



# **Working Conditions And Rights Of Domestic Workers In Nigeria**





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*The views and recommendations shared by the researchers are  
their opinions and perspectives and do not represent the views  
of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation West Africa.*

ISBN: 978-978-776-998-0

# Table of Contents

Abbreviations .....	6
Acknowledgment .....	8
Executive Summary .....	9
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>13</b>
1 Background to the Study .....	13
1.1 Statement of Problem .....	15
1.2 Research Objectives .....	16
1.3 Research Questions .....	17
1.4 Significance of Research .....	17
1.5 Scope of the Study .....	18
<b>Chapter 2: Review of Literature and Theoretical Approach .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.0 Literature Review .....	19
2.1 Legislative Framework and the protection of Domestic Workers in Nigeria .....	19
2.1.1 The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended .....	20
2.1.2 The Nigerian Labour Act .....	21
2.1.3 The International Labour Organisation .....	23
2.2 Nature of Domestic Work Globally .....	26
2.3 Status of Domestic Workers in the International Context .....	29

2.4	Domestic Work in Nigeria . . . . .	31
2.5	Domestic Workers Organising Globally . . . . .	33
2.6	Globalisation of Domestic Workers' Rights . . . . .	37
2.7	Domestic Workers' Right and Organising in Nigeria. . . . .	41
2.8	Literature Gap . . . . .	42
2.9	Theoretical Framework . . . . .	43
<b>Chapter 3: Research Design . . . . .</b>		<b>45</b>
3.1	Research Method . . . . .	45
3.2	Research Location . . . . .	46
3.3	Population of the Study . . . . .	46
3.4	Sample Size and Sampling Technique. . . . .	48
3.5	Research Instrument . . . . .	49
3.6	Method of Data Analysis. . . . .	50
<b>Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings . . . . .</b>		<b>51</b>
4.1	Working Conditions of Domestic Workers . . . . .	52
4.2	Assessment of Efforts by Stakeholders to Protect and Promote the Rights of Domestic Workers in Nigeria . . . . .	68
4.3	Obstacles to Domestic Workers' Rights Protection and Challenges of Unionisation. . . . .	72
4.4	Approaches to Protection of Domestic Workers Rights and Unionisation Process . . . . .	78
4.4.1	Towards the Protection and Promotion of Domestic Workers' Rights in Nigeria . . . . .	79

4.4.2 Building Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers in Nigeria . . . . .	82
4.4.3 Building Structural Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers . . . . .	84
4.4.4 Building Associational Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers . . . . .	86
4.4.5 Building Societal Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers . . . . .	90
4.4.6. Building Institutional Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers . . . . .	93
Conclusion. . . . .	97
References . . . . .	101

## **Tables**

Table 1: Names of referenced persons . . . . .	47
Table 2: Social demography of workers . . . . .	53
Table 3: Type of contract between employers and employees . . . . .	55
Table 4: Services rendered by workers . . . . .	58
Table 5: Wage distribution . . . . .	60
Table 6: Experience of abuse, report and remedial response . . . . .	64
Table 7: Break from work and incentive opportunities. . . . .	66
Table 8: Awareness on law protecting domestic workers and interest in unionising . . . . .	95

# Abbreviation & Acronyms

AUPCTRE - Amalgamated Union of Public, Civil Service  
Technical and Recreational Services Employees

CFRN - Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

CONACTRAHO - The Confederación Latin-American del  
Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar  
(CONACTRAHO known in English as  
the Latin American and Caribbean  
Confederation of Household Workers)

COSATU - Congress of South African Trade Unions

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

DW - Domestic Worker

FIWON - Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of  
Nigeria

IDWF - International Domestic Workers' Federation

IDWN - International Domestic Workers' Network

ILC - International Labour Council

ILO - International Labour Organisation

IMWU - Indonesia Migrant Workers Union (IMWU)

ITUC - International Trade Union Confederation

JUSUN - Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria

- KUDHEIHA - Kenyan Union of Domestic, Hotel, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers' Union
- NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
- NLC - Nigerian Labour Congress
- OAS - Organisation of American States
- PASAN - Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria
- PRA - Power Resources Approach
- RLF - Rosa Luxemburg Foundation West Africa
- SADSAWU - South African Domestic, Services and Allied Workers' Union
- SADWU - South Africa Domestic Workers' Union
- SEWA - Indian Self-Employed Women's Association
- TUC - Trade Union Congress
- UN - United Nation
- US - United States of America
- ZFE - Zambian Federation of Employer

# Acknowledgement

Special recognition goes to Dr Claus Dieter Konig, the Regional Director of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation West Africa for his consistent support of feminism initiatives in Nigeria and West Africa in general.

And to, Angela Odah, Program Manager Nigeria of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation West Africa for conceptualizing the Rights of Domestic Workers in Nigeria Project.

And also, Betty Abah, the Founder and Executive Director of CEE-HOPE who developed and implemented the project and provided the support needed to complete it.

Professor Etannibi Alemika is appreciated for providing guidance throughout the period of the study. Our research assistants, Ogunderu Samuel, Popoola Fahizat, Oge Udegbonam and Husna Alhassan who worked tirelessly to ensure successful collection of data, are immensely appreciated.

# Executive Summary

The Centre for Children's Health Education, Orientation and Protection (popularly known as CEE-HOPE) with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation West Africa, developed a project to investigate the working condition of domestic workers in Nigeria. Two researchers were consulted to conduct the study aimed at generating empirical information for tackling the challenges confronting domestic workers in the country. The study had four thematic objectives which are to: (a) investigate the working conditions of domestic workers; (b) identify efforts to protect and promote the rights of domestic workers by the government and organisations in Nigeria; (c) analyse the obstacles encountered in advocating the protection and promotion of the rights of domestic workers, including enactment of legal protection and unionisation and; (d) identify approaches towards the realisation of the protection and promotion of the rights, welfare and dignity of domestic workers by law and policy in Nigeria.

The research focused on the working condition of domestic workers in Nigeria and the challenges confronting the trade union and other domestic workers' support groups in the attempt to protect the rights of these employees including their unionisation. It reviewed relevant literature on the objectives of the study. The notable gap in the literature is that less attention has been given to

empirical analysis on how domestic workers' union can be formed in Nigeria. This gap informed the priority of this study.

Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were adopted in the study. Interviews were conducted with trade union organisers in FIWON and selected worker union members in Nigeria, Africa and the United States.

Data were collected through questionnaire and interview schedules in two different locations, Abuja and Lagos. In Abuja, 50 domestic workers and 50 employers were selected to respond to the questionnaire. Similarly, in Lagos, the same number of 50 domestic workers and 50 employers completed the questionnaire. Thus, the primary data of the study were collected from 100 domestic workers and 100 employers. Data from the survey were complemented by in-depth interviews with individuals who had participated in efforts towards formation of unions for domestic workers in Nigeria and other countries. Interviews were conducted with organisers in FIWON which is the only known workers' organisation attempting to organise domestic workers to form a union in Nigeria.

The findings in this study indicate that domestic workers are largely in precarious working conditions with inadequate legal protection for them to seek redress when abused by their employers. Domestic workers are generally poorly paid, often work long hours and vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse without channels for redress. With the application of the

Power Resources Approach, recommendations for enhancing the rights and unionization of domestic workers were proposed. There is a need for legislation that regulates the terms of employment and mechanisms for resolving disputes between the domestic workers and their employers.

This study contributes significantly to the existing literature on the status of informal work in Nigeria and domestic workers specifically. While there are previous studies on working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria, this study provides an empirical analysis on the subject and proposes methodical approaches to forming a domestic workers union, with experience from other countries where successful unionization exists.



# CHAPTER One

## Introduction

### 1. Background to the Study

Domestic workers are employed in households or by individuals for the purpose of rendering services to the employers. They provide diverse services, including care of children and elderly, chores like cleaning, cooking, driving and guarding. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that 76.2% of domestic workers are female. The Organisation also reported that 81% of domestic workers are informally engaged and their wages are only about 56% of average salary of other workers.

Goodness Adaoyiche (2023) observed that about 4 million people are engaged in domestic work in Nigeria, with a significant proportion being female. The working conditions of domestic workers are unsatisfactory. They are poorly remunerated and vulnerable to various forms of abuse. It was estimated that some domestic workers were paid as low as 1,500 naira monthly, while average pay was 13,000 naira (UNICEF, 2020) while the prevailing National Minimum wage is N30,000

In response to the global precarious conditions involved in domestic work, the ILO through its tripartite International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2011 adopted Convention 189 (C189) in 2011 which came into force in 2013 to address the challenges confronting domestic work and workers globally. The Convention defined domestic work, the rights of domestic workers at work and the right to form their own association for collective bargaining. This Convention was not adopted without workers' fight themselves (Montague-Nelson & Mather, 2021).

Out of the 187 member nations of the ILO, only 38 countries have ratified the Convention on domestic work with Nigeria on the list of countries yet to ratify. Not only is the Convention not ratified, but there is also no publicly managed database or defined rights for domestic workers in the country. Mbadiwe (2021) suggested that domestic work in Nigeria is precarious, depressing, exploitative and largely involving children.

In July 2024, the National Assembly presented a Bill to regulate domestic work for public hearing. At the hearing, CEE-HOPE advocated for the creation of a database, statement and protection of rights of domestic workers including unionisation in the Nigerian labour system. This is aimed at addressing the inadequacies of the labour law coverage on domestic work.

## **1.1 Statement of Problem**

Domestic work is inadequately covered by Nigeria legislative framework, including the Nigerian Labour law. As a result, domestic workers experience deprivations, abuse and poor work condition. A large proportion of domestic workers are young, and they lack access to opportunities that are vital to their empowerment and future development. Since its adoption in 2011, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and some Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the country have advocated for the ratification of the C189 in Nigeria. The Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON) which organises all categories of informal workers in the country consistently advocated for the ratification of the Convention (Ahiuma-Young, 2011) and to get these workers unionised (UNICEF, 2020). They invoked a legal suit in October 2023 to enforce ratification of the international instrument for the protection of domestic workers (Lawyers Alert, 2023).

As observed earlier, due to the weak institutional framework that can guide the domestic work environment or protect domestic workers' rights, the precarity in the sector persisted and hardly challenged. There should be more efforts by labour scholars, trade unionists and other labour support organisations and individuals to advocate for better work conditions for domestic workers. To contribute to existing scholarly interventions on the subject, this study

seeks to investigate the working conditions of domestic workers and examines measures that can be adopted and implemented to protect the rights and welfare of persons employed to work within and for households.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to determine the working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria and identify legal and other measures that are required to be adopted and implemented to protect and promote the rights of workers within the households. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the working conditions of domestic workers.
2. To identify efforts to protect and promote the rights of domestic workers by the government and organisations in Nigeria.
3. To analyse the obstacles encountered in advocating for the protection and promotion of the rights of domestic workers, including enactment of legal protection and unionisation.
4. To identify approaches towards the realisation of the protection and promotion of the rights, welfare and dignity of domestic workers by law and policy in Nigeria.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The aim and objectives of the study inform the research questions as follows:

1. What are the working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria?
2. What efforts have been made in the past and at present to protect and promote the rights of domestic workers by the government and organisations in Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges encountered in the promotion and adoption of policy and laws to secure welfare and labour rights, including unionisation, of domestic workers?
4. What are the possible approaches for realizing sustainable protection and promotion of the rights, welfare and dignity of domestic workers by law and policy in Nigeria.

