

# Perspectives On The Origin, Genealogical Narration, Early Migrations And Settlement Morphology Of The Tiv Of Central Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper presents some reflections on the origin, genealogical narration, early migrations and settlement morphology of the Tiv of Central Nigeria. Tiv people of central Nigeria today inhabit a substantial part of the Middle Benue Valley of Nigeria. In the various works of scholars of Tiv historiography, there has been an on-going debate on the origin, genealogy and migrations of the Tiv people. This is possibly because of lack of adequate archaeological, anthropological and historical research on the Tiv project that would have provided enough empirical evidence to balance numerous claims of the oral traditions of the Tiv people on this subject. Interestingly, the issues surrounding Tiv settlement morphology appears to have had more professional answers owing to various scientific researches that have been carried out on the topic. Thus, this paper presents a concise analysis of research so far conducted on the subject matter. The Author utilised written documents like books, journals, thesis and dissertations that centres on the archaeology and general history of the Tiv people, as the research method. Therefore, this paper is simply a contribution to what is so far known about the origin, cultural progress and development of the Tiv, demonstrated in their historiography.

**Keywords:** Origin, Migration, Genealogy, Settlement, Historiography, Tiv people, Middle Benue Valley, Central Nigeria.

## Introduction

The name Tiv connotes two meanings. On one hand, it refers to the 4<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in Nigeria who number over 6.5million individuals. On the other hand 'Tiv' is known as a man who is said to be the great ancestor of the entire Tiv people. The Tiv are a dominant ethnic group in Central Nigeria, found in large numbers in Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Cross River States and the FCT. They are mainly in Benue State where they are in the majority. Their area of habitation falls roughly within 6° 30'N to 8° 00'N and 8° 00'E to 10° 00'E. "They all speak a common language known as Tiv language" (Torkula, 2001).

Generally, the "Tivland is predominantly woodland savannah, characterized by a tropical climate with two distinctive seasons. These are a wet season which begins April and ends October, and a dry season from November to March. Characteristic tree species are a combination of forest and savannah types including *Daniella oliveri* (Chiha), *Erythrophleum guineansis* (Kor), *Batryospermum peraduxum* (Chamegh), *Terminalia ovicenioides* (Kuegh), *Spondias monbin* (Konkwagh), *Strychnos spinosa* (Maku), *Chlorophora excelsa* (Leke) *Afzela africana* (Yiase), *Antairis Africana* (Ten), *Baphia nitida* (Kpagh), *Fiscus Thonningii* (Akinde), *Fiscus gnaphalocarpa* (Tur), *Afromosia laxiflora* (Jiagba), *Khaya senegalensis* (Haa Kiriki), *Khaya grandfoliola* (Haa tamen), and many others (see Gundu, 1999; Torkula, 2001).

More so, the Tivland has a geology that is characterized by the precambrian basement, comprising the lower and upper cretaceous sediments in addition to some volcanic deposits (Pugh and Buchanan 1955, cf Torkula, 2001).

Two major Rivers; that is Benue and Katsina-Ala with their tributaries, waters the Tivland, making it productive. Alluvial soils can be found along the river and stream basins, especially on the southern bank of River Katsina-Ala. In the Northern part of Tivland, lies the Benue River Basin and the soil is predominantly light alluvial. The area has a tropical climate with two clearly marked wet and dry seasons (Aboh, 2005; 54-55).

Given the nature of prevailing ecological conditions (a transition zone between forest and savannah), the Tiv people have been amenable to practicing both cereal and tuber cropping. The people cultivate cereal crops such as bulrush millet (*Pennisetum*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), guinea corn (*sorghum spp.*), green pea (*Pisum sativum*), pearl millet (*Pennisetum spp.*), soya beans (*glycine max*), beniseed (*Sasamum indicum*), and maize (*zea mays*) amongst others. This is in addition to such tuber crops like yam (*Discorea rotundata*), cassava (*Manihot spp.*), cocoyam (*Colocasia esculentum*), sweet potatoes (*Ipomea batata*) and groundnut

(*Arachis hypogea*) amongst others. Yam seems however to be the most predominant crop grown, and the leading species is *Discorea rotundata* (white yam).

Apart from agriculture, the Tiv people also engage in the practice of some crafts like blacksmithing, pottery making, building, digging of wells, wood carving, and leatherwork amongst many others.

