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## Agbamevorza: A Developing Culture of the People of Agotime Traditional Area in the Volta Region of Ghana

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### **Abstract:**

*Agbamevorza is a culture of Kete festival which is celebrated by the chiefs and people of Ago time traditional area. This paper sought to bring to bear the aesthetics and cultural values of the Agbamevorza. In the discussion, attempts have been made to educate the general public, students of the visual arts, art educationists and experts in art about the aesthetics and cultural significance of the Agbamevorza. The purpose of the study is to research and discuss the origin of 'Agbamevorza' (Kete festival), the types of Agbamevor and their meanings and how to maintain the culture of Agbamevor weaving in Ago time Traditional area. In addition, the paper described day by day, the weeklong celebration of Agbamevorza and the aims of celebrating same. This study has also unearthed the fact that, Kete weaving is a fast growing occupational development among the Agotime people. Findings indicated that, the chiefs and the people have decided to institute this colorful cultural festival to replace a simple purification of weaving tools and accessories to honour the Kete cloth and advertise it to attract good market for the expansion of the Kete business in the area. It is recommended that festivals should be valued for the contemporary roles of designed products (Kete cloth-weaving) as cultural identity, but not just for aesthetic enjoyment.*

**Keywords:** Festival, Agbamevorza, Kete, ago time, design

### **1. Introduction**

#### *1.1. The People of Agotime*

The paper is able to establish the fact that the Agotime people migrated from Nuer clan of ancient Sudan into Egypt. They were among the Negro race that first settled among the Ewe and Yoruba and are often referred to as people who emerged from the sea in small boats (Keteku, 2015). He also confirms that, on their journey to their present settlement, they made a stop-over at Osudoku, Poni (kpon), Ningo and Ada. Nene and Manye remain the title of their chiefs and Queen-mothers. The Agotime traditional area is vast area, covering the grasslands between the Adaklu in Ghana and Agu mountains in Togo. Two main rivers, the Tordzie in Ghana and The Zio in Togo provide water for the people in the area. The Ghanaian portion of the territory consists of six (6) main towns and over twenty (20) villages. There are twenty-two (22) towns and over thirty (30) villages in the republic of Togo. Kpetoe is the traditional capital of the Agotime and the administrative capital of the Agotime Ziope-District Assembly. It is 25 kilometers from Ho, on the Ho-Aflao high way. Nene Nuer Keteku III, the paramount chief is also regarded as the custodian of the Ewe Kete and warmly welcomes thousands of visitors and tourists to Agotime each year for the Agbamevor festival. The most outstanding aspect of Agotime culture which identifies them, is their weaving. The Agotime are famous for Kete weaving. Each year, they come together to celebrate a colourful Kete festival and exhibit their rich traditions and culture. This dramatic festival is founded on the fine artistry of their weavers and bravery of their warlords.

#### *1.2. Festival*

The word festival comes from the Latin word 'festivus' meaning a feast, joyous or mirth. (Uysal, Perdue and Sirgy, 2012). Getz (2010) defines festival as public celebrations. It implies that festivals are public activities that are opened not for restricted persons but for all.

In Ghana, there are two major types of annual festivals. These include harvest festivals and festivals in the memory of ancestors and past leaders. Every year, festivals of different forms are celebrated to give thanks to God and the ancestors for protection, provision and guidance throughout the year. In Ghana, certain days in the year are set aside by communities to celebrate such festivals. Hence festivals are special occasions for the various ethnic groups. Some festivals last for a day or two. Others last for five or six days. Festivals are of social significance because they offer everybody in the community both young

and old the opportunity to expression their joy. The atmosphere at Ghanaian festivals is always charged with the well-known Ghanaian cheers and delight which sweep visitors off their feet in a rhythmic patterns.

At these festivals one also gets a good opportunity to see a visible expression of Ghanaian culture in various forms. The participants are dressed in colourful clothes; the paramount chiefs dress in royal regalia and are carried in a palanquin all in expressing the deep sense of cultural heritage. Agbodo (2001) reveals that, festivals are days set aside for communal merry-making and that the day is marked with artifacts, chieftaincy regalia, cultural displays and other tourist attractions. He added that, chiefs and other traditional leaders attached significance to their art forms. Amongst the Akan people for example, leadership regalia and prestigious items for royals and others of high status represent important area of artistic activity. He stresses that festivals in Ghana are characterized by intensive use of art forms. Some examples of the artifacts are stools, skins, linguist staffs, amulets, bracelets, gold rings, special Kete cloths, masks, decorative local weapons like bows and arrows, shields, palanquins and the like.

