



THE EFFICACY OF TRADITIONAL CLOTH WEAVING INDUSTRY AND THE ECONOMY OF JECHIRA AREA OF BENUE STATE: 1992-1998

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Abstract

This study looks at the contribution of traditional Tiv cloth production to the economy of Jechira Area of Benue State, 1992 - 1998. Choice of the time frame is informed by the need to ascertain how the Jechira people managed to weather the storm of continual battles through the instrumentality of this traditional craft. The study therefore adopts both oral and written sources of historical reconstruction to interrogate how far Jechira Area of Benue State has been able to navigate through thick and thin, by engaging in viable economic initiatives through the instrumentality of traditional cloth production. Findings of this research indicates that, Jechira has comparative and competitive advantage in traditional Tiv cloth production; an ancient craft which has been practiced in the area from antiquity, has huge potential that can be harnessed for socio-cultural, and economic benefits, among other gains. The study further submits that, it is imperative for the Benue State Government as well as Jechira Area to provide appropriate state and local government support and incentives, particularly investments in production processes, skills, marketing, accounting and management, as well as an enabling business environment; including timely address of both remote and immediate causes of conflicts that will enhance the productivity, profitability, and the sustainability of cloth production in the area. This will, in turn, boost the local economy in terms of additional employment, incomes, taxes, and poverty reduction, among others.

Keywords: Traditional Clothing, Weaving, Industry, Jechira, Tiv Cloth

Introduction

Towards the end of the pre-colonial era, Tiv people generally (which Jechira is part of), had acquired the art of weaving and were clothing themselves and also exporting Tiv woven fabrics to other groups, particularly their neighbours and Hausa traders from the North, among others.ⁱ The fabrics were produced using locally fabricated implements and homegrown raw materials. At its peak, Tiv traditional cloth production was an important vocation in the economy of Tiv society as a whole, and certainly in the local economies of places such as present day Jechira which hosted some of the most vibrant production outlets.ⁱⁱ Right from the outset, the area was reputed for a great variety of brilliant and popular designs of the traditional Tiv cloth; earning the area the enviable status of a foremost traditional fabric production center in Benue State. However, according to Makar and Dzurgba, the fortunes of the local textile industry in Tiv land,



including Jechira started to decline from about 1950 onwards due to a variety of unfavorable factorsⁱⁱⁱ. As a leading center of traditional Tiv cloth production, Jechira held onto traditional cloth weaving, albeit on a reduced scale, relative to what obtained in the boom period. The cloth making vocation in Jechira is an inherited art from previous generations, and needs to be systematically studied and documented, particularly in terms of its contribution to the local economy in recent times.^{iv}

Judging by its wide use at social and cultural events throughout Tiv society, the Tiv traditional attire has become a key symbol of Tiv cultural identity. Since the pre-colonial era, the production and propagation of traditional Tiv clothing has conferred significant socio-cultural and economic benefits on Tiv Society, and on the people of Jechira who are at the apex of the vocation.^v However, since the fall of 1990s, emerging realities in respect of the economy of Jechira need to be identified and systematically assessed. The challenge of the diminishing role of oil in the Nigerian economy has necessitated the urgent need to development alternative sources of revenue and other productive sectors of the economy. The emphasis is, therefore, on diversification, or developing new enterprises that will propel the economy beside oil and gas. Jechira, in line with current realities, can leverage its centuries-old vocation of traditional cloth production, to complement agriculture; and provide viable additional sources of livelihood, income generation and employment, among others.

Sound economic policies and good investment decisions are contingent on quality information. The comparative advantage of local cloth weaving in Jechira needs to be adequately factored into the planning and implementation of appropriate measures that would propel the local economy to greater heights. A vibrant textile industry would not only generate employment and incomes, but would also greatly contribute to poverty reduction in Jechira. The problem of this study therefore, is to identify, systematically assess and document the contribution of traditional Tiv cloth production to Jechira Area of Benue State.

