

## THE TRADITIONAL ATTIRE (AKLES) OF THE EGGON PEOPLE IN NASARAWA STATE

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### Introduction

Nassarawa Eggon was created out of the defunct Akwanga Local Government Area in October 1991 by the then military administration of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. The Eggon home lies at latitude 80.45 longitude 8°30'. The area falls within the southern-most part of the province which forms part of what is known in the past as southern Plateau. The area is made up of mountains and outcrops, which are called "*Eggon Hill*"

The hills form the watershed between the basin of the Mada River to the west and Arikya River to the east. Both rivers flow in general southern direction, the former meeting the Benue River to the west of Markudi and the latter (Arikya) west of Ibi. The local government area is located between Akwanga local Government to the north, Lafia Local Government area to the south, Keffi and Kokon in the west while sharing border with Wamba and Quanpa'an in the north and east (Blench, 2019).

The Eggon are divided into three major groups namely Anzo, Eloho and Eggon Ero which have many sub-clans. All the three major groups speak the same language and share the same cultural belief system. However there exist distinctive facial marks among the groups, while they also have local variations in dialect. As regard the facial marks, the Anzo and Eloho have vertical marks made on either side of their cheek, but are normally not numbered while the Eggon Ero have nine marks on the face and are called by the Hausa "*Madan Tara*" while the Eloho and Anzo are called "*Madan Zube*".

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Eggon people. Farming was based on crop rotation and shifting cultivation. Inter cropping system was also adopted. The small and big hoes and cutlasses were predominantly farming implements. Majority of the crops grown are Guinea Corn, Maize, Acha (hungry rice), Beni-seed, Beans, Yam, Cassava, Groundnut, etc., in addition to economic tree like palm tree, mango, orange and cashew. Weaving is the next most important occupation in Eggon land and was widely practiced.

### The Traditional Royal Attire of the Eggon People

The traditional regalia of Aren (king) of Eggon is called Abbon-Enyi. It is a traditional apparel that has a design of green colour signifying prosperity, blue which is royalty, red obtained from palm oil denoting strength, and black obtained from black benniseed. These colours found on the royal

regalia of the king play symbolic roles in the life of the people. In the same vein, the regalia is a symbol of the authority of the king which distinguish him from his subjects.

The neck of the king is adorned with a brass bowl. Traditionally, he is to use the bowl to drink any substance of his desire whenever the need arises. His neck and hands are decked with coral beads which denotes royalty in many cultures such as Eggon. No one else uses the quantity and quality of the coral beads the Aren wears in ordinary days or during festivals. The Aren also wears bronze bangles which is used as a defensive weapon. The bangle could also be used to shoot an arrow. The royal cap which is black is in tandem with one of Eggon national colours which is black.



The Aren-Eggon Dress in Traditional Royal Attire

#### **Significance of Colours on Dressing Culture**

Colours have great importance and meaning to the Eggon people. The colours are red, black and white. These are the major colours of the Eggon people. Others are yellow, blue and brown. The red colour of palm fruits, black beniseed and white broad beans play significant role in the colours

used for designing the dress of Eggon people. Red, black and white form the unique designs in the woven clothes, which Eggon people wear.

In the history of Eggon people, they engaged the white men in a battle to the point of killing a white miner named D. Campel on the 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1912. The incident led to the massacre of thousands by the white men in Akudagba cave. To some, the red colour on the traditional clothes of Eggon people stands for the blood of their ancestors that were killed in the cave in defence of their land. For some other people, red is a symbol of the blood of the baboons shed by the Eggon people to protect their farmlands, wives and children from attack. Red colour is thus a symbol of national security. It also represents the palm oil (*Masin*) that the Eggon people regard as an important item in their marriage ceremony.



Palm Fruit

The black colour on the regalia of Eggon people represents the fertile land for farming, which the Eggon people possess. It also indicates the natural resources which include emeralds, granite, quartz, etc, as well as the hardworking nature of Eggon people in blacksmithing. Moreover, black colour represents the Eggon black beniseed (*Agne*) used in preparing their marriage food *Ebekpren*.



Black benniseed

The white colour on Eggon fabric is a symbol of the peaceful co-existence among the 43 clans of Eggon people. This gave rise to the slogan "Eggon Kyenkyen", which means Eggon is one. It also represents the Eggon white broad beans "Abekpme" which is a vital item in any Eggon traditional marriage.



White Broad Beans

### Traditional Dress Making among Eggon People

The traditional mode of dressing for Eggon men is that they wear either a skin or a waist cloth round their loins. The cloth often has collapsed edge trimmed with red wool. Women who are sturdy, beautiful and gallant and graceful wear short cloth round their loins because they consider nudity a shameful practice. They make traditional attires by weaving, sewing, dyeing and leather work.

The Eggon people most particularly the women are known for their knowledge in weaving. However, specialist in weaving could be found in Wakama, Wangbi and Agunji. These women produce unique and beautiful materials that exhibit the pride of the Eggon nation. To-gboga, Aganga, Gbaguor, Ahru-abme are all wearing item of the Eggon people. The materials used for weaving can be got from AKA (a tree of the palm family), locally spun wool and the white cloth called (*Akle*) from which the Eggon traditional attire derived its name. Costumes like *Bidakpa* can only be skilfully sewn by special artisans who are trained under apprenticeship. *Bidakpa* cannot be easily and perfectly sewn by contemporary tailor or seamstress because of the skills and patience required in its production. The types of dye used is gotten from tree barks and other local materials, but not chemical dyes as we know today. Dyeing is commonly practiced in Nasarawa state and the Eggon people also share in this practice and produce costume like Ahru-Akalle (whole wool). The Eggon people being good hunters express their success in hunting through the display of beautiful leather work from hides and skin of the animal like lion, leopards, baboons, gorillas etc. Examples of Eggon leather works include head gear (*Ishi Akko*) and *Apai-Igbi* (the leopard skin) tied around the waist.

