



The State and Transformation of Female Wage Labour in Ethiopia: The Case of Waitresses in Cafés and Restaurants in Addis Ababa

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Executive Summary

The hospitality sector is a valuable development opportunity and a vehicle for economic development as it supported about one in ten of the total employment opportunities in Ethiopia. However, the sector is less regulated in protecting the rights and privileges of waitresses, and they are exposed to labour exploitation and emotional and sexual abuse. The study recommended the policy to provide a workable framework for the formation of unions and inspection of labour relations in small and medium hospitality establishments to give female workers the power to negotiate for favourable working conditions and other benefits through collective bargaining. The recommendation also includes enacting the regulation on implementing the minimum wage policy in private enterprises in Ethiopia to improve workers' livelihood, improve the economy and motivate employees to higher standards of performance.

Introduction

Women's employment rate and labour force participation in Ethiopia is lower than those for men, and the unemployment rate for women is much higher in urban areas. The government of Ethiopia implemented various strategies to reduce unemployment through various interventions, which include the plan of action to support job creation through policy reform, inclusiveness, and advocacy. However,

unemployment is yet a significant challenge and is more pronounced among women and young girls. Consequently, expanding employment opportunities for women and youth has been one of the strategic directions in the development plan. Similarly, improving the quality-of-service delivery and developing a competent workforce in the tourism industry through capacity development is a critical area of focus in the Ten Years development plan 2021-2030.

The recently revised labour proclamation of Ethiopia (Proclamation No.1156/2019) addresses the working conditions of women (Article 87) including protection of women from discrimination based on their gender. Similarly, the Gender and Social Inclusion Plan of the Ten-Year Development Plan (2021-2030) emphasises the development of women's overall capacity to facilitate their all-rounded participation in the country's economic, social, and cultural affairs. The plan includes safeguarding women's security and rights, ensuring their participation and protecting their benefit from economic development, and creating conditions where they are free from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

The hospitality sector is a valuable opportunity for economic development that created opportunities for 2.2 million jobs or 8.3% of the total employment in Ethiopia. However, the rights and privileges of women employed in the sector have not yet been attained. Women in the sector are exposed to a non-conducive working environment including sexual and emotional abuse.

Moreover, shortage of trained human power, non-competitive compensation package, low customer satisfaction, and poor-quality standard are common features of small-sized hotels, cafés, and restaurants.

Objectives

The overall goal of this study is to show the state of waitresses in cafés and restaurants in Addis Ababa. This includes the assessment of the socio-demographic characteristics, bargaining power, income and benefits, and working conditions of waitresses. The study also provides recommendations to deal with the challenges.

Methodology of the Research

Three sub-cities in Addis Ababa (Arada, Kirkos, and Bole) were purposively selected to reflect various dimensions of waitresses' challenges in the service sector. The study is largely based on primary data from a survey of 270 waitresses. The selected sub-cities represent areas with a higher concentration of cafés and restaurants. Three focus group discussions were conducted with waitresses in each sub-city. In-depth interviews were conducted with managers and supervisors of cafés and restaurants, and officials of relevant government offices. Secondary data sources were consulted, and a review of empirical studies was conducted. The field data collection was conducted in the first weeks of June 2021.

Key Findings

Waitresses in cafés and restaurants in Addis Ababa are generally young migrants, mainly from rural areas of the Amhara, Oromia, and SNNP regions. Most are unmarried and have dependents. Most waitresses are in their early adolescence, they migrate to Addis Ababa, principally looking for job opportunities, better education, and adoption by relatives. Nearly two-thirds of the waitresses have a secondary or higher level of education, and a fifth of them have hotel service-related vocational training. About a quarter of the waitresses in cafés and restaurants in Addis Ababa are new entrants with less than one year in the sector.

According to the current employment practices, experience and skills are secondary in the choice for waitresses. Instead, young age, overall physical attractiveness, and willingness to follow the dressing codes of the establishment are the most important considerations made by managers and owners of cafés and restaurants to recruit waitresses.

While the nature of the job is both physically and mentally demanding waitresses' basic salary is the lowest by all standards. On average, a waitress earns ETB 3254. Out of this, ETB 911 (28%) comes from regular wages, while tips make up about ETB 1956 (60%). A

higher level of education, younger ages, being non-migrant, and working for fewer hours per day predict higher income from tips.

For most employees in low-paying jobs, nonfinancial incentives and benefits generally inspire and engage them in ways that salaries alone cannot account for. Yet, according to the findings of the research, food is the only item many waitresses (28.5%) got as a benefit. And, very few of them had access to the other benefits such as housing, transportation, health, education, and training. Concerning living expenses, food, house rent, and family support are major expenditures that consume the waitresses' income; other expenses include transportation, airtime, health care, and education.

Even though the labour law of Ethiopia put an obligation on the employers to sign a contract agreement with the employee or provide an employment letter, more than two-thirds of the waitresses in cafés and restaurants do not have legally binding contracts or employment letters. When employees leave establishments, a letter of work experience is rarely provided in most cafés and restaurants.

The presence of labour unions in cafés and restaurants is uncommon – only 3.3% of the surveyed waitresses were members of the labour unions. Instead, waitresses use informal associations (such as Equib) among them to provide support to each other on occasions like burials, weddings, etc., and to address other personal problems.

Due to a lack of oversight on small establishments (such as cafés/restaurants), the concerned offices don't often operate within the bounds of their labour inspection. The findings have shown that simple misunderstandings with supervisors or other employees and a noticeable sign of aging and weight gain could lead to dismissal.

Overall, the challenges encountering waitresses include the demanding nature of the job itself, interpersonal relationships, social norms and responsibilities, discrimination, violation of labour rights, meagre salary, lack of benefits and promotion opportunities, harassment, and unfair treatment.

Recommendations

Ensuring Unionization: Labour unions give workers the power to negotiate for more favourable working conditions and other benefits through collective bargaining. However, the rate of unionization of waitresses in small and medium hospitality establishments in Addis Ababa is very low. The

hotel and tourism confederation of the trade union and relevant government offices should provide a workable guideline for the formation of unions in small and medium hospitality establishments.

Conducting Regular Labor Inspection: Labour inspection in small and medium hospitality establishments in Addis Ababa is minimal or non-existent. The relevant government offices should strengthen labour inspection in small and medium hospitality establishments.

Capacity Building: Poor-quality standard in smaller-sized hotels, cafés, and restaurants in Ethiopia is a concern for the development of the hospitality sector. Concerned government ministries such as Culture

and Tourism, Labour and Skills, Women and Social Affairs, Trade, TVET, and higher education should work on improving the hospitality service quality standard of front-line workers (waitresses) through training and sustainable inspection.

Establishing Wages Board: Waitresses' basic salary is the lowest by all standards, while the nature of the job is both physically and mentally demanding. They earn most of their income from tips from customers. Thus, it is recommended to establish the Wage Board as provided by the 2019 Labour Proclamation which is a crucial step to ensuring a decent living for the workers and their families and motivating employees to higher standards of performance.

By
Tilahun Girma (PhD.)
and
Tigist Tarekegn

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§§ Forum for Social Studies (FSS)

§§ P.o.Box:- 25864 code 1000 Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

§§ Tel:- 0111545605/06

§§ Email:- fss@ethionet.et

§§ Website:- www.fssethiopia.org