The study is necessitated by the need to identify, examine and document the recent social, cultural and economic contributions of Tiv cloth production in Jechira. The research is of socio-cultural, economic, technological and educational significance. Socio-culturally, a better understanding of the full ramifications of traditional Tiv cloth production not only deepens consumption of indigenous fabrics but also preserves the traditional weaving skills currently under threat. Economically, repositioning the industry to actualize its potential for employment and income generation and for poverty reduction will empower the host community and enhance the productivity and overall growth of the economy of Jechira and that of the state.

Technologically, the findings of this study which identify the need to modernize the current production processes in traditional Tiv cloth production, if faithfully implemented, will ensure greater variety and diversity in the design and fabrication of machinery as well as related inputs. The recommended measures will thus influence the overall character and technological capacity of the local economy, that of the state and indeed of the country as a whole. Educationally, the study will have immense contribution to knowledge on both formal and informal fronts. Its findings will form the bedrock for further researches on the subject matter. Also, since the



elements of cultural revival, skill acquisition through indigenous entrepreneurship and self-reliance are central to the Government of Nigeria, the findings of the study can be utilized by the academia to formulate guidelines for the government to follow in pursuit of the realization of such goals.

The Role of Traditional Cloth Production in Jechira Economy

The economy of a place (nation, sub-national entity, or local entity) is the system of economic activities-businesses, enterprises, and vocations, among others- which are located, do business, and benefit from their locality. These activities are also expected to benefit, or give back, or contribute to the overall development and progress of the host entity. In this regard, economic activities such as traditional cloth production which are hosted in Konshisha and Vandeikya Local Governments are expected to contribute to the overall development of the area, particularly in terms of socio-cultural, and economic, and other benefits.

Social benefits are the gains to the community as a whole, while cultural benefits are the specific gains in furtherance of the way of life of the totality of the people. Economic benefits include employment, household incomes, local taxes, wealth generation, and overall improvement in people's quality of life, among others.

Cloth weaving, or traditional cloth production, is an important vocation in Jechira, next only to agriculture, the latter being the primary means of livelihood for the people of the area. Traditional cloth production is a supplementary/complementary means of livelihood, and a source of income and employment generation, and poverty reduction in Jechira. A good number of those engaged in the vocation are beneficiaries of a system of family inheritance; a tradition that has evolved, and sustained over several decades, and passed on from one generation to another.^{vi}

Traditionally, cloth production in Jechira/other parts of Tiv was originally a family affair, in which each household member played a role. In households where weaving was practiced, men, women, children, and others, were involved, at one stage or another; in a process which usually involved cultivation of cotton on family land, and processing the cotton fibre into yarn through spinning, and then weaving, knitting dyeing and packaging the produced fabrics. While the male members of the household prepared the ground and planted the cotton seeds, the women and children cared for the plant until it was harvested. Women and children were also involved in picking and spinning the cotton into thread while the head of household usually did the weaving, and dyeing, etc. Cloth production was therefore a gainful employment, and excess cotton and the fabrics produced were traded or exported far and near. Skills were also imparted on younger generation of household members through learning on the job.^{vii} The Traditional fabrics also contributed in advancing Jechira/ Tiv culture. Events such as trade fairs, and agricultural and cultural shows, organized under the auspices of relevant ministries of the Benue state government especially in the 1970s and 1980s, usually had popular cultural dances and exotic traditional attires as side attractions. The latter in particular contributed in no small measure in promoting Tiv/Jechira culture. New designs and types of traditional Tiv/Jechira fabrics were often introduced with new cultural dances, and the fabrics were always conspicuously displayed



and marketed at such organized events. It is probably no exaggeration to say that Tiv culture, particularly the traditional attire, gained local, state-wide, national and international recognition through the integration of economic, and agricultural and cultural activities of the 1970s and 1980s. This stimulated demand for traditional Tiv fabric, and the growth of a class of middle men who specialized in trading Tiv clothes in other cities and towns within the state and beyond. The industry has no doubt significantly contributed in promoting and projecting Tiv culture to the outside world, through the creative and exotic designs of contemporary Tiv/Jechira traditional attires, which have become well known and greatly admired.

