

---

## TRADITIONAL CLOTH WEAVING AS A MEANS OF EARNING A LIVING AMONG THE TIV: A CASE STUDY OF VANDEIKYA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE

---

Iorja, P.I.

Department of Home and Rural Economics,  
Akperan Orshi College of Agriculture Yandev, Benue State, Nigeria  
E- mail: [iorjaphilip@gmail.com](mailto:iorjaphilip@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study was based on the traditional cloth weaving as a means of earning a living among the Tiv. The study has five objectives among which are: to determine the influence of traditional cloth weaving on the earning and living condition of the people of Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State. The study was to determine the various methods or techniques of traditional cloth weaving among the Vandeikya people. To identify the materials used for traditional cloth weaving among the people. To find out the various prospects associated with traditional cloth weaving industry in the study area. To identify some challenges and problems associated with traditional cloth weaving in the study area so as to meet the needs of the people. The population was made up of 140 people who specialize in traditional cloth weaving. A sample size of 140 respondents was selected from the population. Purposive sampling method was used for the study. The instrument of data collection was questionnaire. Simple frequency and percentages were used for data analysis. Recommendations and conclusion was made from the study.*

**Keywords:** Traditional cloth, weaving, earning, living, industry.

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Human survival depends largely on the level of productivity in the society. There are many areas to which the Tiv society has ventured into for the purpose of earning a living. These ventures include agriculture, trade, fishing, plantation agriculture, motor and other vehicle mechanics, block molding, masonry, blacksmithing, cloth weaving among many others. With diversification and specialization in agricultural produce, local industrialization has emerged as a way of improving the living conditions of the people in terms of earnings. One of such local crafts is cloth weaving. This is an art of manufacturing cloths with the use of cotton yarn and other fibre. According to Dzurbga (2012) the increase of textile industry in Tiv land coupled with the introduction of money making crops like soya beans, beni seeds, cotton, rice etc which Hausa and Ibo traders patronized, quick money was realized for payment of children's school fees, purchase of new cloths for wives, purchase of bicycle etc. The traditional cloth weaving industries are dominant in Tiv land especially in Vandeikya Local

Government Area of Benue State. It is on record that before the introduction of cash crops in Nigeria, weaving industries accounted for over 60% of the Tiv (Utor, 2014). This income earning has brought about an increase in the people's living standard. Apart from the income generation, clothing is one of the basic necessities of life (in addition to food and shelter). So the traditional weaving industries contributed significantly in providing the clothing needs of the people. The Tiv traditional cloths are: "Anger, Holy family, Godo, Lishi Sudan, gber, gberwaa, agbendeakurugh, ivavtyo, deremen, ikyarem" etc. (Toryima, 2005). The traditional cloths have different colours meanings and different uses. They are mainly used to cover the body, make one look attractive. Others use them for protective purposes, for special duties, modesty and identification. They are also used to define status, insignias, decoration, rituals and for burying corpse. The use of a given cloth depends on the physical structure, gender, culture purpose, social and geographical consideration as well as ones income level (Olu, 2001). Though the technique of weaving traditional cloth has undergone some modifications, the system has continued to remain relatively the same.

#### **Origin and development of textile industry among the Tiv**

Tiv ethnic group was created by "Aondo" among other ethnic groups in Africa in particular and the world in general. According to Dzurgba (2012), Tiv tradition held that "Aondo" created man (Nomsor) and woman (Kwase) in the vault of heaven. "Aondo" let them descend down to the earth naked. It was the east of the earth (Far) that God sent them down to the earth naked (Idyeregh). As a result, the Tiv referred to the east as "Kwase hungwa idyeregh (woman came down naked). The man also came down naked, but the nakedness of a woman was a greater prominence. The question then is how did they dress themselves immediately when they began to settle down on earth (Far)? Denga (1995) provided answers to the question when he stressed that, prior to the creation of man and woman or husband and wife, "Aondo" had created the heaven (Sha) and the earth (Tar) in the heaven or vault of heaven, God created the sun, moon, stars and planets while living and non-living things were created on earth. Thus, there were trees, shrubs and vegetables to be used for various purposes, including clothing. There were also animals, birds, fishes and insects for various purpose including and footwear. This explains why God, first of all, created the heaven with its content and also the earth and its contents. Therefore, it can be argued that the whole universe was created for the benefit of all human racial groups. Since then, the basic needs of all human beings have been food for hunger, water for thirst, clothing for nakedness, house for shelter and security, comfort and medicine for curing diseases (Dzurga 2003)

