Living on the Fruits of Her Womb

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Twenty-one-year-old Emem Etukudo sells two of her three children born to different fathers, to keep body and soul together

Twenty-one-year-old Emem Godwin Etukudo of Idua village, and resident of Atung Asam, Ikot Udoma in Okon, Eket local government area of Akwa Ibom State is a productive baby factory. Yet she does not keep her babies. She sells them to the first available buyer. Etukudo is now helping the police to trace the buyer of her third child, a baby boy, which she sold on September 29, 2011, when it was only two days old. She told Newswatch at the Eket Police Station, where she was being detained that she sold the baby for N100, 000 because she did not have money to maintain herself let alone nurture the baby. The agent who found her a buyer-Eddy Grant, took N25,000 as commission. She said that she also disposed of her second child - a baby girl – in 2009 for N360,000 because she was passing through much hardship. Out of this amount, her agent got N250,000 while she got N110,000. She said her parents died some years back and she had been finding it rough in life and decided to trade with the fruit of her womb. Etukudo said when she does not sell her baby, she fixes women’s hair but that fetches her very little money. It is only her first child, born in 2007 that was not sold and this is because the father of the child, born out of wedlock, promptly took him away. The boy now lives with the uncle and attends a primary school. A man she identified as Eddy Grant, from Ikot Aka Enang in Okon-Eket, allegedly executed the contract of finding buyers for her two babies, born to different fathers. She claimed the father of the baby she sold in 2009 raped her while the father of her latest child ‘ran away’ after finding out that she was pregnant. Grant allegedly received N25, 000 out of the N100, 000 realised from the sale of the first child. He got N250, 000 out of the N360,000 the second child was sold. Etukudo and three members of a Port Harcourt-based child trafficking syndicate involved in the disposal of her baby are also with the police in Eket. They are Jacob Michael Stephen, 42, a driver and resident of Umebeletu village, Etche, Rivers State; Okwuchi Mwamuo Obuji, 28, and proprietor of Saint Margaret Memorial Hospital, located at No. 104 Old Aba Road, Oyigbo, Port Harcourt; Nancy Obuli, 21, said to be a trainee nurse at the hospital, and Peace Akpan, 36-year-old hairdresser, resident at No. 9, Ayabulu Street, Port Harcourt. The Akwa Ibom State Police Command is still looking for Ijeoma John, who bought the child from the syndicate and Grant. All the suspects were taken to court recently. Obuji , the hospital proprietor, had arranged for the purchase of Etukudo’s second baby. She told Newswatch: “There is a woman that is in need of a baby and had been married for 18 years without one. She approached me and requested that I should help her acquire a baby to save her marriage from collapse.” When Grant told her about Etukudo’s baby, Obuji despatched Stephen, Obuli and Akpan who arrived and parked their Mercedez Benz car on the road at Ikot Abasi, Akwa Ibom State, where she claimed she was delivered of the baby. Etukudo and Grant met them in their car parked somewhere on the roadside where they exchanged the baby for the money. The visitors drove away, with Akpan acting as the baby’s surrogate mother while Grant and Etukudo returned to their houses. Back in Port Harcourt, Obuji had told Ijeoma John who had feigned pregnancy since some months back to report at the hospital pretending to be in labour. She handed over the baby to John in the hospital. The police have not found the baby yet as John has been on the run. But Obuji said she strongly believes the baby was alive and very safe in the hands of John. Her only fear is whether John would agree to return the baby. How did the police know that Etukudo sold her baby? According to the police, Clement Inyang, her landlord, reported to Prince Inyangudo, village head of Ikot Ataku, that Etukudo, his pregnant tenant, who had been living in his house since 2010, disappeared from her apartment for about one month in September and returned without the pregnancy and could not give account of the baby. She was invited to the village council but could also not say definitely where the baby was. There and then, the village council through Marshall Martins Udosen, one of the chiefs, reported the matter to the police, which led to her arrest and later, that of her accomplices. However, Stephen, Obuli and Akpan were arrested on November 25, last year, on their way to Okon Eket to secure another baby for Obuji who had given them N450, 000 for the new baby. They were arrested following a tip off. Police recovered baby wears, feeding bottles, pampers and toys from the Volkswagen Jetta car with registration No: Rivers XA 926 RGM, which they were using for the crime. Solomon Arase, Akwa Ibom State commissioner of police, told Newswatch that hope of recovery of the baby was not lost. He said his command has the telephone contact of John but said she has always said that she was on the road and in one city of the country or another. “Today she would say she is in Lagos and the next day she would say she is in Abuja. We have gotten in touch with MTN, her GSM network provider. We might get her data base record and contact from that point,” she told Newswatch.