Traditional cloth production, over the years, has imparted traditional weaving skills to younger generations of dedicated Tiv/Jechira craftsmen who have preserved the vocation and earn a living from it, and who also contribute towards employment generation and poverty reduction, as well as complementing agriculture and the diversification of the local economy.^{viii}

Factors that have Contributed to Traditional Cloth Production as a Vocation/Business

According to Ingyur and Hir, the history of the adaptation of weaving in Jechira/Tiv is not immediately clear. Nevertheless, cloth production or weaving has been harnessed in Jechira/Tiv for social, cultural and economic advantages for centuries, within which period a weaving culture evolved and has been passed down from one generation to another. The trade is considered a legacy, to be sustained at all cost due to its positive imprints. Hir reported that most of those engaged in the vocation today inherited the trade as a family business, and that it is common practice to combine traditional cloth production with farming and other engagements in the public or private sectors. This is one of the reasons why traditional cloth production still survives in Jechira.^{ix}

In addition, the abundance of cotton, the primary raw material for contemporary cloth production, and the availability of skills to process the cotton for weaving in Jechira facilitated the growth of fabric production in the area. Furthermore, the favourable climate and soils; with abundant rainfall, average temperature, and the arid/loamy soils readily supported the growth of cotton particularly in Jechira, and that the crop was usually planted around June and July, and grew with the rains and developed to maturity within four months. They report further that the crop was allowed to dry and then picked during the dry season, after which the cotton fibre was processed into yarn and used in weaving fabric, which was then dyed and given other necessary finishing touches. The abundance of the primary raw material for cloth production due to favourable weather and soil conditions as well as Makar and Dzurgba as well as the availability of skills to locally processed cotton fibre into yarn and cloth weaving, contributed to the growth of the vocation particularly in Jechira, up to early 1950s.^x

Closely related, is the availability of family labour for the various stages of cloth production. Beginning with the cultivation of cotton and its processing and weaving, and the dyeing and other finishing touches, Jechira people organized cloth production in a way that every member of the household where the vocation was practiced participated, at one stage or another. Family members-men, women, children, and others, undertook various tasks, under the overall supervision and guidance of the head of household, the latter of who usually did the weaving and



dyeing, etc. Akiga – Sai described the setting as follows “...a good woman would set to work to pick out seeds from the cotton”. In the evening, “... she took the cotton and began to spin till drowsiness overcame her and she fell asleep”. In another place, Akiga reported that in olden times both the head of the house and his wife would spin, and if they had five children, they would each have cotton in their hands. When they had spun all their cotton, the thick thread for the weft and the thin for the warp, they put it together and gave it to the head of the family to weave into cloth. The participatory and all-inclusive approach to weaving ensured that labour was not a problem, and that younger family members had adequate time to learn the rudiments of the trade on the job. There was therefore a relatively seamless transition from one generation of weavers to another within a household that practiced the vocation.^{xi}

The advent of Christianity in Tiv, ushered in western education and greatly influenced local textile industry. The Sudan United Mission (SUM) arrived Sai, Gaambe-ya in Shitile of the present day Katsina-Ala Local Government Area on April 17, 1911. They were later followed by missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Christian Mission who handed over all their mission stations to SUM in 1961. The Roman Catholic missionaries commenced evangelical work in 1919 at Masev. The missionaries from each of these missions opened schools which taught pupils handicrafts (including weaving), reading, writing, farming, arithmetic and Tiv language. The British colonialists opened only one post-primary institution in the whole of the then Benue Province, which got her intakes from the Native Authority schools earlier established in 1928. The school was later renamed as Junior Primary School, Katsina-Ala and it offered four-year subjects in Tiv language, English, Hausa, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Hygiene and Agriculture. The Augustinian Order of the Catholic Mission was replaced by the Holy Ghost Order in the 1930s. The new order really advanced the opening of more mission stations at Korinya, Naka, Udei and other villages in Tiv land. Besides these stations were schools, which numbered 50 as at 1936 across the Benue Province. It rose to 149 in 1949 and was 400 altogether in 1956. It is necessary to emphasize that the pupils of these schools were first, taught handicrafts as one of the subjects, in which they learnt how to weave clothes and make beads. They also learnt how to dress neatly. As a result, the textile industry expanded sales and production in response to growing demand.^{xii}