Festivals are occasions that bring people together and make them feel the kind of unity that is needed as people of the same community or traditional area. The organization of social life in indigenous society gives special place to a festival, for there is general consciousness of its potential as a vehicle for communicating or affirming the values of a society and strengthening the bonds that bind its members (Kemevor, 2004). He also states that festivals are socio-religious in nature. Therefore, to isolate them from religion is to misunderstand the very concept of indigenous festivals. He believes that festivals are special times set aside by a community in order to commemorate some significant historical, cultural or religious occasions. Art is actively and inseparably interwoven with the life of man. The arts therefore play a predominant role in the celebration of our festivals.

The visual arts, performing arts, body arts and verbal arts which contain records of achievements of a people come into play, for instance, the rich stool regalia of the various ethnic chiefs and the sculptures, such as the spokesmen's staffs, drumming and dancing do provide us with much knowledge about our traditional culture. The celebration of festival is a process of passing on the cultural values from one generation to another. Over the years, certain aspects of the culture and traditions of indigenous people have actually been as being relevant to the contemporary development process.

According Ansu-Kyereme (1997, p.4),

“Development relates to improving the life situation of an individual or a community. Actions, activities and amenities related to development are, therefore, designed to meet people's needs while improving ways in which they organise their lives”.

Festivity cultural variables are now perceived as very important in any attempt to generate behavioural change among people and it's believed that these variables must receive due attention in any developmental effort for it to be sustainable”.

Brown (1992) highly stressed that:

Culture based development strategy enables new knowledge, skills and attitudes to be introduced within the framework of existing knowledge, cultural pattern, institutions, values and human resources. Indeed, the indigenous culture is the fabric within which development can be woven.

This recognition of the importance of cultural variables in development has generated worldwide interest in the traditional indigenous knowledge systems of media especially the visual and performing arts in the promotion of development. People's participation and self-reliance are vital ingredients in development.

### 1.2.1. Agbamevorza (Kete Festival)

Agbamevorza is an annual festival of the chiefs and people of Agotime traditional area during which the ancestral handicraft, Agbamevor is commemorated or honoured. Atiklu (2015) states that Agbamevorza is a Kete festival which is celebrated by the chiefs and people of Agotime Traditional Area to honour their traditional Kete cloth and the weavers. Kutu (2015) reveals that the Agbamevorza started in September, 1995 after years of deliberations by chiefs and the people of how to unite and keep the citizens both home away together. It implies that the festival is celebrated to honour the traditional Kete cloth and the artists who produce these artworks in Agotime traditional area. Keteku (2015) stressed that the Agbamevorza is a replacement of a simple ritual which was instituted by the forefathers of Agotime, termed purification of looms and accessories. This ritual he said was done to purify the looms and accessories because, they were regarded as spirit supported implements that assisted them to produce their traditional Kete cloth.

The festival is the source of sustenance of the unity among the people of Agotime over the years. It is celebrated in September of every year, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>, to attract many people from far and near. Ativoe (2015) stressed that the main work of the Agotime people is weaving of Agbamevor, and therefore when the thought of how to bring the people back home from the diasporas for development came to the minds of the chiefs and the people of the thirty-seven (37) States of Agotime, they decided to replace the old age ritual of loom and the weaving accessories purification with the celebration of 'Agbamevorza' to commemorate or honour their main traditional or ancestral cloth and the distinguished weavers of the area. In Agotime traditional area and Ewe land in general, Agbamevor is respected form of bodily attire and represents an indispensable element of royal regalia and plays an important role in the customary and spiritual functions of the people. The Agbamevorza is celebrated to promote and conserve the uniqueness of the Kete cloth and its associated technology and creativity. It also helps to foster unity and socio-economic development. The festival brings together not only the people of Agotime but also tourist and researchers from far and near. It has over the years served as a symbol of cohesion and momentous occasion for artistic display in the palanquin by chiefs from its inception.