### **Sewing plant leaves**

The Tiv man and woman descended and landed on their feet and began a living as husband and wife. Tiv tradition did not give them names at all. When they felt hunger, they plucked fruits and ate. They were satisfied, when they were thirsty; they used their palms to fetch water to drink or knelt down by the side of the stream or pool to drink. At night when it was cold, they entered a nearby cave and slept embracing each other. When they needed materials to cover their nakedness; broad fresh leaves were everywhere, they plucked and sew them together to cover their nakedness. They tied leaves around their waists. Thus, the fresh leaves were clothes (Dzurgba, 2012). Leaves did not last long because they got torn and dried. Changing leaves frequently was also a big task. Thus the need for an alternative became urgent. In the biblical tradition, man was formed from dust and God breathed in his nostrils and he became a living being. The woman was formed from the man's flesh. Thus, there was a man called Adam and a woman called Eve. They were husband and wife and they loved each other. Both of them were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made aprons for themselves (Genesis 1:25, 3:7). This was the first stage of the textile industry. These brief comparative analysis shows that sewing leaves was beginning of the textile industry or textile and it was a global or universal phenomenon.

### **Weaving Plant Fibres**

Later on, the Tiv moved away from the use of fibre of some trees, including "tuu, Vambe, genger and akinde as well as some shrubs such as ager and atuu". The bark of a tree refers to the outer covering of a tree trunk or the skin of a tree or shrub. The skin means the outer natural layer of a human or animal's body. Therefore, the bark or skin of a tree or shrubs is the outer natural layer of the tree trunk or shrub trunk. The terms 'trunk' means the thick central wooden stem of a tree or shrub. The bark is made up of a mass of thin thread parts of the plant that you eat but cannot digest and it is called fibre. Some fibres were so strong that the Tiv could use them to make ropes and twines, the fibres from natural materials such as wood and cotton wool. Thus, the mass of the threads from the bark of the trees and shrubs were used by the Tiv to make aprons for themselves. Apron was used to cover nakedness, but today, apron is used to keep one's cloth clean when cooking. Apron in the Tiv language is known as "lbor". "lbor" was worn to cover shame; the reproductive organs and the anus; the sensitive and delicate parts of the body. A rope was tied to the waist. One end of the "lbor" was hooked on the rope at the front and passed through the two thighs and other end hooked at the back. This was worn by adults not children. At the stage of Tiv history, children particularly went about naked. The children had nothing to hide and nothing was sensitive about their sexual organs and anus. Their nakedness was just normal and without shame or embarrassment. Even adults wore only "lbor" and nothing more. Thus, the beauty of a woman and the

handsomeness of a man was based on body structure, physical or bodily appearance and smoothness or roughness of the skin. Therefore, the application of cosmetics such as reddish, cam wood, native oil and eye lid powder was on the whole body except the head where there was hair. In those days, the ugliness of men and women could be easily seen, but today, it is hidden in beautiful clothes and shoes. In those days, there were no shoes, but "Ibor" satisfied the people's needs of dressing and beauty.

### **Weaving cotton yarns or threads**

From weaving plants fibres, Tiv moved to the production of cotton from which cotton wool was obtained and yarn or threads spun in large quantities, native instruments were used and clothes were produced manually (Utor, 2004).

The Tiv people grew cotton and obtained cotton wool in large quantities. Many people grew cotton for commercial purposes, while others grew it for weaving cloths for home use and for sale. Some clothes industrialists never grew cotton, but they bought cotton wool from markets. Cotton wool was produced for home uses and marketing.

### **Equipment used for traditional cloth industry**

They include: Frame or Stage (Daa ikondo), Looms, Pedals, Beater, Shuttle (Akusha), Needle (Anula u koron Ikondo), Seat (Igbur), Pegs, (Amande), Majir man Igyamber and Cotton Wool Stick.