Another important factor that helped the local fabric industry to thrive in Jechira is its integration with the cultural life of the people. According to Makar and Dzurgba, traditional dance festivals which were a prominent feature of Tiv people’s cultural life, were also effective avenues for promoting new designs of Jechira fabrics, which were usually first worn by traditional dancers. This became an important means of advertising new fabrics locally and among neighboring tribes. As the popularity of Jechira fabrics grew, so did demand and production. This enabled the industry to thrive and expand up to early 1950s.^{xiii}

Further impetus to the development and growth of traditional cloth production in Jechira / Tiv was from the push for ethnic nationalism in an increasingly competitive Nigerian Federalism, and growing awareness of the negative influences of foreign culture, and the urgent need to curtail such undesirable influences. Tiv/Jechira traditional attire assumed an important role in propagating the people’s culture; a symbol of Tiv cultural identity and an outward expression of



the inner pride of being Tiv, a unique brand in the multi-ethnic Nigerian society. This development increased demand for traditional Tiv/Jechira woven fabrics, and the economic sustainability of the vocation.

A class of middlemen has emerged and earns a living from trading in Tiv /Jechira produced fabrics, locally and beyond. Appetite for locally produced fabric has grown as the products find their way into local, state, national and international markets, including Tiv in the diaspora, most of who want to own one or more traditional attires for special occasions.

The availability of relatively cheap foreign (industrial) raw materials such as thread and dye has greatly eased entry to the trade. New start-ups in traditional cloth production are far more common now than before, due to the ease of procuring raw material inputs which, hitherto, had to be grown and processed for production.

Rapid population growth, the absence of critical infrastructure, and lack of reliable electricity and energy supply, as well as non-inclusive growth of the economy, among other setbacks, have created a large gap between demand for employment and what the productive sector of the economy can provide. The pressure to diversify the economy in order to create alternative sources of employment has therefore heightened. This has renewed interest in harnessing the employment potentials of the SMEs including traditional cloth production.

The Socio- Economic and Cultural Importance of Traditional Cloth Production in Jechira

Socio-Economic Importance

Fabric production is an important sector of the economy of nations globally; with several significant socio-cultural and economic impacts. In many economies, the textile industry is significant in employment and income generation, especially for women. The industry is also an important source of foreign exchange earnings. A robust textile industry also contributes to long term sustainable national economic development, particularly in countries with appropriate policies and institutions to harness the dynamism of the industry. Experience from a number of countries shows the significant benefits of textiles to the economy.

1. Cambodia, with virtually a non-existent economic base in the 1990s, grew its textile industry to become a key source of manufacturing exports (80%) and formal employment (65%), and 10-12% contribution to the country's GDP;
2. Bangladesh developed its textiles to become the main source of manufacturing employment and exports, next to agriculture;^{xiv}
3. Mauritius diversified from sugar into textiles and garment in the 1980s, and subsequently into tourism and other services. Textiles generated around 19% of manufacturing value added, and provided indirect employment for some 250,000 people, while direct employment was around 78,000 people; and 70% of the country's total manufacturing employment being in textiles;
4. Madagascar's textile and garment industry enjoyed trade preferences and low labour costs from job relocation away from Mauritius due to higher costs there; while Sri Lanka achieved 5% contribution to the country's GDP from its Textiles, and Pakistan 15% share of total employment in manufacturing form textiles. In the least developed and low-income countries, textiles



contribute to the national economy about 35% to 75%; and 90% in Bangladesh, Lesotho and Cambodia.^{xv}