### The Origin of Tiv People

Several types of research about the origin of Tiv people have not been able to address exactly how the first Tiv man came to be known, as there are different views on the origin of Tiv. It is equally very difficult to trace the origin of the Tiv people in general; this is because no one appears to be quite sure of how or when they came to be where they are today. Thus, researchers rely completely on information from oral traditions, historical and archaeological sources for the study of the general history of the Tiv of Central Nigeria (Aboh, 2005).

Therefore, oral traditions, written sources and archaeological sources are also utilized for the discussion of Tiv origin in this research. Thus, the most popularly considered view on this topic is that which traces Tiv origin to the Bantu. The Bantu are people who once inhabited the Central African Continent. The Tiv are said to have migrated from the Shaba Area of the present Democratic Republic of Congo to where they now live as far back as the 15th and 16th centuries (Torkula, 2001).

### Tiv Genealogical Narration

Historical traditions in Tivland are all in agreement that the man called “Tiv” was the Patriarch of the Tiv people of Central Nigeria. However, there arose a strong question of who was the father of the Tiv. Thus, some allusions amongst Tiv contemporary historians motivate a suggestion that Awange is the father of Tiv. This can also be seen in the reference made to ‘TivAwange’ by the Tiv people. This is the basis for the argument that Tiv had a father called Awange (Makar, 1975, 1994). However, this assertion has been challenged by Dzurgba (2007) who argues that there is no Tiv ancestral evidence associated with Awange. This argument has rendered the assertion of Makar (1975, 1994) that Awange is the ancestor of Tiv extremely remote, doubtful and debatable.

Furthermore, Gbor (1974) Believes that, “Takuruku is believed to be the father of Tiv, the ancestor of the Tiv people of the Middle Benue Valley. According to Dzurgba (2007), this claim is based on the nature of the announcement of the death of an old or noble person in Tivland. The announcement which starts with the name of the dead person is followed by that of Takuruku, Anyam and then Azenga. The last two names are therefore, considered by Dzurgbe (2007) to be Tiv ancestors. This means that Tiv may have been the son of Takuruku, who was the son of Anyam, who was also the son of Azenga.

The basis for the above argument is that any respectful greeting offered to a person from a cheerful heart in Tivland, take such a format that starts with the mention of the person’s name, followed by the name of the person’s father and/or that of grandfather (Dzurgba, 2007).