### **Statement of the problem**

There are abundant riches in Tiv land, yet poverty continues to prevail in the society. Traditional clothe weaving has played a vital role in poverty reduction. In every human society, there are artifacts or handicrafts which the people embark upon to improve on their living conditions. One of the handicrafts of the people of Vandeikya local government is traditional cloth weaving. The basic issue in the study is to find out how traditional cloth weaving serves as a means of earning a living among the Kunav people in Vandeikya local government of Benue State. The art of traditional cloth weaving has faced serious challenges in spite of the fact that this practice has helped in the improvement of living standard of the people. This is because; modern textile clothes have dominated the traditional cloth weaving industries and as a result of this, there is a slow pace of development of the traditional cloth weaving industries. Apart from that, the elderly people who were the custodians of the traditional weaving sails are gradually dying away as a result; the skills are likely to vanish among the Vandeikya people. Also, the materials (raw materials) used in the traditional cloth weaving are either becoming expensive or scarcely found. The poverty rate in the study area coupled with decline in the level of cotton production has affected the rate of traditional cloth weaving in Vandeikya local government area

of Benue State. This has affected the earnings of the people as well as the living conditions of the Kunav people.

### **Decline and Revival of the Traditional Textile Industry**

The expansion of agrarian activities in Tiv land; fast growing of cash crops became more important to many farmers. Fast growing varieties of groundnuts, soya beans, and rice was produced in abundance and sold in large quantities to the people in Southern Nigeria, especially the Igbo who were exporting them to other countries. The great markets at the early stage of the expansion of agricultural activities were; Tsar, Ihugh, Agbo, Adikpo, Annune among others (Tseayo, 1992). The production of cotton and cloth became too slow for many farmers who wanted to make money to pay school fees, buy more clothes for their wives, build a zinc house, purchase a bicycle or motorcycle or furniture or marry additional wives. There was tremendous social movement, change and development because of the impact Colonial rule, Christian missions, especially the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) and the creation of states by successive military administrations in Nigeria. There was improvement in road networks, transport and trade. Many farmers abandoned production of clothes and weaving across Tiv land. However, there was an interesting aspect. The Kunav people Vandeikya Local Government Area, Benue State continued to produce traditional clothes. The people of the local government area began to look for rolls of yarns elsewhere in Northern Nigerian towns and cultivate cotton wool for traditional weaving (Gbor, 1995). Today, the people go to purchase rolls of yarns from Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, Onitsha, and Ibadan etc. By this development, traditional textile expanded in Vandeikya Local Government area. The growth and expansion of the Tiv traditional textile and the demand for the cloth brought buyers from all parts of Tiv society and from Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Jos, Ibadan and Enugu, among other cities where Tiv cloth is needed by men and women. For several years now, Vandeikya has been visited by American and European tourists who come to Benue State (Ligom, 2002). This means that the traditional weaving industry is attractive such that the tourists visit and find fulfillment in. Because of its current popularity and commercial boom, many young people in other parts of Tiv land are reviving the industry and the marketing of Tiv cloth is also increasingly expanding. It is again becoming a major occupation in Tiv land. The Kunav people also successfully kept and sustained the declining and collapsing Tiv traditional textile industry alive and sustained its attractive and exciting quality until it has come to a point that it is now being revived back to life in full swing. The industry is bringing wealth, prosperity and success to many families across Tiv land.

This study is therefore set to solve the problem with a view to finding out how the income base of the people has sustained economic and social development.

### **Objectives of the study**

The major objective of the study is to find how traditional cloth weaving has contributed to the increased earning and living conditions among the Tiv people of Nigeria. Specifically, the study identifies:

- To determine the influence of traditional cloth weaving on the earning and living condition of Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State.
- To determine the various methods or techniques of traditional cloth weaving among the Vandeikya people.
- To identify the materials used for traditional cloth weaving industry among the Vandeikya people.
- To identify some challenges and problems associated with traditional cloth weaving in the study area.
- To find out the various prospects associated with traditional cloth weaving industry in the study area.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been formulated to guide the study. These are:

- Do the people of Vandeikya Local Government Area earn their living through cloth weaving?
- What are the various methods adopted in traditional weaving?
- What are the materials used for traditional cloth weaving among the Vandeikya people?
- What are the various prospects associated with traditional cloth weaving industry in the study area?
- What are the challenges and problems associated with traditional cloth weaving in the study area?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a survey research method. The population of 140 people in Vandeikya Local Government Area who are between the ages of 40-50 years and are specialized in traditional cloth weaving as a means of earning a living in Vandeikya Local government area of Benue State. Purposive sampling technique was used and sample size of 140 respondents.