In general, in a number of low-income countries in particular, textiles provide opportunities for diversification and expansion of manufactured exports, especially where the country fully exploits its labour cost advantages and is able to meet buyer demands. The dynamic effects of the textile industry are greater with more linkages between textiles and local suppliers. *Socially*, if appropriate policies and institutions are in place, *fabric production provides* jobs and enhances skill acquisition, and accommodates new entrants into higher value-added activities such as design and marketing, etc. It is evident from the foregoing that cloth production confers on the host economy significant economic, social, and cultural benefits.^{xvi}

According to Bohannan, et al, the economy of Tiv, and by extension Jechira and Benue State, the host sub-national entity, is agrarian. Artisanal skills such as cloth weaving, wood and raffia works, and mat and basket making among others, constitute the informal sector, and supplement agriculture. Cloth production in particular has had significant socio-economic and cultural impacts on Jechira and on Benue State as a whole. According to Bohannan, prior to the introduction of money in the Tiv economy, traditional woven fabric (cloth money) was a valuable medium of exchange. Cloth production also complemented agriculture in providing a means of livelihood, employment generation and a source of income for those engaged in the vocation.^{xvii}

Akiga –Sai reported that cloth production originally involved entire household- men, women and children, who were involved in the process at one stage or another; and providing gainful employment for the entire household. The participatory and inclusive approach to traditional cloth production in Jechira also ensured that younger members of the household acquired relevant skills on the job, in a seamless transition between one generation of traditional weavers and another. Hir reported that traditional cloth production in Tiv/Jechira created a local economy for the people, and that the fabrics produced were marketed locally and beyond. He reported further that extensive commercial networks and trade relations developed as a result of traditional woven fabrics and other local products of Jechira /Tiv area. The older market centres like Adikpo, Jato Aka, Zaki Biam, Buruku, Tsar, Agbo and others owe their emergence to trade in local commodities including traditional woven fabrics. Some of the early trade routes, particularly Adikpo-Buruku-Gbajimba-Keana; Makurdi-Abinsi-Ihugh-Ogoja; Obudu-Adikpo-Katsina Ala; and Akpagher-Buruku-Katsina Ala, were instrumental in the Tiv /Jechira people accessing new skills, technology, and designs for cloth production from other groups such as the Hausa of Northern Nigeria and the Jukun within the Northern axis.^{xviii}

According to Hir, cloth weaving in Jechira and other places where it is widely practiced, created wealth for those engaged in the vocation, and that even those in white collar jobs and other profitable ventures are still attracted to weaving, albeit on part-time basis, in order to supplement their earnings. Abee is reported to have disclosed that cloth production enables households engaged in the vocation to earn income that would help in giving their children and wards western education and to meet other important household needs such as health and other



necessary family commitments. In addition, consistent with available evidence from other developing economies particularly Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mauritius and Madagascar and others already cited in this study, trade and commerce through which locally produced goods and services, including traditional woven fabrics are exported, or exchanged beyond their place of production, confers several socio-economic benefits such as household income, employment, and skills on the local economy of the producing entity. Jechira has similar benefits from traditional cloth weaving, even though the current performance is not commensurate with available potential of the local textile industry in Jechira.

Cultural Importance

Culture relates to artistic or social pursuit, or valuable or enlightened events relating to a civilization. According to Igirgi, and Gbor, theoretically, culture is quite elusive and is not amenable to a simple definition. Practically however, certain aspects of a people's way of life such as language, religion, political and social systems, economy, aesthetics (arts) and mysticism, among others collectively constitute the people's culture. From the forgoing, the focus here is on the way of life (behaviour) of Jechira People viz a viz their traditional woven fabrics.^{xix}

In essence, woven fabrics protect the body against the elements. Over time, fabrics assumed other dimensions including satisfying man's aesthetic need of body adornment. According to Gordon, Chilver and Igirgi, the woven fabrics of the Tiv symbolized social stratification- wealth, warfare, craft and industry, magico-religious powers, etc. – and served to place an individual user within the social structure, and that cloth types were a means of social identification and originally indicated the status of the wearer. For instance, *Shagba-or* (translated as “man of abundance”) dressed in high grade woven fabrics like *Tugudu*, *Gbagir*, *Godo*, or *Swem-Karagbe* (even on ordinary occasions).