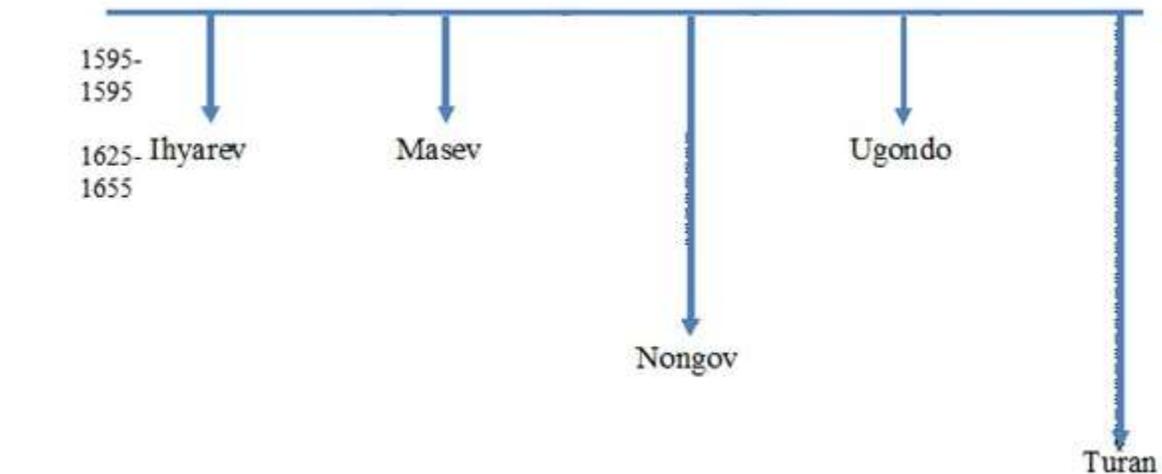
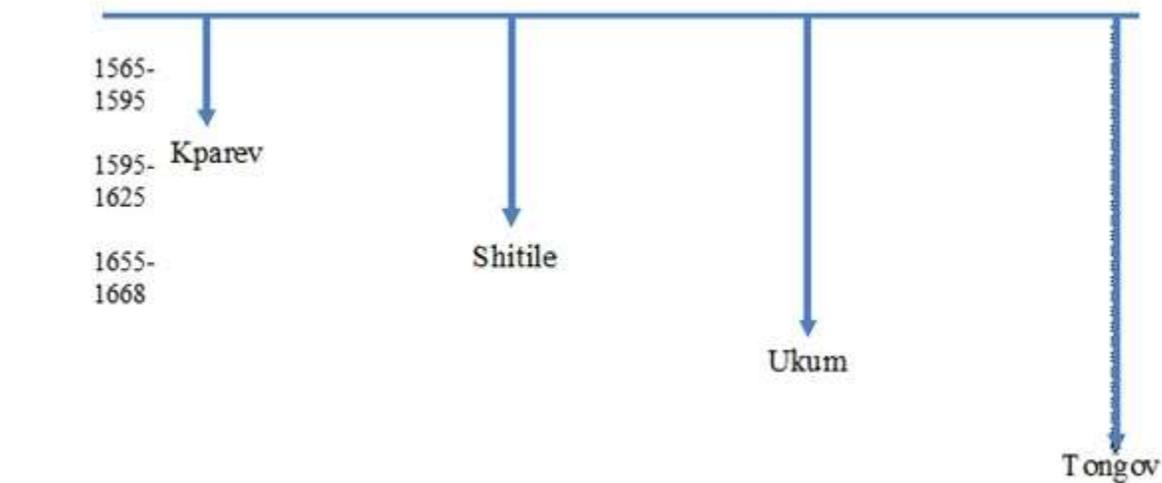
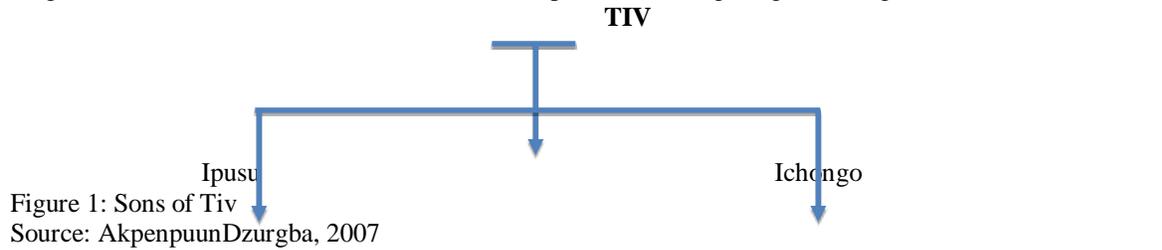
Therefore, Takuruku married Aliwe and gave birth to two sons; Tiv and Uke. According to oral traditions of the Tiv people, Tiv the father and founder of the Tiv Nation was a brave man who broke off from the family to found the Tiv tribe with his wife Ayaaya. They gave birth to two sons; Ipusu and Ichongo. Thus, Ipusu means uncircumcised. It also means a portion of land without stones or rocks, fertile and suitable for agriculture. This name may have been given because Tiv may have enjoyed the harvest of good crops, been a brave and gifted farmer. Thus, he named the child Ipusu with reference to *Ipusunya* (soft and fertile soil).

In the same vein, Ichongo means circumcised. It also means a fox (an animal) and trick (*ichongo or atseree*). In his hunting, Tiv might have killed several foxes at the time his wife was pregnant. The wife having eaten much fox meat gave birth to a black child as a fox and this prompted Tiv to name the child ‘Ichongo’ (Dzurgba, 2007).

Ipusu and Ichongo (Tiv sons) greatly multiplied and became a tribal nation. Oral traditions of the Tiv people claim that the descendants of Ipusu are referred to as Ipusu-akem, while those of Ichongo are referred to as Ichongo-akem. As mentioned above,

the Tiv family multiplied and became a tribal nation with a homogenous language (called the Tiv language), without dialect, spoken and understood by all Tiv sons and daughters the world over (Gbor, 1974; Makar, 1975, 1994; Gundu, 1999; Aboh, 2005; Dzurgba, 2007; Ndera, 2013).

The genealogical divisions of the sons of Tiv, the father of Ipusu and Ichongo is given in figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.