### **1.4 Significance of Research**

Informal workers, including domestic workers in Nigeria are yet to be adequately covered in the Nigerian labour laws (Soneye, 2024). Nigeria is yet to ratify the C189 which promotes the rights of domestic workers. Because of this, domestic workers are mostly in precarious working conditions and lacking the institutional support to form a union of their own. The essence of forming a union is that it

would provide these workers a platform through which they can better advocate for their own rights and collectively bargain for better working conditions. With the formation of a union, collecting adequate information and creating a dependable database would be facilitated.

This study is relevant in providing an analysis of the rights and working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria. It assesses the past and current efforts by labour activists, unionists, scholars, labour support groups, government and other stakeholders in developing a framework for the protection of the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria. It is expected that the outcome of this study will significantly contribute to strategic ideas toward creating a union of domestic workers.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The research focused on conditions of domestic work and workers with respondents drawn from Lagos and Abuja which are the commercial hub and administrative hub of the country respectively. They are as well the most cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria with a high demand for domestic work. The data collection for the study lasted for a period of six weeks in October and November and analysis of the data was undertaken in November and December 2024.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Review of Literature and Theoretical Approach

### **2.0 Literature review and theoretical approach**

In this section, the literature on the working conditions of domestic workers and efforts towards organising for the promotion of the workers' rights is reviewed. The section analyses the legislative framework which includes; laws and policies as they relate to the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria. It includes a review of scholarly works on the working conditions of domestic workers and the theoretical framework adopted in the study.

### **2.1 Legislative Framework and the protection of Domestic Workers in Nigeria**

The protection of domestic workers is necessary and urgent considering the current socio-economic situation of Nigeria. First it is important to understand and appreciate that they are workers in every respect of how we understand the fundamental principle of work. This aligns with the

argument of Montague-Nelson and Mather (2021) that domestic workers are not “helpers”, nor “servants” and they should not be treated as slaves under any circumstance. They render very important services that under capitalism would serve as surplus labour due to unpaid overtime.

Traditionally and historically, the service they offer today was mainly done by the family members, largely women and children in working class homes, while slaves and captives provided these services in the homes of the upper class. This is why 76.2% of the 75.6 million domestic workers globally are women (ILO, 2021). Due to the increasing demand of the family and the shrinking value of the wage, women are becoming more of an economic power. This means that women now have to balance domestic care work and economic work as well. The large size and social characteristics of the domestic workforce demands that a legal framework is put in place to protect the workers is crucial. We consider here both a local and international framework that may cover domestic work.

### ***2.1.1 The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999***

The Nigerian Constitution recognises and protects the right of workers. Section 17(3) contains provisions that are very relevant to the focus of this research. It provided in subsections a, b and c as follows:

The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that-

- a) all citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment.
- b) conditions of work are just and humane, and that there are adequate facilities for leisure and for social, religious and cultural life.
- c) the health, safety and welfare of all persons in employment are safeguarded and not endangered or abused.

Section 40 of the constitution guarantees the right to freedom of association. This provision is relevant to efforts aimed at the unionisation of domestic workers. Section 34 of the Nigerian Constitutions guarantees that every citizen is entitled to humane treatment and protection against degrading treatment while it also prohibits forced or compulsory labour. These constitutional provisions can be employed to regulate working conditions and enhance the rights of domestic workers.

### ***2.1.2 The Nigerian Labour Act***

The Nigerian Labour Act (2004) is a comprehensive law that governs the relationship between employers and employees.

Its coverage includes various aspects of employment, contracts, condition of service, wages, termination and trade unions. Section 54 of the Labour Act provides for six weeks maternity leave during which the woman is not expected to work. However, the provision of the law is not observed by employers of domestic workers. Some women work with pregnancy until they are a few days to delivery. They give birth to the child and return to work with the infant less than two months after delivery. This type of situation is common especially among women who are non-resident domestic workers.

On agreement between employer and employee, section 7(1) of the Nigerian Labour Act provides that “a worker should not be employed for more than three months without the formal recognition of such employment. Further, Section 13 of the Labour Act regulates hours of work and overtime. It states that work hours will be fixed based on mutual agreement. This ordinarily should be contained in the written or verbal agreement. Often, what occurs in practice in domestic work employment agreements and letters is the specification of the type of work to be done which does not specify hours. The study shows that more than 90% of live-in domestic workers were engaged for more than 12 hours of cumulative daily work.

Section 11 of the Labour Act outlaws arbitrary firing of workers. Majority of domestic workers are not on legal

contracts and can be dismissed without observing this legal condition. Section 3 of the Act recognizes payment of salary only by money legal tender while any other form of compensation is illegal, null and void. This provision is violated by the practice of not paying regular salary or not fixing salary, especially in the case of minors and “relatives”. In some cases, as observed by Nesbitt-Ahmed (2020), some domestic workers are not paid in legal tender but in kind without commensurate value to work done.

Section 50 of the Labour Act only recognises written contracts that are signed and witnessed. Thus, the absence of written contracts in domestic work undermines the chances of employees to demand justice at the industrial court. The Nigeria Labour Act does not explicitly cover the informal sector. It defines “workers” as people who have a contract with an employer. A contract in this case which may not be written can refer to rights, responsibilities and obligations as agreed or discussed between employer and the worker. It may be argued that this provision therefore covers the rights of the domestic workers both under the Constitution as primarily human beings and under the Labour Act as workers with dignity.

### ***2.1.3 The International Labour Organisation***

The ILO defines domestic workers as “those workers who perform work in or for a private household or households”.

They are an important factor in the care economy because they provide direct and indirect care service. The ILO further defines the work done to include; cleaning the house, cooking, washing and ironing clothes, taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family, and even taking care of household pets. A domestic worker may work on full-time or part-time basis; may be employed by a single household or through or by a service provider; may be residing in the household of the employer (live-in worker) or may be living in his or her own residence (live-out). A domestic worker may be working in a country of which she/he is not a national, thus referred to as a migrant domestic worker.

- There are 75.6 million domestic workers globally out of which women constitute about 76.2% of the workforce.
- About 81.2% are informally employed.
- Larger percentage are either totally or partially excluded from national labour legislation.
- 51.1% have no entitlement to weekly rest periods while 57.1% do not have equal rights to paid annual leave.
- More than a third of women domestic workers have no maternity protection.

- It is a major source of income to especially unskilled workforce. It also exhibits a prevalence of child labour, forced migration and trafficking.
- There are estimated 9.6 million domestic workers in the entire Africa, 68.4% of whom are women.
- Nigeria ranks third on the list of African countries with the domestic workers.

*Data Source: ILO, 2021*

Despite the importance of their work, domestic workers essentially do not enjoy the rights of a worker. They are highly vulnerable to violence and all forms of harassment in addition to a precarious working condition, yet their global average monthly wage is about 56% of average monthly wage of other employees (ILO, 2021). However, in Africa and particularly Nigeria, their monthly wage is on the average less than 25% of the monthly average of other workers.

The Informality and vulnerability in domestic work is largely a function of gaps in legislative provision and implementation of what is available. The Domestic Workers Convention (189) was adopted on 16th June 2011 during the 100th session of the ILO. It is founded on the fundamental principle that domestic workers are neither “servants”, nor “members of the family” nor second-class workers”.

The foregoing discussion of the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution and the Convention of the ILO demonstrates the existence of the principles and laws that govern labour and employment. They provided for the protection of the dignity and freedoms of citizens, including workers.

## **2.2 Nature of Domestic Work Globally**

Domestic work is considered one of the most ancient jobs known to humankind. It was originally associated with the aristocrats and monarch families who employed the service of the less privileged in the society to carry out the homely chores and other maintenance in their homes (Boris & Nadasen, 2015:4). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, domestic work evolved into a paid service and the 'servant' nomenclature gradually changed to 'domestic work' with the change in engagement status from non-payment to paid work (Gruberg, 2017:5). The industrial revolution of the century contributed to the change in payment status for domestic workers as many women predominantly in domestic work found jobs in the industries that were coming up around that time (Rizzi, 2023). This option of working in industries paved way for domestic work to be better appreciated and paid. The nature of domestic work has since evolved overtime as societies develop.

As in the case of many informal work, domestic work is characterised by precarity and job insecurity, especially for

migrants who see domestic work as a tractable job opportunity (Rosewarne, 2014:138). Domestic work is also characterised as a private and household labour that is not adequately captured within the public sector. So, a tangible number of domestic workers are engaged privately without public coverage as in the case of Nigeria. Added to this, Osinuga and others (2021:12) noted that validity of data or measurement index to assess the burden of domestic work or experience of the workers is yet to have a standard measuring scale in the literature. The implication of this is that there is no generally acceptable data on impact of domestic work on the workers because of a lack of generally accepted measurement scale. The integration of domestic work into international discourse and globalisation, despite its transnational features, had been impeded by these factors.

Until recently when globalisation deepened the interconnection of different strata of societies and many nations together, domestic work and domestic workers did not attract the deserved attention. According to Meerkerk, Neunsinger and Hoerder (2015:1), the recognition of domestic work as a phenomenon in globalisation is connected to three notable factors; one is the universality of domestic work and the dependency of humans on care support at different times in their lives; second is the significance of domestic work which has metamorphosed since ancient Mesopotamian sources till present day and;

third is the connection of domestic work with global division of labour. What this means is that domestic and care work is now identified as an important support in every human's life and is now recognised as a significant part of what keeps the global economy running. Their service provides cover to enable their employers to participate in the mainstream economy, many of whom could have been prevented from working due to domestic services demand (Feld, 2022).

Domestic work is associated with labour precarity, poor working conditions and informality everywhere in the world regardless of efforts to formalise their services. Setrini and colleagues (2023:2) in their study of the factors militating against formalisation of domestic work attributed the exacerbation of the vulnerability of domestic workers to the socio-economic condition of people propelling the expansion of the domestic labour market internationally. Setrini et al (2023:3) categorised these factors under four broad perspectives, namely; gender and cultural discrimination by employers; inaccessibility to knowledge of and information on social security; imbalance in bargaining power of domestic workers, and inadequate capacity to measure actual labour input. What is deduced here is that the inherent condition of domestic workers and its labour market limit the bargaining power of the workers globally.

## **2.3 Status of Domestic Workers in the International Context**

The status of domestic workers has been a contentious issue in different countries. Even after the mainstreaming of the rights of domestic workers globally through the ILO C189, the implementation of these rights has been challenging (Setrinin et al, 2023:6). According to the Organisation of American State (OAS), the difficulties in instituting the rights of domestic workers like the rights of many other workers in other jobs is attributed to three central factors, namely; the non-profitability of the domestic work for the employer; domestic work as a kind gesture for unqualified women in return for feeding and living and; the inability of employers of domestic workers to pay statutory minimum wage. Setrini and colleagues (2023) also identified and attributed these factors as predominant in many circumstances of employment of domestic workers globally.