### 1.2.2. The Aims of Celebrating Agbamevorza

The aims of the festival are not only to honour the cloth and the weavers of the area but also advertise this Kete cloth to attract a better market in order to make the weaving more interesting in the area. Keteku (2015) who is the paramount chief of the area affirms the above through interview and stated a number of other reasons why the festival is done as follow;

- The festival is celebrated to preserve and protect the cultural and aesthetic values of Kete cloth.
- To project the various uses of Kete cloth through dress, costumes and regalia.
- To expose new techniques and innovations in the Kete industry.
- To attract tourists to the Agotime traditional area.
- To unite the people for socio-economic development among others. Kutu (2015) also agreed to the reasons for celebrating the festival and added that the Agotime people also raise fun for the development of the area.

### 1.2.3. Days Used for the Celebration of the Agbamevorza

The paper is able to ascertain the fact that the festival is normally celebrated using eight days, starting from Sunday and ends on Sunday. Ativoe (2015) said some time ago, the planning committee added ninth day which is Monday to the number of days where chiefs, planning committee members, the Member of Parliament and the district chief executive contribute money for get-together among the people in the area. Different kinds of foods are cooked, drinks are bought and brass band is used to entertain the people when eating and drinking. Atiklu (2015) also confirms that as the eating, drinking, drumming and dancing are going on, stories are also told by the leaders as interlude to guide the Agotime to shape their lives. But of late, the Monday programme is taken out of the activities and the festival begins on Sunday and ends on Sunday, because the elders have decided to move the programme to Easter Monday.

### 1.2.4. The Activities of the Agbamevorza

The study enumerates the day-by-day activities that constitute the entire eight-day festival. They are based on the days of the festival, for example, the first day of the festival which is Sunday is Non-denominational kick-start church service. Monday is launching of the festival and candle light procession. Tuesday is clean-up exercise and weaving competition. Wednesday is football gala to semi-final and presentation of gifts to chiefs. Thursday is women and children day and fetching of water from the river Tordzie (asia le torme). Friday is firing of musketry and beauty contest. Saturday is the grand durbar and street jamboree. Thanksgiving church service, football gala, final and state dance are the final activities that take place on Sunday

### 1.2.5. Kete Cloth in Agotime Traditional Area

Kete cloth is widely known in West Africa and beyond. The name Kete cloth refers to hand-woven textiles, often made of rayon with bright colour contrasts, which are composed of narrow strips sewn together edge to edge. In the Volta Region of Ghana the production of Kete is currently concentrated in several villages around Agotime Kpetoe area and the coastal villages along the Keta Lagoon, and other Ewe-speaking areas in Ghana, Togo and Benin. Ewe weavers with their long tradition of migration, have settled in other major West African cities (Kraamer, 2005; Clarke, 1999; Klein, 1998). As you walk the cross-section of the Agotime traditional area of the Volta region of Ghana, there are traces of narrow loom cloth weaving among the people, either in the fundamental form or in advance form. Many towns and villages in Agotime and the entire Eweland wove and wore cotton cloth since their settlement at Ketu, Hogbe, Agbome, Notsie and Ile Ife in Nigeria.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the discovery of the cotton wool, Nene Nuer Keteku III, the paramount chief of Agotime outlined that, the Ewe for that matter the Agotime people wore bark of tree and animal skins as cover clothes. Among the Agotime, a popular tree called 'Logo' was used. Therefore, the Agotime referred to their first cloth as Logo Bo (Logo cloth). With time, the Logo fibre was well beaten to produce a refined cloth called 'adzrala' which looked like sisal bag (Kutu, 2015). The Ewe knew of cotton wool from the ancient Sudan, (Agotime for example knew of cotton wool from the 'Nuer' clan of ancient Sudan). Cotton was therefore grown and span for cloth weaving, anytime Agotime found themselves in grass land areas.