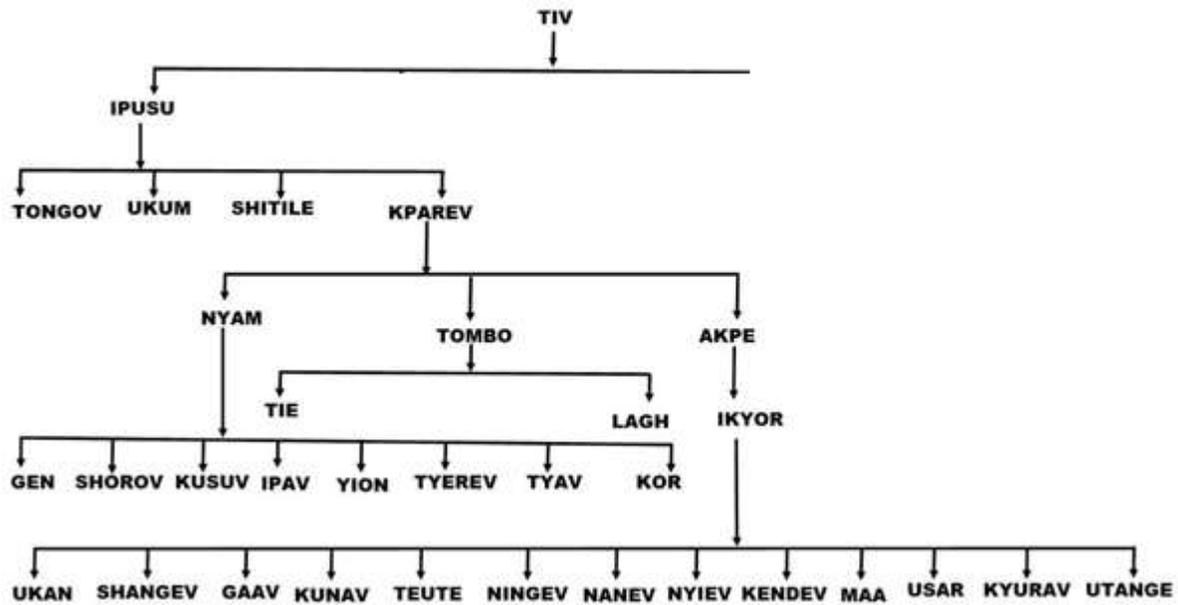


Figure 4: Sub-division of Ipusu Super Clan

Modified from: Tiv Nation; Ayatutu ka uno? Ka se, (Retrieved 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2020).

### Early Migrations of the Tiv People

The Tiv are said to have had many conflicts and wars with their neighbours in Congo, as the Tiv were brave and difficult to be defeated, all their neighbours ganged up against them and planned to wipe out the Tiv through a surprise attack. Consequently, because the Tiv were a religious and prayerful family, some elements amongst their neighbours leaked the plan and the Tiv got to know of the planned attack (Aboh, 2005).

Therefore, the Tiv began their migration from Congo. This meant that they had to cross River Congo which was almost an impossible task. Thus, a mysterious snake called *Ikyalem* (green snake) formed a bridge across the River Congo to help all the members of The Tiv family cross the river. To date, the Tiv do not kill the *Ikyalem*, and forbid anyone in carrying out the act in Tivland (Aboh, 2005).

According to Aboh (2005), “the Tiv went through many forests and later succeeded in reaching a place called “Swem”. To many Tiv people, Swem represents their original homeland. However, the exact location of Swem has been a matter of controversy amongst scholars. Akiga (1939) claimed that Swem is a hill in the Iyon area of Ikyurav-Ya in south-eastern Tivland and that he visited Swem in 1934. Bohannan and Bohannan (1954) also claimed Swem is actually the Ngol-Kedju hill located in the Bamenda highlands, south-western Cameroon. Makar (1975) concluded from the oral traditions he collected amongst the Tiv that, Swem is located in Nyiev-Ya in the present Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State. He noted that Swem is a mountain that is about 36 miles southwest of the compound of Mr Yaro Gusa the District Head of Nyiev-ya. Gbor (1978) and Orkar (1979) were not specific in their location of Swem, but saw Swem as a hill located on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, southeast of the present Tivland.