In spite of these factors, the acknowledgement and enshrinement of the rights of domestic workers had been at the centerpiece of labour institutes, trade unions, and other labour support organisations globally (ILO, 2012, Schwenken, & Hobden, 2021 & Barua, 2022). These initiatives have led to the introduction of many laws and treaties both at international level and by national governments (ILO, 2012 & ILO, 2021). Notably in the history of domestic work is the 20th century when domestic

workers began to get acknowledgment and attention with the change in societal standards accompanied by labour movement campaigns and several support groups advocacy on the working condition of domestic workers leading into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Shah & Seville, 2012:414 & Rizzi, 2023).

By the turn of the 21st century, domestic work and workers got a renewed advocacy and support over recognition as a legitimate and credible job, work hours definition, wages and remuneration. With this renewed advocacy, there was a paradigm shift that addressed the need to change the stereotype associated with domestic work and workers especially in the global north (OAS, nd). This advocacy was advanced in subsequent years.

A notable event that led to the mainstreaming of domestic worker's right into global discussion and particularly the ILO is the 2006 meeting in Amsterdam hosted by the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) which brought together for the first time different domestic workers organisations and their support groups from across the globe (Montague-Nelson & Mather, 2021:2). It was from this meeting the idea to fight for a convention that will recognise domestic work as a work with status and recognition in the ILO was initiated.

This struggle was then championed by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations (IUF) and Women

in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) that set up an Interim Management Committee to carry out the process of forming a domestic workers' union which eventually resulted to the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) (Montague-Nelson & Mather, 2021:3).

## **2.4 Domestic Work in Nigeria**

The history of domestic work in Nigeria dates back to immemorial time. The rich in the precolonial societies that would later be merged to form Nigeria were known to have a pool of domestic workers who helped in house maintenance, cooking meals and taking care of children (Mbadiwa, 2017:3). The numerical strength of domestic staff was often used as a parameter to measure the wealth of rich people in the olden days. These practices predated the period of global slavery and colonialism accounted for in most scholarly works. Historically, Nigerian cultural and social norms undervalue domestic labour (Osinuga et al, 2021:2). For a long period, there has been the practice of sending children out for engagement as domestic workers for families and friends that are richer than their parents (Olayiwola, 2023:1066). The sending family and the children are usually paid in kind in this circumstance.

Colonialism has been cited as a factor that also reshaped the pattern of domestic work in Nigeria. The colonial officials

and the succeeding native elites created by the colonial regime recruited children of the poor as domestic servants (Mbadiwe, 2017:3). While this was not entirely introduced by colonialism, it is observed as a factor that engendered the practice. During this period of colonialism, the employment relations or rather, pattern of engaging domestic workers in a coloniser-colonised arrangement were even worse. It is observed that in many cases under this regime, domestic workers were working as free labour in exchange for food and/or shelter (Meerkerk et al, 2015).

This practice of unpaid domestic work would outlive colonialism itself as one of its legacies. The middle class and rich Nigerians still enjoy the benefit of employing the poor who do their domestic work in return for food and shelter. In many cases, domestic workers especially children are usually not contracted and as such are not paid by legal tender. This unfair practice was observed by Nesbitt-Ahmed (2020) that domestic workers in Nigeria are sometimes paid in “kind”. “Kind” in this situation may mean offering some favours in return such as gifting of used clothes, household items or food to the worker. Fish (2017:4) and Olayiwola (2023:1067) observed that in some cases, domestic workers leave their own family not cared for to render domestic service to the rich in exchange for money to provide for their own family.

Ahmed and colleagues (2024:7) in their study of the domestic labour condition in the North-West part of Nigeria

observed that it is characterised by overtime work hours, excessive workload, poor remuneration often decided at the discretion of the employer, lack of access to organising right and lack of right to privacy of workers. This often results in psychological, social and economic abuse for these workers. Ogbechie and Oyetunde (2018) suggested that the problems surrounding domestic work in Nigeria can be reduced with effective legislation. Ngwamma, Ogunlusi and Amuno (2018) observed that the recruitment process which is dominated by third party agencies aided by absence of regulations is a contributing factor to the exploitative nature of domestic work in Nigeria. They opined that trade union organising for a better recruitment system would mitigate the precarious working conditions common to domestic work in Nigeria.

## **2.5 Domestic Workers' Organising Globally**

There had been attempts globally to organise domestic workers into unions like their counterparts in the formal sector. These attempts cut across different periods in history. In the 17th century, there was much global resistance by domestic servants and slaves with labour unrest in countries like Brazil, Britain, US (Boris & Nadasen, 2015:6). Much of the organising toward advocating for the rights of domestic work did not gain much traction in that period until the beginning of 20th century when several groups sprang up in many countries including US, Australia,

Tanganyika and Argentina to demand for fair domestic work employment status (Gruberg, 2017:14 & Boris & Nadasen, 2015:6). Many of these groups started as advocates against feminisation and stereotyping of women into domestic work. This was largely due to the fact that domestic works were largely set aside as women's preoccupation.

The population of females in the job had reduced since the late 19th century (Gruberg, 2017:1). Although there was intense industrialisation and job opportunities that spanned through that century with women engaging in more economic endeavours (Rizzi, 2023), domestic work has grown globally and it is still largely feminine as it was since time immemorial (Meerkerk et al, 2015:1 & ILO, 2021).

Some of the early organising of domestic workers in the 20th century was during the first world war. In Africa, Kenya had an early organising of domestic workers spearheaded by an association which later transformed into a trade union known today as the Kenyan Union of Domestic, Hotel, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers' Union (KUDHEIHA) (Bonner, 2010:8). The Indian Self-Employed Women's Association ([SEWA](#)) founded in 1972 to organise women in informal work now organise domestic workers (WIEGO). More recently, there were other efforts by associations and registered trade unions across the globe to organise domestic workers (Durano, 2019). Some of these associations and unions include the UNITY House Cleaners

Cooperative of the USA, Indonesia Migrant Workers Union (IMWU) in Hong Kong, the Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON) created in 2010 and began organising domestic workers at the same time.

With the consistent support of the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation, Centre for Education, Health Orientation and Protection (CEE-HOPE) in Nigeria has since 2020 focused its activities on the abuse that domestic workers are confronted with in the course of their work.

The International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) formed in 2009 and metamorphosed to International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) in 2013 was created out of a global movement which agitates for an international legal instrument to establish and guarantee the rights of domestic workers across the world (WIEGO, nd). In this history of domestic workers' organising documented by WIEGO, series of national and international networks was formed by domestic workers. The IDWN was a creation of IUF and WIEGO from 2006 meeting in Netherlands which brought about fighting for an ILO Convention that would cover domestic work (Montague-Nelson, & Mather, 2021:2).

The Confederación Latin-Americana del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar (CONLACTRAHO known in English as the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers) was founded in 1988 by

organisations from thirteen different countries. To its organising success, the IDWF on its website claims to have spread to 65 countries with 84 affiliates and over 600,000 domestic workers membership registered with the union.

Although it has been a daunting challenge since 2009, Schwenken and Hobden (2021:61) noted that memories recounted by the founding organisers of IDWF suggest that the current situation of the organisation is different from the wide gap it started with. In an interview with Open Society Foundations' Elizabeth Frantz in 2022, the IDWF's general secretary confirmed that while the challenges of organising are much all over the world, the mood and response from national leaders of their affiliates are encouraging and promising (Open Society Foundations, 2022).

The organising of domestic workers has been approached in different ways across countries based on their peculiarities. Prominent among methods of organising has been either incorporation into an established trade union or through the formation of one. Bonner (2010:5) identifies two patterns of organising of and for domestic workers that evolved. The models are the primary organisations which could be of new model, traditional model or changing model as well as secondary model which could be of national organising, or international organising. The secondary model adopts broad base organising approach larger than the primary model. A series of these methods were combined to organise a

network of domestic workers into trade unions. Importantly, the IDWF had its founding Congress in October 2013 in the city of Montevideo, Uruguay, being the first country to ratify the C189 (Montague-Nelson, & Mather, 2021:7).

## **2.6 Globalisation of Domestic Workers' Rights**

It was recorded that a preliminary discussion on the right of domestic labour generally was held in the ILO in 1948 and it never held another of such until 1965 (Fish, 2017:6). As a resolution of the year 1965, the International Labour Council (ILC) recognised domestic work and adopted the resolution to promote the rights to human dignity and minimum standard of living for these workers (D'Souza, 2010:1). But the discussion never resulted in any convention on the subject. The ILO focus on domestic work found its influence in some agitations and legislation that came into force in and within nations by the end of the 20th century and the first decade of this 21st century (WIEGO, n.d). In response to these agitations and demands, there were consensuses and legislation enacted globally to promote and institutionalise the rights of domestic workers.

According to *Equality Now 2024 reports*, the Belém do Pará Convention adopted on June 9, 1994 among the 34 member nations of the Organisation of American States (OAS) promotes the right of all women to enjoy violent free life both

in private and public care work. Of all the 34 member nations, the US and Canada are the only two nations yet to ratify and domesticate this Convention. This law protects women generally against violence which they were hitherto known to be victims of as domestic workers who are vulnerable to their employers.

In the following year, the fourth world conference of the United Nation (UN) which was held in China resolved and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform Action to further mainstream into public the significance of domestic work and the importance of respecting the rights of domestic workers and women generally (UN, 2014). The ILO (2021) estimated that 76.2% of domestic workers are female and emphasised the protection of the female gender at work. High female participation in domestic work perhaps accounts for why women have been pivotal to domestic workers' organising. Women's rights emphasis is concurrently raised with the agitations globally because many argue that reforming domestic work is also a way of resolving gender economic inequality (Setrini et al, 2023:6). Conventions and declarations discussed above were based on the understanding that domestic work is predominantly performed by females and that they are vulnerable to all sorts of workplace abuse.

By the beginning of the 21st century, there was strategic activism that elevated the status of domestic workers to be

able to enjoy decent working conditions like other categories of workers (Fish, 2017:6). At the 10th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Quito Consensus of 2007 is another legal instrument that was adopted to espouse the rights of domestic workers as important as those of other labour rights established by the ILO (ECLAC, 2007).

To consolidate on promoting equal rights and fair status for domestic workers in furtherance to intense wave of feminism, the Brasilia Consensus 2010 was adopted at the 11th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean to advance the right of domestic workers, promote legislation to protect these rights and eliminate child labour in domestic work (ECLAC, 2010).

The International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) was created out of a global movement which agitates for an international legal instrument to establish and guarantee the rights of domestic workers across the world (WIEGO, n.d). Also, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Union of Foods (IUF) began to organise campaigns for the ILO to introduce and adopt an instrument on domestic work and workers. This action as noted earlier was spearheaded by IUF and WIEGO at the instance of the Amsterdam meeting in Netherland hosted by the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) in 2006 (Montague-Nelson, & Mather, 2021:2).

As a result of agitations championed by the interim committee that turned to IDWF after the meeting in Amsterdam, domestic work became a focus of the ILO. By 2011, the Domestic Workers Convention also referred to as ILO Convention 189 (C189) was introduced by the ILO governing council to properly define the rights of domestic workers and fair employment relations. The C189 became a rallying point globally to advocate for the rights of domestic workers to be enshrined into national labour laws of the member countries of the ILO (Alonso, Trillo & Vincent, 2024). Following up with this Convention, the Santo Domingo Consensus of 2013 in its recommendation number 126 urged national governments to adopt this convention as well as respect the Platform for Action declaration of Beijing 1995 on the promotion of equal treatment for all human (ECLAC, 2013:15).