The raw cotton cloth was referred to as 'kawu or sakpo'. The cotton yarn could not be woven smoothly as the logo fibre in the 'adzrala' mechanism; therefore, shed openers were developed and warp thread put into it as a structure now called loom for weaving the cloth smoothly and therefore the name Kete (open and press), based on the opening of the shed and pressing the weft thread to make a good cloth. Since then the people of Agotime became mainly Kete weavers, even though a few of them engage in subsistence farming and petty trading. Keteku (2015) states that, the best Kete cloth in Ghana comes from the Volta region, and 'Agotime is the home of Ewe Kete'. Apart from the simple geometric shapes, Ewe Kete has unique features that make it aesthetically and culturally special. The motifs and designs with special background in the Ewe Kete evoke powerful emotions and symbolize the most fundamental human ideas. The bold designs, bright multi-coloured patterns, touch of geometry and the insinuation of royalty are the things that make Ewe Kete the icon of African heritage around the world (Akoto-Sah, 2014).

The click and clutter of Ewe weaver as he draws the fly shuttle and opens the shed at his loom, gives a funny music-; 'kplafinya-kplafinya-kplafinya' (the sound for opening of the sheds and passing of the shuttle) as the beat for the people of

Agotime. Kete cloth is a cultural heritage for the people of Agotime. The Ewe Kete has more than five hundred designs. There are evidence to the fact that fathers teach sons strips of clothes since eleventh century and is handed down to generations (Kutu, 2015).

Kete cloth has evolved over the years, growing from the original only black and white dyes to different shades of indigo to finally the vast array of light colours that we see today. The Agbamevor (Kete) weaving is very popular in Agotime, especially in the capital Kpetoe. On daily basis, the youth and the elderly are seen in one loom or the other weaving seriously because of the financial reward which is attached to this traditional business at Agotime. Many weaving centers and individual looms are seen at most places in the town and the surrounding villages that produce a greater number of clothes to the market, thereby providing employment to many weavers and sellers of the Kete in the area. The weaving of the Kete cloth also attracts tourists from far and near to the area on weekly bases.

#### 1.2.6. Kete names and their meanings in Agotime.

1) 'Haliwoe'; - flour made of fermented corn used for beer. 2) 'Babadui'; - devoured by termites. 3) 'Biafemeta'; - inquire from the house. 4) 'Safui'; - key. 5) 'Doka'; - the net. 6) 'wogagba';- a bowl of corn flour. 7) 'Mamafehoe'; - it is my grandmother's money. 8) 'Dzinyegba';-my heart is broken. 9) 'Norvisi'; - be your brother's keeper. 10) 'Fiawoyome'; - behind the chiefs 11) Nutifafa'; - peace. 12) 'Takpekpe le Anloga'; - there is conference at Anloga. 13) 'Klogo'; - the shell of tortoise. Below are some of the pictures, of the traditional Kete clothes, their names and meanings.



Figure 1: Titriku (Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Titriku means thickness. The cloth is very thick in nature. These types of designs were the bedrock of the discovery of modern designs called 'faprim'. Most of the designs were made in a single braids joined together to form the design. There are different forms of the Titriku designs with different colours. The Titriku range of clothes are considered the oldest types of Agotime clothes worn for the performance of various customary rites, including puberty rites, traditional marriages, outdoorings, etc. These clothes are handed down through generations and kept in 'heirlooms'.

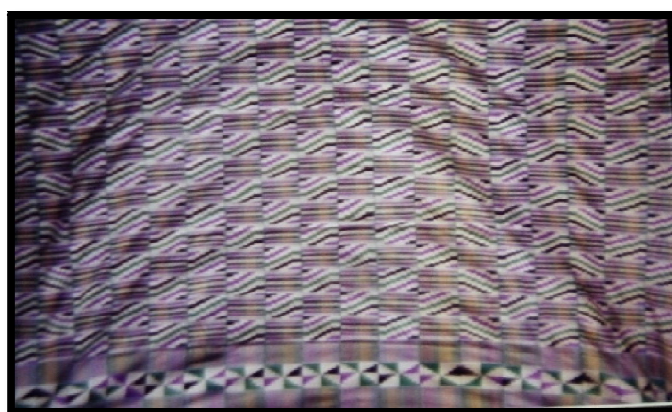


Figure 2: Atrakpui (Fieldwork data, July, 2015)

Atrakpui originated from a predominant design which is in a form of staircase. That is why the cloth was named 'atrapkui', which means staircase. It implies that, life is a journey of steps; therefore, one has to follow it with extra care.