### **Instrument for data collection/data analysis**

The instrument used for collection of data for this study was structured questionnaire with items that provided answer to the research questions

formulated for the study. The data were collected on the spot and were analyzed using simple percentages and frequencies.

Table I: Do the people of Vandeikya Local Government Area earn their living through traditional cloth weaving?

S/No	Occupation	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Fishing	8	5.8
2.	Lumbering	10	7.1
3.	Traditional cloth weaving	66	47.1
4.	Wood carving	24	17.1
5.	Tailoring	32	22.9
	Total	140	100

Table I above, shows respondents views on the occupation of the people of Vandeikya Local Government Area used to earn their living. Fishing has 5.8% of the respondents, lumbering has 7.1% of the respondents while traditional cloth weaving has 66% of the respondents. Wood carving has 17.1% of the respondents while tailoring has 22.9% of the respondents. This shows that the people of Vandeikya Local Government Area earn their living through traditional cloth weaving, since it has the highest respondents.

Table II: The methods of weaving traditional cloths

S/No	Method of weaving	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Table loom	2	1
2.	Horizontal loom	130	93
3.	Vertical loom	8	6
	Total	140	100

Table II above, shows the methods of weaving traditional cloths. In the table; loom has 1 percent of the respondents, horizontal loom has 93 percent of the respondents, while vertical loom has 6 percent of the respondents. This revealed that horizontal loom which has 93% representing 130 respondents is the most adopted method for traditional cloth weaving.

Table III: Materials for cloth weaving industry; what are the materials used for traditional cloth weaving industry among the people of Vandeikya Local Government Area?

S/No	Materials used for weaving	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Nylon fibre	32	23
2.	Cotton fibre	105	75
3.	Jute fibre	3	2
	Total	140	100

Table III above revealed that nylon fibre has 23 percent of the respondents, cotton fibre has 75 percent of the respondents while jute fibre has 2 percent of the

respondents. This shows that cotton fibre which has 75 percentage representing 105 respondents indicated that cotton fibre was the most material used for traditional cloth weaving industry in the study area.

Table IV: The various prospects associated with traditional cloth weaving in the study area

S/No	Prospects of weaving	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Income	120	86
2.	Leisure	17	12
3.	Rituals	3	2
	Total	140	100

Table IV above revealed that; income has 86 percent of the respondents, leisure has 12 percent of the respondents while rituals has 2 percent of the respondents. This shows that income has the highest percentage of 86 percent representing 120 respondents and indicated that traditional cloth weaving brings income to the people in the study area.

Table V: The challenges and problems associated with traditional cloth weaving in the study area

S/No	Challenges and problems of weaving	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Lack of collateral	33	23.6
2.	Lack of education	62	44.3
3.	Bank unwillingness to give loan	45	32.1
	Total	140	100

Table V above shows the respondents views on challenges and problems of traditional cloth weaving; that lack collateral has 23.6 percent of the respondents, lack of knowledge has 44.3 percent of the respondents while bank unwillingness to give loan has 32.1 percent representing the respondents. The result then shows that lack of education was the most basic challenges and problems associated with traditional cloth weavers in the study area since it has the highest percentage of 44.3 percent representing 62 respondents.

### Discussion of Findings

The research questions were aimed at finding out how traditional cloth weaving has contributed to the increased earning and living conditions among Tiv people of Benue State. It was established that traditional cloth weaving has helped in the improvement of the standard of living of the people.