It is rather interesting that since the introduction of the C189 in 2011, many member countries of the ILO are yet to ratify the Convention and make it a law in their national legislation. Only 38 of the 187 member nations have since ratified the Convention. This has since become a matter of concern for labour organisers, scholars and labour support organisations globally who have lamented that a decade after the adoption of the convention, ratification and implementation is low with around 75% of the work still informal globally ((Montague-Nelson, & Mather, 2021 & Setrini et al, 2023:7). Despite this Convention, there are

countries like the USA, Malaysia and Thailand where domestic workers are in vulnerable working conditions and their rights to join or form trade unions are not guaranteed (WIEGO, n.d).

## **2.7 Domestic Workers' Right and Organising in Nigeria**

In tandem with Schwenken and Hobden (2021:62), domestic workers in this paper exclude family and care work as defined by the ILO. Regardless of the terms of reference, as in the case of informal workers generally who are not adequately covered by the labour legal framework in Nigeria (Soneye, 2024), the rights of domestic workers are not adequately covered in the Nigerian labour law today. With the C189 introduced in 2011, expectations were high that upon ratification of the Convention by the Nigerian government, domestic workers would be able to enjoy workers' rights such as fair employment contract, good working conditions and the rights to unionise for the purpose of collective bargaining. However, the Convention is yet to be ratified by the government of Nigeria. To this effect, domestic workers continue to work in precarious conditions with limited rights in Nigeria (Adaoyiche, 2023).

The larger percentage of domestic workforce is a combination of women and children under the age of 18 who may be taken in by relatives and friends to exchange their

services for shelter and food (Mbadiwe, 2017 & Olayiwola, 2023). Ngwama and colleagues (2020) suggests that organising domestic workers to form a trade union and regulating domestic work is as essential to protecting the rights of domestic workers as it would be beneficial to employers to know their rights from contract signed. NGOs, labour support groups and FIWON, carried out several organising advocacy projects to mobilise domestic workers into a union in a bid to enforce their labour rights like other trade unions in the country (Ahiuma-Young, 2011 & SharpEdge News, 2024). In 2011, FIWON embarked on a campaign urging the government of Nigeria to ratify the Convention of domestic work for the proper domestication of domestic workers rights (Eroke, 2011). This campaign is being complemented with efforts at identifying the workers and organising them under one umbrella. To achieve this, seminars and orientation programs are organised for newly recruited workers to understand the essence of the union and the benefits to expect from it (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2020).

## **2.8 Literature Gap**

The review of literature on domestic work in Nigeria has shown that scholars have investigated and explained the working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria (Mbadiwe, 2017; Adaoyiche, 2023& Olayiwola, 2023). Many of such studies recommended strategies to improve the working conditions of workers. What is however

identified as a gap is that there is not much scholarly work on organising domestic workers to form a union of their own. There is a gap in terms of identifying how domestic workers may organise themselves to defend their rights

Therefore, the thrust of this study and the gap it seeks to cover is to provide a linkage to developing strategic recommendations on how domestic workers' power resources can be mobilized and organised to form a trade union for the advancement of their workers' rights.

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework**

### ***Power Resources Approach***

The Power Resources Approach (PRA) as its name implies is a model often used in labour related studies to examine the power resources of workers' unions and their potential in advancing workers' rights. The PRA was originally initiated by scholars interested in the welfare states but now adopted in industrial relations (Gallas, 2016).

Basically, this framework identifies four powers of trade unions which include structural power, associational power, societal power and institutional power (Gallas, 2016). The structural power refers to the workplace bargaining power of workers and their ability to disrupt the marketplace activities (Refslund & Arnholtz, 2022:1962). The

associational power refers to the capacity of trade unions to maintain internal cohesion among its members and collectively take purposeful actions (Gallas, 2018). The ability of trade unions or workers' organisations to publicise their agenda and build common alliance with other groups is termed societal power (Schmalz et al, 2018). Institutional power is the available legal and system framework with which unions can work with to advance their rights (Bieler, 2018).

Although the PRA has been criticised for its exaggeration of the unity of workers under the associational power, its usefulness is maintained as a tool of assessment of the potential of union organising (Gallas, 2018). Amongst the criticism is also that the framework seeks to undermine the potency of the external environment and other agencies as an influence on or against the workers' power (Bieler, 2018 & Refslund & Arnholtz 2022). In spite of the criticisms, the framework provides insights into an effective union power mobilisation strategy and is therefore adopted for this study.

## CHAPTER Three

# Research Design

This section describes the method adopted for the study. It provides information on the research design, the location and population of the study, instruments used in data collection and the techniques adopted in analysing the collected data.

### **3.1 Research Method**

The mixed method design was adopted. Data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Questionnaires were used in collecting data from domestic workers and employers. Adequately literate respondents completed the questionnaire, while those not able to do so were interviewed and their responses recorded by the research assistants. In-depth interviews using interview guides with open-ended questions were conducted with labour union leaders, NGOs and other groups to elicit information on the working conditions of domestic workers as well as prospects and challenges of organising domestic workers into a union to protect their rights.

Selected trade unionists in different countries where domestic workers have been unionised were interviewed.

Use of the mixed method approach adopted for the study produced quantitative data and qualitative information. The fieldwork of data collection was carried out by the research assistants with supervision by the researchers. The interview with Key Informant was conducted and transcribed by the researchers.

### **3.2 Research Location**

The study was carried out in Abuja and Lagos which are respectively the current and former capital city of Nigeria. Abuja is located in the North Central part of the country while Lagos is in the South West region. Both cities have a high concentration of employers of domestic workers. These cities are highly cosmopolitan in economic and social composition. Lagos, apart from being a former capital city of the country, is the economic hub of the country. Abuja has been the capital city of the country since 1991 and recorded a fast-growing population drawn from different parts of the country and beyond. The economic and political significance of the cities and the high population of domestic workers inform their choice as locations for the study. The current population of Lagos is 16,536,000 while Abuja population is 4,026,000 (Macrotrends, 2024).

### **3.3 Population of the Study**

In this study, domestic workers, employers of domestic workers and trade union organisers resident in Abuja and Lagos constitute the population of the study. The study

included trade union organisers to find out the prospect and challenges of organising domestic workers into a union and draw lessons from countries where a union of domestic workers has been successfully formed or attempted. Below are the pseudo names of the key informants that were interviewed.

**Table 1: Names of referenced persons**

SN	NAME	ORGANISATIONS	COUNTRY
1	Kareem	Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON)	Nigeria
2	Tunde	Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON)	Nigeria
3	David	Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC)	Nigeria
4.	Yerima	Judiciary Staff Association of Nigeria	
4	Agba	Trade Union Congress (TUC)	Nigeria
5	Ogefa	Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN)	Nigeria
6	Ezeama	Amalgamated Union of Public, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE)	Nigeria
7	Ngolo	Zambian Federation of Employer (ZFE)	Zambia
8	Mbeki	Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)	South Africa
9.	Christopher	South Africa Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union	South Africa
10	Carington	Anonymous	USA
11	Shola	Domestic worker	Nigeria
12	Agnes	Domestic Worker	Nigeria
13	Malam Danjuma	Domestic worker	Nigeria
14	Madam Abigael	Domestic Worker employer	Nigeria
15	Erigi	Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN)	Nigeria

### **3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

Purposive and convenience sampling approaches were adopted for the selection of the respondents. Purposive sampling of the cities and clusters within them was adopted because the purpose of the study was to focus on persons who were domestic workers, employers of domestic workers and activists involved in organising domestic workers into unions. Lagos and Abuja have served as the capital city and seat of the government of the country.

As a result, there is a high concentration of population employed in private and public organisations in the two cities, Persons with experience and knowledge of domestic work were the target population and where available and willing to be interviewed were selected. There is no database for domestic workers and their employers. It was therefore not feasible to draw a random sample. Thus, each of the two cities was divided into clusters. Available and consenting respondents (workers and employers) were selected to participate in the study.

Besides non-availability of databases for domestic workers and their employers, access to households was highly restricted as people protected their privacy. This restriction influences the selection of respondents based on their availability, accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. In some cases, respondents were selected through snow-balling - recommendations and introduction of the

researchers to the respondents by fellow domestic workers or employers.

Data were collected through questionnaire and interview schedule, in two different locations, Abuja and Lagos. In Abuja, 50 domestic workers and 50 employers were selected to respond to the questionnaire. Similarly, in Lagos, the same number of 50 domestic workers and 50 employers completed the questionnaire. Thus, primary data of the study were collected from 100 domestic workers and 100 employers.

Data from the survey were complemented by in-depth interviews with individuals who had participated in efforts towards formation of unions for domestic workers in Nigeria and other countries. Nine key informants were interviewed from 8 unions in Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and the United States of America. The questionnaires were administered in each of the three senatorial districts in Lagos and in the Abuja municipality.

### **3.5 Research Instrument**

Both questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII) were applied in this study. Questionnaires, with close and open-ended questions were used to elicit information from workers and employers. A total of 200 questionnaires were completed by domestic workers and employers in Lagos and Abuja. The guide used for eliciting information from the KII

consisted of open-ended questions to give the respondents chances to express themselves.

### **3.6 Method of Data Analysis**

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data interpretation. The quantitative data derived from the questionnaire were analysed and presented as percentages. Information from the KII were categorized and coded with the PRA and the research questions as a guiding tool. The analysis and findings of the data were presented in tables complimented by narratives from the responses obtained from the interviews. Percentages in the tables may not add to 100 per cent because of multiple responses to several questions.

## CHAPTER Four

# Data Analysis and Findings

In this section, the analysis of the data collected for the study is carried out. The findings from the analysis and their significance are discussed in relation to the objectives of the study.

### **4.1 Working Conditions of Domestic Workers**

Globally, domestic workers are largely in informal and precarious working condition. In Nigeria, the working condition of domestic workers has been attributed to lack of defined working hours, unspecified work duties, exploitative work relations, indiscriminate termination of work, non-commensurate pay and sometimes abusive workers-employers situation (Ahmed et al, 2024:7). In tandem to this, our research findings suggest that these factors are present in almost all the work situations with only a few of the employers who are considered 'magnanimous', granting fair working conditions to these workers. Many of the workers are vulnerable and are in the job for survival. This

vulnerability to precarity can be attributed to factors like social background, employment relations, economic potentials, institutional framework among other factors.

More than 80% of female respondents keep live in workers and they have no specific work hours. Only the male respondents who employ live-in security guards work all day. While 24% respondents say their security guards work on weekly shifts, at least 36% or respondents prefer live in female house helps with many sharing the position expressed by Madam Mary as “they are handier with the needs of the house...less tendency to steal and misbehave”

## **Social Background of Domestic Workers**

Social background and status often determine the job opportunity and working conditions. Therefore, the experience and working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria may be associated with their social background as the findings in this study suggests. The data reveal that only 7% of the domestic workers in the study are either in a tertiary institution or have completed a tertiary education program. Some of the workers, representing 25%, are not more than eighteen years of age. This implies that child labour still manifests in domestic services in the country.

On preference for children as domestic workers, more women employer respondents will not indicate preference

for going for younger age because they believe that that they are easier in taking directives “*because my children are very young, I need someone who can grow and play with them...I have a cousin who is much older that supervises when I am not around*”. Another respondent says “*they are least likely to keep men or bring pregnancy to my house*”.