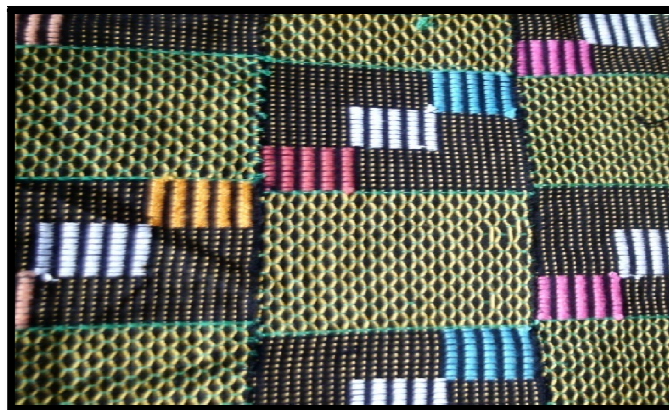


Figure 3: Edorvor (Fieldwork data, July, 2015)

Ebevor/Edorvor means, a thatch cloth or net cloth. The name came about because the design is woven in the form of thatch or net. Agbah (2015) states that this same cloth is also called 'hiatormeduakpeo', meaning, no matter how poor a person is, he/she will not eat stone. This implies that, in the past, this design was the most common Kete design that one can acquire in the traditional area. It was affordable in such a way that no matter how poor a person was, he or she was able to afford one and use. That was why this Kete cloth was named 'hiatormeduakpeo'. It is still used in this contemporary era.

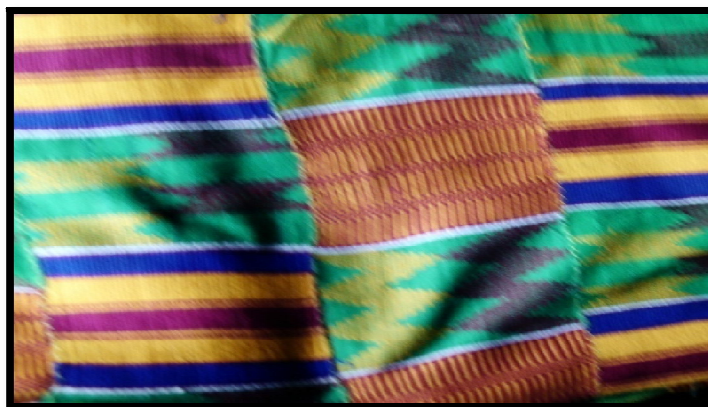


Figure 4: 'Fometsihe'/Familyheadgear  
(Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Fometsihe design is interpreted to mean, 'Family ties' the design is made predominantly of king stool compliments. It is a symbol of family reunion. It implies unity, peace and togetherness among families. Its use signifies that one is peaceful and ready to unite members of the family.



Figure 5: Ketekufida (Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Ketekufida means, Keteku Friday. The name of the paramount chief is Nene Nuer Keteku III. The name was translated to mean Keteku Friday. The cloth was first designed and presented to the chief Nene Keteku II when he came back from the 2nd World War in 1945. It is called Keteku Friday because; the cloth was first used by the chief on Friday when he was being celebrated by his subjects as a warrior. The cloth was adopted since then as a remembrance of this occasion. It signifies respect and honour to the paramount chief. It is also an artifact which is used to remember the chief as a warrior.



Figure 6: Gaenyoame or Omeda (Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Gaenyoame is translated to 'money makes you a man'. This was adopted because of how expensive the cloth was. It was highly priced in such a way that it was only rich people who could afford it. That is how come the name 'money makes you a man'. It was mostly woven with yellow background with other coloured stripes. It is a symbol of riches and pride. It makes the user more respected in the society and among the people.



Figure 7: Tadekamedeadanuo (Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Tadekamedeadanuo is one of the typical indigenous designs made in early 1960s. The name is translated to mean, 'Two heads are better than one'. It is the design that was made and presented to Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his wife during the republic day. That is why the design was also referred to as 'Fathia fata Nkrumah'. This same design can be seen in Ashanti region and all other places of Ghana and beyond because of its popularity among Ghanaians.