All the above methods and more are employed in the making of the Eggon traditional attires. One major way in which one can see their traditional attire in full display is during their festivals. The most notable one is the Anzalu dance, where they show and express their love for their culture.



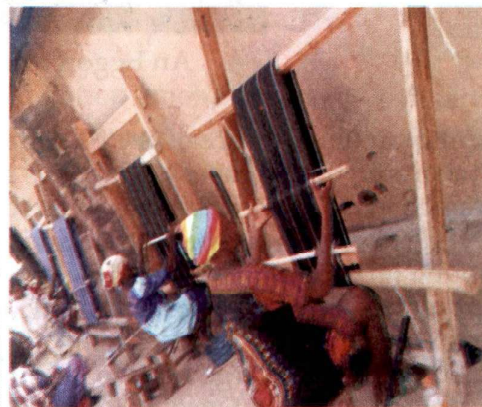
Anzalu Dancers in their Traditional Attire.

The origin of Anzalu dance and her costumes is associated with the origin of three dance styles of Eggon people called Allu, Ebugu and Ngbasa or Masa. Anzalu is a compound word gotten from Anzaku Alumbugu, the name of the man behind this wonderful dance who is said to have hailed from Wana clan. Alumbugu was reported to wander from place to place expressing his love for Eggon tradition and culture especially music and dance. He introduced the dancing styles of the Eggon people. (Allu, Ebugu and Masa). He was consistent in his dancing style, hence the saying "dance the way Anzaku Alumbugu does". Anzalu dance features during the installation ceremony of Aren Eggon, the ruler of the Eggon people. It was at the Aren Eggon's palace that the Aren himself pronounced these words "Gyizhha Anzalu lo dne ma mohyel" which is translated to mean 'after all, we are faced with the choice to dance Anzalu dance'. It was in view of this pronouncement that Anzaku Alumbugu dancing styles found its way into the heart, culture and tradition of Eggon people.

Although the use of hides for clothing no longer exists, but the wearing of cloth continues to flourish. One informant who has been a weaver for 18 years at Angwan Moyi in Nasarawa explains that weaving business in Eggon land is not hereditary but anyone with an interest in the art can learn. There is no taboo associated with the weaving process of producing *Akle* Eggon. The process of producing a complete set of *Akle* Eggon for a woman takes four days, while an *Agba'da* for a man takes about a week. It starts with preparing the yarn with the desired colour, which takes two days to prepare. Next is to lay it on the beam made of wood and bamboo sticks which lasts a day before weaving begins.



The Yarning Process



The Weaving Process



Couples Dressed in *Akle Eggon*

There is no traditional wedding in Eggon land that is complete without the couples adorning themselves in *Akle Eggon*. The fashion trends have been inculcated into it especially for bride who wants to look more sophisticated. Crystal stones and pearls are added to *Akle Eggon* to make it modern and sophisticated as can be seen in the picture below.



An Eggon bride dress in *Akle*

#### **Economic Importance of *Akle Eggon***

The production of the *Akle Eggon* is a means of livelihood for those that engage in it. The price ranges from ten thousand for a woman set of wrapper and head gear to eighteen thousand naira for a set of *Agbada* for a man. Young girls from the age of 13 years to 18 years learn under the process of apprenticeship to ensure continuity. It takes about six months to a year to learn the weaving. After learning, they are expected to work for their mistress free of charge for two months before they are issued a certificate. People take pride in weaving and dyeing of *Akle*. Most of the *Akle* businesses are left for women, who teach their children and other interested persons.



The Eggons in their traditional attires (Akle)

### Prospects and Challenges

*Akle* is an economic tool for revenue generation among the Eggon people. People from far and near engage in *Akle* Eggon business either as apprentices or investors. Some of the challenges faced in the production of *Akle* is mostly lack of income for experts who know how to weave. There is also the issue of poor advertising, which has hindered the growth of *Akle*. Modernity has also been a challenge as young people tend not to purchase the *Akle* as they see it as old fashion. Inter-ethnic conflict has also affected the *Akle* production. Government can setup small and medium scale enterprises in this trade. Funds can also be made accessible to prospective investors. Equipment and trainers can as well be provided to attract the teeming unemployed people to get involved in the business. More research can be sponsored to find new ways to make the business more productive and lucrative. Wider publicity of the *Akle* Eggon enterprise is imperative.

### Conclusion

Like in every other culture, the Eggon traditional attire is a symbol of the Eggon people; it shows their struggle, triumph and unity. Findings regarding it have shown that people can be united especially when the attires are worn. *Akle* Eggon gives a unique identity to the people. Even with modern trend, the *Akle* has been able to maintain its unique skills of weaving that still makes it different from other clothing materials.

### References

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### Informants

S/N	Informants	Age	Occupation	Place and date of interview
1.	Solomon Gaga	52	Business man	Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area 25 <sup>th</sup> 01/2022
2.	Julius Emmanuel Abuga	45	Secretary to the Aren Eggon	Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area 25 <sup>th</sup> /01/2022
3.	Mama Tani	50	Weaver	Angwan Moyi B. Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area. 26 <sup>th</sup> /01/2022
4.	HRH, Chief Adam Makka Nangba JP	63	Hakimi Wakama	Akwanga Local Government Area 26 <sup>th</sup> /01/2022
5.	Anthony Ayiwulu	62	Chairman, Eggon Dev. Ass. Jos Branch	Jos. Plateau State 14 <sup>th</sup> /01/2022