A gender lens also shows that females still largely dominate domestic work. Table 2 presents the social and educational demography of these workers.

**Table 2: Social demography of workers**

Category	Female	Male	Total (%)
	61	39	100
	<b>Age</b>		
Less than 15	5	0	5
15 to 18	14	6	20
Above 18	42	33	75
	<b>Education</b>		
None	13	4	17
Primary	13	14	27
Secondary	32	17	49
Tertiary	3	4	7
	<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	20	22	42
Divorced	7	0	7
Separated	5	1	6
Never married	22	16	38
Widow	7	0	7

The data suggest that the chances of lifting these workers out of poverty will be a challenge considering their social background which also impacts the potential they possess. The summary of the educational qualification of the workers shows that 17 (17%) do not have any form of education, 27 (27%) have primary education, 49 (49%) have secondary education and only 7 (7%) have tertiary education. Most of those without education are older security guards and older nannies with their own family to look after.

For those with tertiary education, three are attending schools, four are working as nanny, driving and other jobs temporarily to make ends meet. With this in mind, we find that the largest percentage of these workers are unemployable in other standard jobs due to their lack of educational qualification and productive skills. This may explain the reason they are vulnerable to their employers because of uncertainty of alternatives. Those who possessed tertiary education qualification adduced their reason for taking these jobs to high rate of unemployment in the country.

While 12% of the total respondents have some form of educational or vocational training, 4% have none. Some of the respondents from employers of the domestic workers indicate unwillingness to support domestic workers to acquire education or skills while working with them for the fear that *“by the time you finish assisting them with education or learning a trade, they leave the job without*

*notice, or they become arrogant and start misbehaving”*  
Lady Banke.

## **Employment Contract and Agreement**

In many professions, the duties and activities to be performed by employees and the obligations of the employers in return are clearly spelt out in the job contract to be signed by both parties. Contrary to the ILO C189 recommendation that employment should be by contract with terms of reference clearly defined, the findings in this study shows that these employments are usually without any written contract; neither agreement nor workers' duty spelt out. In the case of a contract, some are oral agreements with no paper backup for reference purposes. This is seen in table 3.

**Table 3: Type of contract between employers and employees**

Category	Female	Male	Total (%)
	<b>Workers' Responses</b>		
Written	10	5	<b>15</b>
Verbal	32	26	<b>58</b>
None	11	8	<b>19</b>
I don't know	8	0	<b>8</b>
	<b>Employers' Response</b>		
Written	16	18	<b>34</b>
Verbal	36	24	<b>60</b>
Both	15	13	<b>28</b>
None	0	0	<b>0</b>

According to domestic worker respondents in Abuja, 36 (72%) are in verbal agreement, 9 (18%) have no agreement, 5 (10%) are not aware if there is any contract at all and no single one with written contract. In Lagos 22 (44%) are on verbal agreement, 10 (20%) have no agreement, 15 (30%) have written agreement, 3 (6%) are not aware if there is any contract at all and no single one with written contract. As indicated in the table above, when Abuja and Lagos are combined, 58 (58%) have verbal agreement, 15 (15%) have written agreement, 19 (19%) have no agreement and 8 (8%) are not aware if there is any contract at all. When the combined response of employers is considered, only 34 (34%) employers indicated having written agreement while the rest have either verbal or no agreement at all with their employees.

This has implications on the general working conditions of the workers as made evident subsequently. For the minors or young adults, we find out that the contract is usually agreed to between their employers and their parents or guardians with almost no input from them. The decision to terminate the employment and dismiss these workers is usually at the mercy of the employers.

Typical of the characteristics of the informal sector, domestic work is particularly associated with high job insecurity. This is so because many of the agents who refer the workers to their employers encourage the employers to dismiss these

workers at any slightest misunderstanding. The reason for this is that the agents are happy to get referral commission from employers for getting them new employees. This commercial interest of agents or referees puts domestic workers at job risk. If there were binding contracts in many cases, indiscriminate dismissal at wish would not be prevailing.

The lack of binding contracts also exposes these workers to labour exploitation. Even in the few cases of written contract, responses suggest that duties and activities of workers are not equivocally stated. The verbal agreement usually comes in the form of explaining duties, dos and don'ts. A few cases had their passport photographs taken on assumption of duty with the threat that if they stole, the picture will be all over the place and the police will be after them.

## **Job Description and Duties**

Employment contracts and terms of agreement usually contain the work schedule and duties expected of workers as well as the obligations of the employer. The duties of domestic workers include but are not limited to, washing and ironing, cooking and kitchen upkeep, babysitting and nanny work, gardening, security, driving. While many of the workers are employed on the verbal terms of performing specific duties, we find out that they usually perform more

tasks than what they were told at the time of employment entry.

**Table 4: Services rendered by workers**

Category	Female	Male	Total (%)
	<b>Workers' Responses</b>		
Washing & ironing	6	10	<b>16</b>
Cooking & Kitchen	36	3	<b>39</b>
Nanny	10	0	<b>10</b>
Gardening	0	8	<b>8</b>
Security	0	8	<b>8</b>
Driving	0	7	<b>7</b>
Home Cleaning	8	5	<b>13</b>
Category	Female	Male	Total (%)
	<b>Employers' Response</b>		
Driving	0	14	<b>14</b>
Laundry	13	12	<b>25</b>
Cooking/kitchen	34	5	<b>39</b>
Home cleaning	32	12	<b>44</b>
Gardening	0	11	<b>11</b>
Nanny duties	32	2	<b>34</b>
Security/guard	1	10	<b>11</b>

Overlapping multiple responsibilities of domestic workers can be observed from the responses of domestic workers and employers in table 4. Many of the workers revealed that other duties that were not initially mentioned were assigned to them after they began the work. Oftentimes, the female workers perform multiple roles for women employers, especially cooking, cleaning and nanny work. Findings in this study points out that description of jobs is not always available at the point of employment. In some cases, workers are assigned more tasks after engagement contrary to what was specified in the initial bargain. In Abuja, we met a worker who in addition to her multiple tasks is also a shopkeeper to the same household.

## **Wages and Remuneration Bargain**

The salary structure also gives the impression that getting out of the poverty cycle for average domestic workers may be difficult. Similar to the problem of multiple tasks caused by undefined contracts, the salary of some domestic workers is usually undefined, sometimes with no fixed payment time and could be paid to them in staggering tranches. Under this circumstance, payment of their wage is usually at the discretion of the employer on a daily, weekly or monthly basis depending on how much work they think these workers have done. For those whose payment is defined, it is based on oral agreement with no binding contract whatsoever (table 5).

**Table 5: Wage distribution**

Wage range	Female	Male	Total (%)
Less than 10,000	13	2	<b>15</b>
11,000 -20,000	19	11	<b>30</b>
21,000-30,000	24	12	<b>36</b>
31,000-40,000	5	7	<b>12</b>
More than 50,000	1	6	<b>7</b>

The data on the salary range in both cities shows that 15% earned not more than 10,000 naira; 30% earned between 11,000 – 20,000 naira; compared to 35% who earned between 21,000 – 30,000; 12% earning 31,000 – 40,000 and only 7% who earned 50,000 and more naira per month. Interaction during the fieldwork with respondents and responses to questionnaires indicated that it is largely the underaged that earn below 10,000. The lowest in this range being N7,000. At the current value, workers earning 50,000 naira makes only 33.2 dollars a month. This means the highest paid worker have just a little over a dollar per day. This would be considered living in extreme poverty by international standard.

On the positive note, we observed that apart from salary, some of the workers, especially those living with their

employers enjoy at least two meals daily and female workers often get stipends for toiletries and sanitation. This is in addition to vocational and formal training that some attend. But when compared with the national living cost, this stipend does not constitute a living wage. The reported remuneration by the workers was below the wage structure in the public service and private organisations. The national minimum wage law is not assertive about the coverage of domestic workers (Onyedinefu, 2024). It is unlikely for domestic workers, even in possession of contract, to seek legal redress that they be paid the minimum wage of 70,000 naira per month approved in 2024.

In many of the households, the young domestic workers are extended family members who are brought in to be assisted to learn trade or get some basic education while in turn they provide domestic work services. On how these categories of workers are remunerated, Madam Mary said

*“It's based on understanding as they are my blood relative. I make sure that they are learning a skill like tailoring, hairdressing, or attending some education. I take care of their medical needs when they are sick and feed them...I don't pay them salary, there is just an understanding that I take much of the responsibility. At the end of their stay, I will give them something to start off business or help them with their life”*

## The living condition of domestic workers

The information on the living space of domestic workers in the study also showed the dynamic vulnerability. Although 47% of the workers live with their employers while 53% live out, we found out that this also has implications on their working and living conditions generally in different ways. In the case of workers who live with their employers, the experience shared by some of them differs based on the nature of work they do in the house. Their shared experience suggests that they are the last to sleep and first to wake in the house. Because they live in, they are sometimes called up to carry out some tasks that were not initially stated to be part of their job expectations during the employment negotiation stage.

While Madam Halima opines that *“I need their service and attention regularly”*, she did not see anything wrong with it and wondered why *“if they live in my house, eat my food and use my facilities after paying salary what regulation are we talking about”*

Responses from employers suggest they would prefer their domestic workers to live with them because of security reasons and access it gives them to saddle the workers with work without time limit. Many whose workers are living out attributed the arrangement to lack of space to accommodate the workers and their families. While this may not be

conscious, it gives an impression that the employers are also aware of how it may be easier to exploit the workers when they live with them.

## **Workplace discrimination and abuse**

Discrimination and abuse at the workplace are another common experience shared by domestic workers. Different forms of abuse were also indicated by the workers. Verbal abuses are usually experienced from female employers while the men would regularly shout and are harsh towards them. In some cases, assaults are reported. Shola recalled her experience with us thus:

*“My madam always abuse me almost every day. Anything I do is wrong. Sometimes she beat me with slippers. Sometimes she will abuse me and taunt me that I am from a poor family and that is why I don't behave well. One day her son who was about 8 years old when I was 15 slapped me. I told her and she just waved sorry. After I completed my JSS 3, I told her I wanted to go and see my parent. That was how I packed my things and didn't return”* October 2024, Abuja.

In another instance, Agnes reported sexual harassment case that:

*“It was in my former place of work. I was sleeping in the parlour under the dining table. My madam's son will come*

*and be touching me. If I remove his hand, the next day he starts shouting at me and giving me plenty work. Sometimes the brother also come to touch my buttocks. Maybe the madam didn't know or perhaps she pretended not to know. One day I ran away to a classmate's house. It was late at night, and I refused to go back home. I couldn't tell anybody what was happening, but my madam started calling me a witch. I refused to go back to the house until they returned me to the village the next day. I was 12 years old in primary 4 doing house girl” October 2024, Abuja.*

**Table 6: Experience of abuse, report and remedial response**

<b>Forms of Abuse</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Verbal	40	22	<b>62</b>
Physical	7	2	<b>9</b>
Sexual	4	0	<b>4</b>
Others	2	5	<b>7</b>
<b>Agency reported to</b>	<b>Reported cases</b>		
Police	3	0	<b>3</b>
Agent	4	2	<b>6</b>
Parent/family	17	8	<b>25</b>
Others	8	5	<b>13</b>
<b>Remarks</b>	<b>Satisfactory remedy</b>		
Yes	6	2	<b>8</b>
No	17	5	<b>22</b>
Don't know	27	9	<b>36</b>

From table 6, it can be observed that the workers were subjected to abuse of all kinds. It also shows that some of the abused workers indicated that they reported cases of abuse. Many of them confided in family members. The reason for the low percentage of reports is likely related to the vulnerable situation of the workers as the majority do not report the cases to their agency, family or security either for fear of losing their job or because there will not be any satisfactory outcome. This is also evident as only 8 out of more than 60 workers who indicated that they reported cases of abuse confirmed that the outcome was satisfactory. These workers were apprehensive of leaving their job because of their own survival and that of their dependents. To corroborate this, Malam Danjuma lamented that:

*“My problem is that they spoil the kindness with bad behaviour, shouting and sometimes telling me that I am daft, I don't have common sense. Sometimes I cry quietly but because I have children in school, I stay. What can I do? If government wants to help us let our children go to school and let them get good jobs so that they can have better life.”*  
October 2024, Abuja.