Similarly, the cloth type known as “Anger-U-Ichengeigbee” was traditionally, restricted to “*Orsoron Igbe*’ or the one specialized in treatment of *Igbe* (a common ailment in those days that was characterized by constant stooling and loss of weight). Other persons, no matter how highly placed, could not use this particular fabric; violators of the restriction risked undesirable consequences. In addition, most of the traditional woven fabric types were gender sensitive. Contemporary Tiv society has liberalized most of these restrictions and the use of the different clothing types is largely a matter of choice, for the men and women of all classes, as commonly seen at social gatherings.

To some extent, traditional Tiv fabrics still, culturally reflect some element of sexual differentiation, commemorations, observance of cultural phenomena, and royalty and leadership position. Gender wise, woven cloth types such as the “Anger” fabric incorporate gender considerations in design and production. The male version is longer and wider than the female “anger”, due to the way the men wear the fabric. While men normally strap the fabric on the torso allowing it to drape far below the knees, women wrap the fabric round the waist over blouse with head gear to match.



Commemorative occasions such as marriages, celebration of achievements, and the like attract fabric types that are considered appropriate for the occasion. According to *Atagher*, before money economy was introduced in Tiv land around the 19th and 20th centuries, transactions such as the payment of bride price, and gifts by the bride groom to key members (mother and father in-laws) of the bride were done using woven fabric. The bridegroom also gave woven fabric to the bride to prove his capability to cater for his wife. Some of these traditions are still in observance in contemporary Tiv/ Jechira society.

According to Gbor, celebration of achievements in the form of “*Amar a Mirin*” (or feast convention), for example, is a lavish occasion organized by an accomplished man of wealth. The guests are usually well fed and entertained, with the celebrant clad in prestigious traditional fabrics with a cap to match, and decorated with a skin bag (*Ikpa I abolough*) which is hung over his shoulder. The celebrity is also given a long-shafted lance in the right hand, to give an air of accomplishment to his appearance. *Amar a mirin* is almost extinct in Tiv culture, but is replaced with receptions periodically organized by groups to celebrate achievements politically, educationally and other wise. Most significantly, the celebrant is always clad in prestigious traditional Tiv attire.

Burial, according to Torkula, and Ushe, is a most solemn cultural activity among the Tiv people, and it also involves the use of traditional woven fabric. In Tiv culture, an individual's status follows him to his grave, and before the era of coffins and elaborately constructed graves, the shroud more than anything else determined the dignity of a burial. Woven fabrics still constitute what Torkula refers to as “grave goods” in Tivland.^{xx}

Leadership inaugurations also incorporate the use of suitable traditional woven fabric to adorn a new leader. Centralized authority arrived late in Tiv; a paramount ruler was appointed as recently as 1946. Since then, leadership structures have continued to evolve in the Tiv society. It is now standard practice that leadership inaugurations at all levels incorporate the use traditional Tiv fabrics to adorn the new leader. The ceremony of inauguration of rulers in Tiv land is now also characterized by dressing the “Tor” (ruler) in Tiv traditional attire which symbolizes his new status and authority. This usually consists of an expensive traditionally woven fabric with complementary items like a decorated skin bag, a cap, a long-shafted lance or a walking stick.

The Benue State cultural troupe has adopted the various traditional woven fabrics of the major ethnic groups in the state as a symbol of identity. The fabrics are also designed into a variety modern fashionable wear such as skirts, blouses and other tops (for females), and kaftans, Jumpers, Agbada and Danshiki, and caps and mufflers, and others for the males.

It is evident from the aforementioned cultural uses of traditional woven fabrics that the fabrics are fully integrated into the culture of the Tiv/Jechira people. From its use as a medium of exchange in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, traditional woven fabrics have been an important aspect of Tiv cultural life, and a symbol of Tiv/Jechira cultural identity. Most important ceremonies in contemporary Tiv/Jechira society, such as marriages, celebration of achievements, burials, and chieftaincy and other leadership inaugurations, and similar events are



really never complete without decorating the celebrities in befitting attires made of Tiv/Jechira traditional fabrics, which are inseparable from the people's culture.