Figure 8: Trekake (Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Trekakee as a name of Kete in Agotime is translated to mean, pieces of calabash. This name is given to the cloth because of its width. The width of this cloth is extraordinarily small, so it needs more of the strips to make a required cloth for either a man or a woman. That was why it was named 'pieces of calabash'. This cloth was used for 'Dipo' among the Krobo and other cultural ceremonies because of how unique the design is.



Figure 9: Milewo/Ntsrim/Yeatsiwomu. (Fieldwork data, July, 2015)

Milewo is translated to mean 'we have arrested them'. This name is given to the cloth because it is believed that, this was the design of Kete cloth which our forefathers were weaving before the Ashanti arrested them during their war. They collected all their belongings with them to the Ashanti kingdom. Upon reaching, they told the Ashanti that 'yeatsiwomu' meaning, we have arrested them. They were made to teach the people of the kingdom how to weave the cloth, but could not speak the Ashanti language, so the Ewe or the captives started saying, 'ke, 'te'. 'ke', 'te'. Meaning, open, press, open, press. Hence, the name of the cloth, 'Kete'. The name serves as remembrance to that event of our forefather.

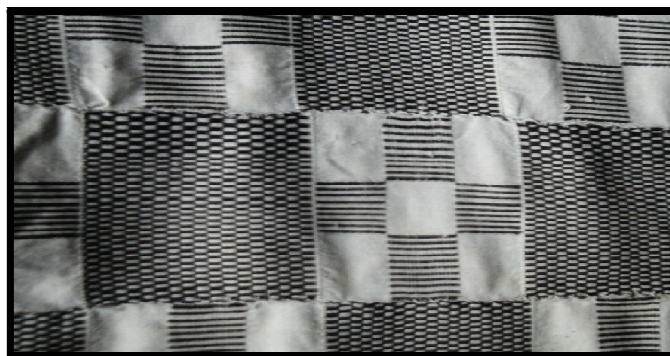


Figure 10: Wonukornutinekor (Fieldwork Data, July, 2015)

Wonukornutinekor means 'let your name be cleaned'. This was the cloth designed for use by Agotime women during child birth. This is to demonstrate that they are customarily married and have given birth. It is always part of the dowry that men pay to have their wives fully married. It is a symbol of fertility, peace and happiness.

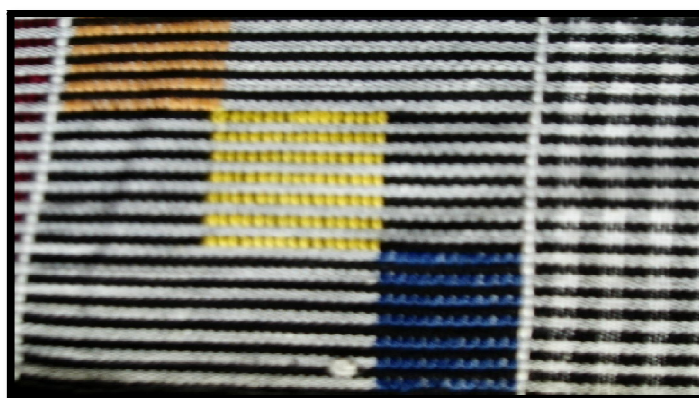


Figure 11: Atsapim/Akwapim (Fieldwork data, July, 2015)

Atsapim design originated from the name Akwapim' (an ethnic group in Ghana). This design was first made and introduced to Akwapim people as a festival cloth, at the time when they were celebrating their festival without any recognized cloth. It later became a pride for Akwapim citizens to possess the design especially during their festival. It symbolizes unity and togetherness among the Akwapim people.

## 2. Conclusion

Since Ghana is seriously promoting its heritage of arts and culture in contemporary Ghana, using every available media, access to documented information on the Agotime culture, especially the Agbamevorza (Kete festival), should no longer be a matter of chance. In view of the influence of foreign cultures on the Ghanaian culture, knowledge of one's heritage of arts and culture becomes necessary not only for knowledge sake, but also for self-identity and belongingness to one's ethnic group. To achieve this, access to information on every ethnic group in Ghana should be made easier through any available media. Effort should also be made to put in place reliable and all inclusive documents to cover our rich cultures to save as reference for our generation yet unborn.