## **Holiday and Incentives at Work**

Taking a break from work is necessary to prevent burn-out and also encourage recreational time for workers to regain strength. The assessment in this study shows that domestic

workers' break is not often negotiated or granted by demand but dependent on when their service is less or not required.

**Table 7: Break from work and incentive opportunities.**

<b>Annual leave</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
One week	10	10	<b>20</b>
Two weeks	15	7	<b>22</b>
Three weeks	18	13	<b>31</b>
Four weeks	18	7	<b>25</b>
More than four weeks	0	2	<b>2</b>
<b>Remark</b>	<b>Public holiday Break</b>		
Always	28	13	<b>41</b>
Sometimes	13	12	<b>25</b>
Rarely	5	6	<b>11</b>
<b>Annual leave</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
<b>Remark</b>	<b>Public holiday Break</b>		
Never	15	7	<b>22</b>
<b>Remark</b>	<b>Bonus/Incentives</b>		
Often	40	22	<b>62</b>
Sometimes	8	7	<b>15</b>
Never	13	10	<b>23</b>

Irrespective of the residence status of these workers, many of them indicated that having a leave break or holiday is subject to their bosses' itinerary. This break is often granted when their bosses travel out of the city. However, the majority of these workers acknowledged that they often get leave bonuses and/or incentives. A deep interrogation of those

who indicated either often or sometimes showed that they are usually those on stable salary or employed through a recruitment company with standard of operation. In the specific case of drivers who drive their employers' children to school and home, they likely get a rest on public holiday because children would not go to school. But this is also subject to whether the children would be taken out for recreational activities or not.

Generally, there is a good remark from the workers in terms of other benefits in the course of their work. Thus, 85% of the workers attested to regular health care when they fall sick and some support to their children and spouse when they fall sick. They acknowledged regular feeding at least once a day for live-out and at least twice daily for live-in workers. But less than 50% of workers living out get support for accommodation from their employers. The response from the employers also indicated similar conditions. But the overall response showed that domestic employees largely work under precarious conditions and are vulnerable to all kinds of workplace abuse.

This data also indicated that they usually do not report abusive situations. They resort to self-consolation. Interestingly, the fear of workers who did not report was confirmed as responses from those who claimed to have reported suggested unsatisfactory outcomes in about 75% of the cases. As observed in the interview with Yerima, the

general working condition of domestic workers is “*very appalling and they are usually treated like sub-humans*”. He noted that there is no regulation to moderate their employment condition which makes them vulnerable to indiscriminate hiring and firing from work. What could have been their last resort is a trade union which would represent their interests and protect them against such abuses. The absence of a trade union for these workers. makes it quite challenging to organize, establish and maintain communication and meeting with the workers in this sector.

Working conditions of domestic workers is largely precarious and unregulated. The domestic work offers little hope for the workers to navigate their way out of poverty while subjecting them to the mercy of their employers. Obviously, there is a need for a regulatory mechanism to alleviate the precarity in domestic work in Nigeria.

#### **4.2 Assessment of Efforts by Stakeholders to Protect and Promote the Rights of Domestic Workers in Nigeria**

The protection and promotion of the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria has been challenging and daunting. It is generally known that to protect and promote rights of any individual requires the establishment of such rights. In the case of domestic workers, there are no clearly codified rights nor categorization of such rights in Nigeria, and this is a

known fact to the country's national assembly (Aborisade, 2024). This is not to mean that the domestic work does not appear in the Nigerian labour law at all.

Several labour regulations and laws have been enacted on domestic work in Nigeria which include; the Nigerian Labour Act (1990) that defines who a domestic worker is and what constitute domestic services; the Anti-Trafficking Policy (2003) which address trafficking and unpaid services through domestic work; the Employee Compensation Act (2010) which provides for the recognition of paid domestic work and; Labour Migration Policy (2013) which promotes the recognition of migrant workers that constitute a large proportion of domestic servants in the country.

Notwithstanding these laws and policies, none clearly defined the rights and status of these workers. For example, while the Labour Migration Policy of 2013 recognises the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers who are mostly women (Kanu et al, 2018:5), it fails to define clearly who migrant workers are or in the least who these migrant domestic workers could be (Kanu et al, 2018:8). With this in mind, it becomes really challenging to place domestic workers on any identifiable status and rights, especially those within national boundaries and international migration background.

On the bare minimum of human rights which are applicable globally, it may be difficult to apply it to domestic work

relations since there is no proper documentation of domestic work nor is there an existence of policy that aims to guide the process of employment and disengagement between employer and employees. This is the vacuum that the “Bill for an Act to Provide for the Documentation and Protection of Domestic Workers and Employers and for Other Matters Connected Therewith, 2024” aimed to fill (Ameh, 2024). Disappointingly, this yet to be passed bill still excludes domestic workers from the national minimum wage coverage of 2024 (Oyedeki, 2024). The implication is that there is no national salary benchmark. This may continue to put domestic workers at the mercy of employers.

To change this situation, efforts have been made by several interested bodies and individuals in the campaign for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria. One of such efforts is the campaign which started following the adoption of C189 at the ILO by the NLC, TUC, FIWON and CEE-HOPE all advocating that the Convention be ratified and domesticated by the Nigerian government.

To this end, FIWON and the CEE-HOPE have and are still in the process of mobilising and making contacts with domestic workers, much of which has been carried out in, Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. Kareem noted that FIWON had prosecuted a case to demand for compensation up to the level of industrial court and won few victories have been won in

the cases of abuse of workers' rights example is the case with an expatriate who locked up his domestic staff in the house and prevented them from going home. But they were able to compel the expatriate to respect the rights of these staff based on resolution of complaint to the Nigerian Human Rights Commission.

From the interview with respondents from labour unions, although the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) support better working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria as well as their unionisation, they have no clear programs on it. According to Yerima, the NLC has lately been consistent in organizing the informal sector, and they “*are hoping to partner with the FIWON*” on this even though he expressed the challenge that “*nothing concrete is on the table*”. A similar remark was made by Agba that the TUC empathises with the workers and wishes to support other groups in their attempt to organize and fight for these workers' welfare but they are “not doing anything significant to address the situation” in action. The implication of this on the welfare of domestic workers is that it at least exists as a prospective agenda for both labour unions to advance.

More recently, there have been campaigns by NGOs, CSOs and several other women's groups in Nigeria campaigning and advocating for the rights of domestic workers to be constitutionally enshrined and respected in the labour

system. Emphasis has been placed specially on the gender dimension and exploitation of children in domestic labour (Musa, 2024). Some of these NGOs and CSOs have collaborated to hold actions at the National Assembly to call for the ratification of C189 and inclusion of domestic workers in the minimum wage coverage.

In response to our interview, Ogefa from the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN) noted that the interest of the leadership of the union on the plight of domestic workers was inspired by a presentation that was made on the floor of the house by a CSO with the presence of the wife of the then Chairperson Senate Committee on labour. This event also contributed to the attention given to the domestic work bill by the law-making body in the country.

These attempts have projected the issues of Domestic Workers before the National Assembly which is expected to enact laws to establish and protect their rights. A significant result is the acknowledgement of this vacuum by the law-making body in Nigeria and creation of a new system that would document the work and workers adequately.

### **4.3 Obstacles to Domestic Workers' Rights Protection and Challenges of Unionisation**

The promotion and protection of the rights of domestic workers like every other worker category ought to be

advanced in Nigeria. But the findings of the study showed that promotion and protection of the rights of domestic workers have been constrained by some factors despite the efforts by CSOs and other labour support organisations. The absence of contract between domestic workers and their employers made it difficult to seek redress for any abuse at work.

Organisations that may want to support the workers are confronted with the challenge of lack of written contract in most cases. In a particular case of an abused worker, Tunde noted that “one of the challenges in a situation (conflict between a worker and employer) is the lack of contract” and they had to rely on “ID Card, text messages showing commitment during the litigation process” before they could make a sound case. Also because of this absence of contract, it hinders the possibility of maintaining defined work hours or daily tasks.

Even in a situation where there are written contracts or where workers may have legitimate demand from their employers to avert work related abuse, the general vacuum created by the inadequate law on domestic work and the rights of the workers may put a limit to the legitimate demands of these workers. Since domestic work is not covered under the new minimum wage law, it makes it difficult to have a general benchmark or standard of payment for domestic workers.

The effect of this is that workers are subjected to the dictate of the level of their own desperation and vulnerability to get a job and the magnanimity of their employers. Our findings corroborate this as many of the workers explained that they settled for whatever offer they got from their employers because they must fend for themselves.

From the foregoing findings, the absence of contract affects both the payment criteria and working conditions. The non-coverage of domestic workers in the minimum wage structure and the non-ratification of the C189 also impede the efforts. Beyond this condition, the general implication of these factors on protecting the rights of these workers is the difficulty in seeking legal justice in the case of abuse or exploitation of workers.

The fact that employers of domestic workers are also workers poses unionising and rights protection challenges to organisers of domestic workers. This was pointed out by Ezeama who works with the Amalgamated Union of Public, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE). The employers of domestic workers are usually workers belonging to other unions and it becomes challenging for these unions to intervene in the case of conflict between the workers and their employers.

It is a common knowledge that the defence of workers' rights is hinged on the vibrancy and articulacy of a trade union

founded for such purposes. Notable among factors militating against the protection of rights of domestic workers is the absence of a trade union that can collectively bargain on their behalf. It is established that there is no organised trade union for domestic workers in Nigeria in spite of attempts by CEE-HOPE and FIWON which are confronted with socio-cultural and weak legislative obstacles. These are concerns which have been similarly expressed by the trade unions in Nigeria.

It was in the realisation of the need for a strong legislation that CEE-HOPE is consistent in its campaign for laws that will specifically protect the interest of domestic workers in Nigeria. Thus, it was notably the only NGO that submitted a memorandum at the Senate Hearing on the proposed domestic workers' Protection and Regulation Bill in 2024. It remarkably made a submission that demanded for a protection of their rights to establish or join a union.

According to the Trade Union Act, at least workers must be well organised to be considered qualified as a trade union. But it has been challenging to have a sustained meeting of these domestic workers to form representatives amongst themselves. This is caused by different factors associated with the working condition of domestic workers. Domestic workers are usually working in isolated homes unlike other jobs with workplace convergence.