Varieties of Traditional Cloths Produced in Jechira

Abrahams, a colonialist wrote, at the onset of colonialism, that “.... the Tiv weave a great number of different cloths, but these are fast being ousted by materials bought at European canteens and the time cannot be far away when weaving will become a thing of the past”.^{xxi} The views of this colonialist clearly attest to the fact that even before colonialism, traditional cloth production was a booming vocation among the Tiv people including the people of Jechira.



Some Traditional Cloth Varieties Produced in Jechira;

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2019



The range of cloths woven in Tiv/Jechira has grown over time. From a limited number

of cloth types such as “atsar a ikyondo”, “Icha”, “Chado”, “Lishi”, “Ashisha”,

”Tugudu”, “Godo”, “Gbagir”, and “Akpen”, etc.), contemporary traditional cloth types include a greater variety of brilliant and popular designs; customized for particular occasions and/or users, as well as gender and class sensitive. Contemporary Tiv/Kwande people produce many types of traditional fabrics for various occasions. These include “Anger”, “Iviavtyo”, “Gberwhaa”, “Agbende A kurugh”, “Akughul A Anyam”, “Anger U Tiv”, “Anger U Ichenge Igbee”, “Ashiva”, “Ate U Tiv”, “Chado”, “Deremen”, “Gbagir”, “Gbeleve”, “Gere”, “Godo”, “Gurugu”, “Kumashe U Tiv”, “Lishi”, “Mule U Tiv”, “Ishundan U Tiv”, “Swem Karagbe”, and “Tugudu”, among others.

The men’s mode of dressing is to either, cast the traditional fabric over the body and knot it over the shoulder with a cap to match, or sew the fabric into jumpers, agbada, or other chosen designs, and always with a matching cap. The elderly men also carry a shoulder bag of animal hide and a staff. The women generally wrap the fabric around the waist, with a suitable blouse and a head-tie to match; although nowadays, women also sew the fabrics into dresses of various designs and shapes to suit the occasion, age and status of the wearer.^{xxii}

Conclusion

For centuries, beginning at least from their time in Swem, which is between the beginning of 1500 CE and 1600CE, the Tiv people have practiced weaving; an ancient art of cloth production. To date, the Tiv, and particularly Jechira people have produced a vast array of traditional fabrics for their use and for trade. Weaving, the earliest, and the most commonly used, and the most important method of cloth production in the world has been adopted and adapted by Jechira people for centuries. The hand loom, or manual weaving method which is in use in the area, has remained substantially unchanged. The trade has been handed down from one generation of traditional weavers to another, and has had significant socio-cultural and economic impacts on Jechira society and its economy. Traditional cloth production in Jechira, and in Tiv generally, has been adversely affected by several factors including protracted communal conflicts in the area.

More recently, trade liberalization policies of successive governments have led to flooding of local markets with cheap industrial base fabrics, and the abundance of synthetic dyes which permits an almost limitless combination of colours on fabrics. These have cumulatively eroded the originality, quality and standard of local traditional fabrics. Progressive use of cheap foreign raw material inputs (particularly yarn and dyes) has led to the loss of integration and linkages that were possible with the old production processes which involved cultivation of cotton, spinning the cotton fibre into yarn for weaving, and dyeing and other value-added, finishing processes, and their impact on the local economy.

Nevertheless, since Jechira has proven to have comparative and competitive advantage in cloth production which has been practiced in the area for centuries, and which huge potential can be



harnessed and leveraged on, by government at all levels, deliberate protectionist policies be made, to engender a vibrant, robust, and sustainable cottage industry; in order to generate employment and income; wealth creation; inclusive growth and development; poverty reduction; skill acquisition, and to diversify the economy of Jechira as well as to promote and preserve Tiv cultural identity, among numerous other potential socio-cultural and economic benefits.

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