The study focused on Agbamevorza because it is a more practical way of demonstrating the arts and culture. This has also been achieved by demonstrating how to preserve the culture of weaving Agbamevor in Agotime traditional area. This study is an eye-opener for a new Agotime, where the youth will be conversant with their culture, because it has succeeded in exposing the rich culture of the people as far as Agbamevorza and weaving of Kete is concerned.

It is therefore obvious that the concept of sustainability transcends indispensable sustainability of nation's natural resources. Development must be socially sustainable. It must increase people's control over their lives, maintain and strengthen community identity.

Finally the celebration of the festival is significant to Agotime because, it educates the people about their cultural heritage and their traditional Kete cloth. Art among other cultural aspects is the most significant phenomena of the celebration of the festival. The festival is also very artistic and aesthetically pleasing thereby attracting many participants and viewers from far and near.

## 3. Recommendations

Documentation of Agbamevorza (Kete festival) is essential as this will augment the effort of art institutions in the promotion of Ghanaian cultures for art education and cultural tourism. This will help bring to the fore the rich and fascinating cultures of the people of Agotime in the Volta region of Ghana. To achieve this, the government, the Ministry of Education, institutions of art, private and public libraries should help to make available information of the Agotime cultural heritage to the general public and for posterity. This will add to the scholarly material for quick and easy references to enhance knowledge in arts and culture education in Ghana. Books related to arts and culture education in Ghana should include the Agbamevorza, for study and reference. The arts and crafts have shown unflinching potentials for wealth creation in Ghana. Efforts should be made to preserve originality of Agotime artforms. Adaptations need not alter nor destroy the very fabric artforms.

Also, Agbamevorza/Kete festival of Agotime should be included in school syllabus and textbooks, under Festivals, as a topic for study in social or religious and moral education in schools and colleges. If this is done it would greatly inform researchers, scholars and students about the varying cultures Ghana has to offer to the world.

It was discovered that not much research had been done into the Agotime, their cultures, religion and arts in the Volta Region. Almost all the published books have not made mention of Agbamevorza, but it may be amazing to realize what the Agotime culture can offer for art education, and cultural tourism. It is therefore necessary for current researchers to undertake comprehensive studies into the Agotime people to unearth and project the hidden treasures in their customs, traditions and art to boost their popularity as well as add to the existing cultures already promoted in Ghana.

The recognition and inclusion of Agbamevorza on the list of the Tourist Board and that of the National Commission on Culture would add to the list of the already patronized Ghanaian cultures by local and international tourists. Since the festival is celebrated basically to honour the traditional Kete cloth (Agbamevor) and the weavers of Agotime traditional area, a stringent measures should be put in place by the government and NGOs to encourage more youth to engage in this profession of weaving Agbamevor by providing financial support for the establishment of weaving centers in the Agotime towns and villages. This will help train more people for higher productivity.

Weavers play very important roles in the celebration by ensuring that there is good supply of quality cloths for use during the festive period. They must therefore be motivated and helped in every possible way by the government, through the district assembly, NGOs and philanthropists by making available loans with flexible re-payment packages to them. This will increase the employment rate in the area as well as boost the income of the individual weavers. The weavers themselves should also be up and doing in order to attract such kind gestures.

Government agencies, international organisations and other agencies should delve into these available knowledge systems of weaving and progressively use this important and powerful skill as a means for mobilizing people sustainable and holistic development.



The value of cultural base emphasizes our very development thinking. Development springs from the mind and that the mind reflects the quality and relevance of the educational process through which it is passed. If the mind is in tune with the environment, one understands and appreciates it. In so doing, ones influences on it are bound to be salutary.

Efforts should be made to preserve the originality of artforms. The people of Agotime are rediscovering the potential of indigenous cultural knowledge especially weaving as a weapon for their voices and plight to be heard. It is also a well-known fact that any developmental programme which does not touch the vast masses of the people cannot be justified. The goals of rural economic growth in the narrow sense are to balance social and economic development, with emphasis on the equitable distribution as well as creation of benefits

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