Yerima noted that because of this “the biggest challenge will be how to reach them with relevant information and how to mobilize them into an accessible location” considering that their employers are “likely to discourage them from joining unions or even threaten them with firing” if they do so. Kareem affirmed this from shared experience that some of the domestic workers do not open up about their experience or willing to actively engage in a union because they do “not want to lose their job and they do not know the implication of unionising” on their work.

Funding is another militating factor affecting the process of forming a union for domestic workers. Organising usually requires having a standby team of organisers who are paid to do the organising work. This requires a sustainable fund stream to keep the organising work ongoing. In their response, the organisers in FIWON noted that:

*“the challenge is funding to be quite blunt. This is not peculiar to Nigeria from interaction with colleagues elsewhere. Domestic Workers don't pay dues. Not like they don't want to pay but it is difficult for them to do. So, we need fund to get work done, to pay lawyers to be committed to standing up for cases of human rights abuse of these workers”* (Tunde, October, 2024).

*“The major challenge is funding. We have made like three attempts to get them organized. There are times we went as*

*far as doing a radio programme to educate them on what their rights are and also link them with us but that radio programme could not be sustained because of fund. There was a time we got three organisers to organized them and they were meeting once in a meeting but that became unsustainable even though the payment was just a stipend (Kareem, October, 2024).*

Migration and instability make it difficult to maintain a core with them. The findings from our reports reveals that domestic workers are sometimes migrant workers which can be migrants moving from the rural communities to work in urban areas or nationals of neighbouring African countries who are in Nigeria for greener pastures. Tunde acknowledges that:

*“Migration plays a key role because majority of them are undocumented and vulnerable in their desperation for survival to take any sort of payment. This involves both national and international migrants. Whereas the agents are always encouraging illegal migration and supportive of indiscriminate sacking of domestic workers because they get commission each time they change domestic workers for employers”.*

The challenge in this is that it becomes unsustainable to consistently organise the same set of workers over a long period of time enough to form a union. When these workers

migrate elsewhere, maintaining contact with them or linking them with the organising structure in their new place may be difficult since their work environment and circumstances also change as they migrate. This is compounded by undefined work hours or daily tasks which makes it a challenge for the workers or organizer to find a common free time since these domestic workers can be called upon by their employer at any time. From experience shared by Kareem, bringing the workers to attend meetings has been a daunting challenge “because even at their own leisure time they don't know when their boss can call them” to work.

General decline in trade union membership and internal challenges also undermine the power of organised labour in Nigeria to work towards domestic workers unionisation in the country. Yerima and Agba expressed the interest of the NLC and TUC to see domestic workers organized however that while this is in line with the current organising of the informal sector there is not yet a strategic action plan towards unionising domestic workers.

#### **4.4 Approaches to Protection of Domestic Workers Rights and Unionisation Process**

This section is divided into two parts. In the first part, an attempt is made to provide recommendations on how Nigeria can improve its laws and policies on domestic work to guarantee the rights of these workers and their protection.

The power resource approach is adopted in the second part to provide theoretical guidance towards the formation of an organized trade union of domestic workers in Nigeria.

#### ***4.4.1 Towards the Protection and Promotion of Domestic Workers' Rights in Nigeria***

The induction from the focus of our study is that a major setback for the promotion and protection of the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria is the inadequate provision of the rights of domestic workers in the labour laws of the country. To fill this vacuum, it would be important for the government of Nigeria to review its labour laws and provide for the adequate coverage of domestic workers in Nigeria. Provision of such laws, according to Yerima, would first among many things guarantee job security by “*regularizing their hiring and firing process*” as well as “*include them in social protection policy*”. To corroborate this, Agba opined that “*all the informal sector unions need to have social safety nets, social protection, living wage and generally decent work coverage*”.

The importance of institutionalising this is that the employment of domestic workers would become mandatorily contractual and approaching industrial court for breach in contract would become applicable. The ratification and domestication of C189 by the Nigerian government will be instrumental as it already made

provision for these standards. It may be interesting to revisit the campaign for the domestication of this convention.

This can be supported by the organized labour unions, civil societies and other domestic workers support groups in the country. Putting this agenda at the forefront of the campaign by these NGOs and women's rights groups may be a central uniting objective that addresses all the fundamental challenges confronting domestic work.

Another policy that could be considered is mainstreaming domestic work like every other labour. This idea is borrowed from the global north practice where care work and domestic services are integrated into private and public services. In our case, we argue in favour of state organised and managed services rather than a private managed. This follows the logical response of Carington, a former organiser in a union in one of the states in the US who said:

*“It does make sense to have a public system as opposed to a private system. Any system that is private is for profit. One role the state could play if we have a state that would be interested in the case of the working class, is to move to a public model. There are also models where the homecare workers are incorporated through skills required to administer homecare service”*

What this means is that documentation of domestic work can go further to be included in the public service system in

which people can directly apply for domestic service work and employ domestic workers through a government managed platform. In this sense, the government would serve as a fair intermediary between the employer and employee while protecting the rights of both parties as citizens.

A complementary good in this can be that unionising these workers may become easier since they would now have a central platform through which they can be mobilised and organised. In addition, what can be enforced here is the working condition regulation with the obligations of the worker to employers and vice versa clearly defined.

Conscious of an observation made by Madu, the challenges may be from the *“employers who fear that a strong legislative protection will erode the power they have over the employees”*.

Indeed, there is a common fear expressed by the employers of domestic workers which indicates their opposition to unionised domestic workers. While trade union employers agree that a union of domestic workers will the job more dignity and respect, some employers express the worry that trade union demand *“will distract and disrupt their work”*, some fear that *“they may become more expensive”* to hire a respondent noted that she will avoid hiring a union member because according to her *“I don't want trade union trouble”*

It is interesting to note the perception of employers of domestic workers on the unionisation of domestic workers which demand for organised education and understanding of benefits to both the employer, the employee with respect to quality of service, security and respect for basic human dignity.

There could be an intricacy of employers' protection through the campaign for documentation. Because employers are also union members, the organised unions can do internal awareness and advocacy among their members who employ domestic workers to support the rights of these workers as an act of solidarity consciously as workers themselves. This can be a cross-sectional solidarity.

#### ***4.4.2 Building Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers in Nigeria***

Among all the challenges confronting the efforts made at promoting and protecting the rights of domestic workers, the non-existence of a trade union which can continuously sustain the struggle is first among other important issues. Tunde remarked thus:

*“It is fundamental to first of all establish an independent workers' agency. Domestic Workers have been a favourite pastime for NGOs which come and go within the scope of their project. We need a union that is on standby that can*

*take up issues around working conditions. (A Union) That is continual. So Union is even more important in this sector where conditions are so precarious, and we are loud about it.”*

Kareem holds a similar view when he said:

*“Number one is for them to be recognised as workers. Though they are workers, but in the context of their work I don't think there is a kind of employer-employee kind of relationship where employees can negotiate their working conditions. I think in that aspect; the first thing is giving them recognition and that includes the power to unionise. Because when they are unionised, they tend to learn some of the basics of what it means to be a worker and that will help them to better negotiate, and this is what is lacking compared to other workers.”*

Apparently, what is central to protecting the rights of informal workers is to first organize them under a recognized trade union through which they can collectively bargain. This implies that even when the laws and policies which recognise and protect the rights of domestic workers are made, there is a need for the presence of an organised union through which these rights are protected, promoted and continuously advanced. Our study findings suggest approaches that can enhance the creation of a legally recognised and sustainable union of domestic workers.

### **4.4.3 Building Structural Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers**

To follow the sequence of the PRA, it is important to appreciate the structural power of domestic workers in the society as a tool to establish a union by and for them. This may begin with building campaigns around the importance of domestic workers in our households and to those they render their services to. It may be difficult to call for a strike as in the case of many informal workers in Nigeria, in pursuant of their rights to decent work, they could be trained on Collective Bargaining Agreement and negotiation skills. This can be done simultaneously with the campaign for the domestication of the convention of domestic work.

A union respondent suggests further that domestic workers support group can deepen awareness and focus on what would make *“people to understand that a healthy intervention on domestic work can have benefits for the employers and the employees”*. Beyond the power dynamic a shared and deepened understanding of the rights of domestic workers to participate in union provides traceable linkage to enhance security guarantee confidence with their employees. Some of the observations made by the employers is the issue of insecurity with domestic servants. It may be an addendum that the organisers may use to convince employers of granting their employees union time while the union provides for them in turn guarantee. An idea shared by

Agba may also be tenable that Unions “*should reach out to domestic workers' employers and sensitize them about the mutual benefit of a planned intervention*”.

This may be done as an internal education within the union since many of the employers are members of trade unions themselves. It may be interesting to appeal to them that allowing their domestic staff union time is solidarity by extension. This may be a propaganda or positive blackmail to win a union participation time for the workers. Another possible intervention could be that organised labour with other labour support groups should strengthen advocacy for regulation to protect their interest.

Above all, the impact of domestic workers in the households where they work cannot be overemphasised. For the childcare workers, they provide care for babies while their parents are away at work. The significance of the childcare worker in this instance is that without the availability of their service, the parents would be constrained from working because they would then need to look after their own kids themselves.

This is the similar situation for workers who take care of the aged people. Without these care workers, the children of these old people would be required to sacrifice their economic hour to look after their own old parents. This goes in line with the argument of Fled (2022) that domestic

workers provide the household members who hire them participation in other jobs. The security guard in a country like Nigeria where insecurity is a challenge also plays a crucial safety role in the home.

As this becomes crucial for the employers of domestic workers, the government also benefits indirectly from it because the unavailability of the employers of domestic workers because of the absence of their domestic workers would have an impact on the economic productivity of the country. This poses the structural importance of domestic work in Nigeria. The organisers of domestic workers and the support groups may adopt a positive advocacy awareness to highlight the structural significance of domestic work to the public good. This can be a good campaign instrument in the agitation for the domestication of C189 and a possible introduction of the public care work model in the country.

#### ***4.4.4 Building Associational Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers***

As has been described in the theoretical framework section, association power is the cohesive capacity of a union to organise its members and sustain unity of purpose within its rank and file (Gallas, 2018 & Schmalz et al, 2018). The information provided by Kareem and Tunde is that they have been unable to maintain a stable associational meeting of these domestic workers. The difficulty in

building the associational power of domestic workers may be associated with the challenge of their kind in their workplace. Just as many of the union and civil society organisation respondents mentioned that reaching domestic workers has been challenging because they work in isolated homes, and it may be difficult to identify which household employs domestic workers or not. This reality is corroborated by cases in the US, South Africa, Kenya/Uganda, Senegal and Ghana. Carington expressed the similarity when he said that:

*“The biggest challenge by far is that homecare workers are isolated. Usually when you are organising you build bond. Organising requires sharing physical work site where you hold conversation.”*

He explained further that from his experience, the “second challenge is how to reach the workers”. So, reaching workers and building solidarity was a big challenge because they are isolated without convergence. Having understood this condition, he shared a workable plan adopted by their union. In their strategy, they “relied a lot on door-to-door visit and sometimes on phone call” as a communication and mobilization tactic. What they can achieve through sustained communication is the emergence of a cohesive interest among these workers. This became an instrument of popularising the objective of unionisation and regulation of domestic service in the state of California.