Research question 1 revealed that traditional cloth weaving has 66 respondents representing 47.1 percent of the respondents which indicated that traditional cloth weaving was the most preferred occupation done by the people in the study area as a means of earning a living. This conforms to Dorward (1976) submission, that



clothe weaving is simply a craft and an occupation. This does not however diminish the social significance of clothe itself. Research question II, also established that the most preferred method adopted for traditional cloth weaving was Horizontal loom which has 93 percent representing 130 respondents than Table loom and Vertical loom that have 1, and 6 percent respectively. This agrees with Jewish Encyclopedia (1990). That this method of weaving was probably the one which was customary at the time of Herodotus; although the movements prove that the Egyptians were acquainted also with Horizontal looms.

Research question III, revealed that the most preferred materials used for traditional cloth weaving was cotton fibre which has 75 percent representing 105 respondents than nylon fibre and jute fibre which have 23 and 2 percent respectively. This conforms to Majeed (2009) submission that different types of fibres are used to produce yarn. Cotton remains the most important natural fibre so is treated in depth. Research question IV also established that the prospects associated with traditional cloth weaving industry was income which has 80 percent representing 120 respondents than leisure and rituals which have 12 and 2 percent respectively. This agrees with Daily Trust (10<sup>th</sup> March, 2009) that Tiv weaving cottage industry boosts Benue's economy. Research question V, also revealed that lack of education was the major challenge and problem associated with traditional cloth weaving since it has 44.3 percent representing 62 respondents while lack of collateral and Bank unwillingness to give loan has 23.6 and 32.1 percent respectively. This conforms to Lakhimi and Anjah (2014) that lack of knowledge about securing loan by weavers has hindered opportunities in the industry.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the study concludes that traditional cloth weaving has significantly increased the earning of the people in the study area and elsewhere. As a result of significant role of cloth weaving to the people's living condition, the problems associated with traditional weaving industry such as lack of collateral, lack of education and Bank unwillingness to give loan etc, can be addressed through training of the needed personnel, granting of loans to traditional cloth weavers by financial institutions, diversification of the existing markets among others by government will address this ugly situation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- More emphasis should be placed on traditional clothe weaving to improve on the income of the people.
- Traditional clothe weavers should be given formal education and should be educated on the importance of acquiring loan from government and banks to boost their traditional weaving industry.

- Financial institutions should adopt simple procedures in order to grant loans to traditional clothe weavers.
- Government should encourage traditional clothe weavers by giving them cotton seeds to plant so as to have enough raw materials.
- Traditional clothe weavers should be encouraged to diversify their operations and to take up insurance cover in order to reduce risk and uncertainty in their production and operations.

## REFERENCES

- Daily Trust 10<sup>th</sup> March, (2009) Abuja.
- Denga, E.O. (1975). *Local Industries in Nigeria*. Exbet Publishers, Ibadan.
- Dorward, D.C. (1976). Pre-colonial Tiv Trade and Currency. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 5.
- Dzurgba, A. (2007). *The Tiv and their Culture*. John Archers Publishers, Ibadan.
- Dzurgba, A. (2012). *On the Tiv of Central Nigeria: A cultural perspective*. John Archers Publishers, Ibadan.
- Gbor, J. (1995). *The Tiv Economy*. University Press, Zaria.
- Jewish Encyclopedia. (1906). *The Unedited Full Text Synopsis of Jewish Encyclopedia at [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com)*.
- Lakhimi, J.C., and Anjah, B. (2014). Rural women weavers' of Assam: Artistic skills and entrepreneurial issues. *Asian Journal of Management Research*, 5(3): 296-311.
- Ligom, J. (2002). *The Tiv Weaving Industry*. A.B. Publishing Company, Makurdi.
- Majeed, A. (2009). Cotton and textiles, the challenges ahead. Down the internet edition, retrieved on 12/2/2009 at <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/>
- Olu, M.M. (2001). *Individuality in Clothing, Selection, Personality and Appearance*. Lagos State University Press, Ojo-Lagos.
- Toryima, I.A. (2005). *The Beauty of Anger*. Macmillan Publishers, Ibadan.
- Tseayo, J. (1992). *Paradigm Shift in Tiv Industry*. Savannah Press, Jos.
- Utor, A. (2014). *Alleviating Poverty in Tiv Land*. Sew Publishers, Makurdi.