It is also assumed that providing long and/or short-term social and welfare schemes for domestic workers may be an interesting strategy to keep their interest in union membership. A Cooperative scheme could be an interesting initiative to mobilise and catch the interest of domestic workers. It has been acknowledged that informal workers in Nigeria generally lack social savings and financial plan, this becomes the reason the cooperative society was founded to encourage savings, provide interest-free loans, discounted pricing, social insurance and other financial support for its members (Sesan, 2022:9 & Soneye, 2024:12). It may be helpful to encourage domestic workers to join the cooperative scheme. This will likely engender their interest in associating. They can begin to bond within themselves and form cohesion of interest. This would provide a meeting platform for further unionisation discussion.

Another lesson can be drawn from the South African experience shared by Comrade Christopher of South Africa Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), who narrated how Mrs. Leah Desmond Tutu and Mama Eunice Dhladhla formed the 'Domestic Employers Project' which later became the South Africa Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU). It was again renamed South African Domestic, Services and Allied Workers' Union (SADSAWU).

In this testimony, the duo initiated a capacity training and opened operation centres in strategic places in communities

where domestic workers are concentrated. They meet every Thursday to train them on knitting, crocheting, sewing, cooking etc to enable them to learn additional skills for alternative income generation. This also became a platform for them to meet and discuss union with them. Initiating a similar project through funding partners in Nigeria may yield a similar result under a similar plan.

One other problem highlighted is the lack of funds to keep the organisers in their work. Although funding is very important, the cost of maintaining this may be cut down strategically. One interesting narration from Carington is also how he lamented the avoidable spendings on the organising strategy team in their plan as thus:

*“The union spent much more. But I do not think they have spent the money wisely. They could have trained the workers themselves rather than employing organisers like me. So, they could have trained more homecare workers to become organisers themselves. I think maybe they can spend more on politics to push the government to do more policies for the homecare.”*

From this, two important lessons could be drawn for the organising strategy. One, initiating capacity building training with the available resources for as many domestic workers as they can afford to engage may be helpful. In this case, these workers in turn would become the organisers of

their co-workers to form the union. As this cuts down costs and build unionists from their ranks, it may also be positive that these workers would be more committed and become better organisers with their firsthand experience as domestic workers themselves.

Consequently, whether from the project that seeks to bring together domestic workers for upskills training, or the cooperative scheme meetings and the social benefits or the capacity building training for potential organisers among the domestic workers, associational coherence and unity is built through this process. Either of the platforms would be a meeting place to familiarise the workers with the union and earn their interest in becoming a part of it. This may require a long-term plan for its feasibility.

#### ***4.4.5 Building Societal Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers***

Popularisation of the struggle of domestic workers may also be an important strategy to mainstream the discussion on the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria. We find this suggestion of Carington interesting when he said he:

*“Would suggest that apart from organising for better working conditions, it would make sense to get a cooperating model. There is a strong need for this kind of work. This is a kind of work that they (workers) don't feel*

*alienated the way factory workers feel. For example, teachers and healthcare workers do their job for the community everywhere in the world, this is the same for homecare workers. They care for their clients and build bonds with them. Maybe what we could do as a union is to include the clients and family of these clients.”*

There are two suggestions knitted together above. The first being the idea of a cooperating model which Carrington explained as a practiced model in some states in the US. This cooperating model is only made possible by moving public, that is, state intervention in the database management and employment procedure. According to him, “one role the state could play if we have a state that would be interested in the case of the working class, is to move to a public model” in which the government directly manages the recruitment medium, and employers can employ them through the state's-controlled platform.

The way to do this may be through raising a campaign that advocates domestic work as an essential work, that it is really in each household. It is interesting that this idea is currently conceived by Ezeama and Tunde, that domestic workers should be made to register through the Ministry of Labour, while recruitment should also be done through the Ministry.

To develop an alliance to campaign for the protection and promotion of rights and welfare of domestic workers, it may be helpful in building the societal power to make this a public

issue. As correctly noted, domestic workers bond in a special way with their clients as they often see themselves as friends and family to their employer or client. It may then be thought to win the employers to the side of the workers that documentation of domestic workers and provision of homecare for the elderly especially, should be the responsibility of the government.

The findings from the responses of the employers also shows that they are willing to have a better and trusted domestic service system. This is why the upper middle-class employers prefer domestic servants hired through private agencies. Instead of this, the interest of the employers and the employees may be brought together by the organisers to demand for a publicly managed domestic and homecare service that would be subsidized by the government. The challenges that may arise is possible antagonism from private agencies.

A methodology that may be considered to address this is the Zambian example where Zambia Federation of Employers (ZFE) is actively promoting good recruitment and employment practices and has come up with a Code of Conduct for employers of domestic workers. Ngolo from the ZFE noted how they were able to run a campaign that brought about this change. A similar method was adopted during the process of forming SADWU. According to Mbeki, they founded the domestic workers and employers project which aimed to provide additional skill and psychosocial

counselling for domestic workers. They find a common interest that could make the employers find interest in the domestic workers. COSATU was approached as the national union to which many of the employers of domestic workers themselves belong.

The possibility of getting people unionised if this alliance is successfully built will be higher as there would be understanding from employers the interests that necessitate the demand for union. This may make the employers grant concessions for their employees to have union time. Since many of these employers are originally members of unions, it becomes easy for existing organised labour to consolidate on this mutual understanding to put this on their union agenda.

A suggestion made by Ogefa that the labour centres can then provide “appropriate training for negotiation and understanding self-dignity” for these workers can then be put forward. The organised labour may consider designating the women's wing to liaise with CEE-HOPE and other domestic workers support groups to ensure that regulation on their protection is well implemented.

#### ***4.4.6 Building Institutional Power for the Unionisation of Domestic Workers***

A critical challenge evident in Nigeria is inadequate institutional coverage of domestic workers in the labour system. However, the good opportunity available is that the

quest to build institutional power would not be started from zero. Both locally and internationally, there are legal frameworks for human rights and workers' rights of domestic workers guaranteed respectively. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) and the Nigerian Labour Act and Convention 189 are existing instruments that can be utilised in the struggle for the unionisation of domestic workers. The relevant sections of these legal instruments have been cited in section 2.1 of this study.

The constitution of Nigeria which is supreme by the provision of Section 40 guarantees the freedom of assembly and association of all Nigerians. This is the base from which the right to unionise may be argued that it is contestable that employers or agencies depriving workers the rights to associate with the union are undermining the fundamental rights of the workers.

The NLC and the TUC have for almost two decades began shifting away from organising mainly the formal sector workers to now organising the informal sector workers who are largely self-employed. Before now the typical case of informal sector organising is the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) under the NLC, the National Union of Road Transport Employees (NURTE) under the TUC.

Today, the National Union of Textile and Garment Workers (NUTGW), are mobilising the informal sector self-

employed. Other recent cases of successful unionisation include the Motorcycle riders, App based logistic service providers and the telecommunication service providers. though the domestic workers are currently not captured in the informal workers organising process, the Nigeria Labour Congress has previously attempted to organise the domestic workers by seeking collaboration with FIWON, the NLC respondent indicated that the NLC in its determination to continue to organise the informal sector is willing to continue to explore possibilities of collaborations

While “workers” are defined as people who have contracts with their employers, which may be written typically refer to rights, responsibilities and obligations as agreed or discussed between employer and the worker. This may be argued to cover the rights of the domestic worker both under the constitution as primarily human beings and under the Labour Act as workers with dignity.

**Table 8: Awareness on law protecting domestic workers and interest in unionising**

	Female	Male	Total (%)
<b>Remark</b>	<b>Willing to join DW association</b>		
Yes	17	20	37
No	31	13	44
I don't know	13	6	19
<b>Remark</b>	<b>Awareness of law on protection of DW</b>		
Yes	4	4	8
No	57	35	92

From the table above, the importance of a strategic campaign and advocacy plan on the available legal instruments on the protection of the rights of domestic workers is made visible. This campaign and advocacy will be a crucial instrument to educate domestic workers and also earn their interest in joining unions. The findings in this study shows that 92% of the workers are not aware of any law protecting their rights. We see that 37% of them are willing to associate in a union, 44% showed negative reaction to unionism while 19% are indecisive about it.

This may be attributed to the lack of awareness of both local and international legal frameworks that protect their rights, including the benefit of unionism. Therefore, revisiting the campaign on the domestication of the convention 189 will be an important strategy for institutionalising the rights of domestic workers as well as their chances of unionisation. The convention clearly addresses the union rights of domestic workers with which campaigns can be organised around.

The example of the SADSAWU policy driven struggle that brought about unemployment insurance policy, work hour rate and minimum wage are some of the notable policies domestic workers support groups in Nigeria may learn from. This may come with its challenges, especially demanding 1% of the monthly salary from the workers and their employers into the trust fund. However, the already presented bill

before the national assembly for creating a database of domestic workers and their employers may provide the organisers and the ministry of labour a mechanism through which they can implement the policy.

## **Conclusion**

We have examined the working conditions of domestic workers in Nigeria. The findings of this study demonstrated that domestic workers experience precarious working conditions with almost no labour rights coverage. It is established that there are ongoing efforts by CEE-HOPE and trade unions' advocating for inclusion of domestic workers' rights in the country's legislation. We also found out that the organised trade unions, although sympathise with the plight of domestic workers in the spirit of global solidarity with workers in every sector, they are yet to develop a concrete programme of action for organising these workers.

While it is expected that the ongoing drive in unionising the informal workers by the NLC and the TUC will create a strategic inclusion of the domestic workers where FIWON and the CEE-HOPE will need to overcome the challenges of transforming their contacts with the domestic workers to a successful trade union for the sector. These challenges which include paucity of funds, difficulty in reaching the workers and the inadequate labour framework will require a dedicated pool of resources and policy backup.

Findings from Civil Society Organisations, organised trade unions and examples from other countries provides hope that with consistency and strategic action plan, trade union for domestic workers and mainstreaming of their rights like other workers in Nigeria can be achieved.

Essentially, the PRA framework was adopted in this study to examine the potential of the power resources of domestic workers within the Nigeria context. With this framework, we came up with possible ideas and methodology that may be adopted by CEE-HOPE and other support organisations to mobilise the power of domestic workers for the purpose of advancing their rights and forming a registered trade union for them.

We suggested that partial strike, when possible, could be used to exert the structural importance of domestic services in the household. We recommend the integration of domestic workers into the cooperative schemes to build their cohesion for associational power effect. The public model which includes the integration of the interest of the workers and their employers as aligning could be a means to building societal power for the government to provide legislation that capture domestic services in the labour system. The enforcement of CFRN, relevant labour laws and the domestication of C189 are instruments we suggests for building institutional power of domestic workers.

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The public model which includes the integration of the interest of the workers and their employers as aligning could be a means to building societal power for the government to provide legislation that captures domestic services in the labour system. The enforcement of the Nigerian Constitution, relevant labour laws and the domestication of C189 are instruments we suggest for building institutional power of domestic workers.

In essence, while there are challenges confronting the protection of the rights of domestic workers in Nigeria, the situation is not hopeless. A consistent effort of a united front

of CEE-HOPE, FIWON, NLC, TUC and other CSOs that put workers' rights, human rights and women's rights as the focus of their action will create a critical momentum that can sustain the establishment and successful integration of domestic workers into the world of decent work.

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This Research and Publication  
was supported by:



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