For Dzurgba (2007:26) Swem is located at the source of Katsina-Ala River in North-western Cameroon”. Dzurgba further stressed that “Swem is located in the Akwaya Subdivision or Local Government Area”. It is in a range of mountains in the area which stands taller amongst all the others. The hill is also referred to as Swem by the Akwaya people who include the Iyon, Ugbe, and Utange amongst others. These Cameroonian groups also claim to be Tiv and their kith and kins reside in Nigeria in Moon District, Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State (see Akiga, 1939; Gbor, 1974; Makar, 1975, 1994; Gundu, 1999; Aboh, 2005; Dzurgba, 2007; and Ndera, 2009, 2013).

However, following several reasons like, persistent attacks from tribes like *Bafum* who were already occupying the Swem area before the arrival of the Tiv people, population explosion and the need for wider/suitable land for the production of sufficient food

to keep the growing population, the Tiv decided to migrate into the Middle Benue Valley of Nigeria where several researches have established that they have been living beyond 500 to 600 years ago.

Their present abode was equally inhabited by various tribes. Thus, having lived most of their lives as sojourners in the jungle, they were used to jungle justice. Therefore, with the help of primitive arms, and the increase in their population, they forced the already inhabiting population of the land out (Makar, 1994; Aboh, 2005, Dzurgba, 2007; and Ndera, 2013).

The Tiv fought with arrows that were described as the most poisonous in Africa. This kept their enemies far from a plan of attacking the Tiv. Thus, being farmers, the Tiv found Benue Valley suitable for agriculture and this escalated their desire to sacrifice everything to make the land their permanent abode.

Therefore, the Tiv people migrated from Swem, crossing the Bamenda highlands in Cameroon, through the Nwange group of hills about 16km south of Ikyurav-ya where they encountered some hostile groups of people known as Ugee, Uindir and Ulive amongst others. These tribes forced the Tiv to leave the area in three groups. The first group consists of Kparev and Ukum, who migrated northwest of Nwange to occupy the Ngokugh hill, presently found amongst the Shangev-ya clan in Kwande Local Government Area (see Akiga, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1954; Gbor, 1974; Makar, 1975; and Orkar, 1979. Others include Folorunso, 1998; Gundu, 1999; Ogundele, 2006; Ndera, 2009; Chia, 2014; and Nomishan, 2014).

The second group is made up of Tongov, Ikyurav, Nongov and Turan, who migrated to the hills of Barakuv, Wo-Mondo and Ityough-Ikegh, found amongst the present Nyiev and Nanev clans. The last group consists of Masev, Ihyarev, Ugondo and Shitire, who moved to the plains around Ibinda hill, located in the present-day Ikyurav-ya, about 10miles southwest of Jato-aka in Turan (Makar, 1975, 1994).

Thus, “the Tiv spread from these hills over the Benue plains was propelled by a three-pronged attack from the Chamba (referred to in Tiv Tradition as the Ugenyi) on the western banks of the Katsina-Ala River (at Ushongo hills), the eastern banks of the Katsina-Ala River (at Dikpo hills) and the western banks of the Donga River (at Mdema hills). The Tiv victory over the Chamba in this war enabled them to spread rapidly with the Kunav and Gaav sections moving towards the south-west (displacing the Udam) while Jemgar, Ugondo and Ikyurav moved north-west (pushing the Etulo and Idoma) and Shitire, Ukum, Iherev, Masev and Nongor moved north-east against the Jukun, Arago, Koro and Migili having been pushed further north, east and west to make room for the Tiv habitation of their present area” (Torkula, 2001).

### **The Settlement Morphology of the Tiv People**

Traditionally, the Tiv live in compounds made of round huts that are built with mud blocks and thatched mostly with sword grasses locally known as *ihila*. The huts are arranged in circular patterns but limited numbers are arranged in oval and arch patterns (Ndera, 2013). Ethnoarchaeological studies on Tiv settlement morphology is also in agreement with this establishment except for the modern ones that are mostly made in rectangular farm (see Folorunso, 1993, 1998; Ogundele, 2005, 2006; Ndera, 2009, 2013).

Archaeological research on the early settlements of the Tiv, found on hills such as the Nwange, Ngokough, Barakuv, Wo-mondo, Ityough-ikegh, Ibinda, Kpe and Bako amongst others, have established that early Tiv people lived in round huts that were built using stones, particularly at their foundations, while mud blocks were used to build the huts to completion. Usually, structures found on the archaeological sites in Tivland include round huts (sleeping and kitchen huts), granaries, reception hut (*Ate*) found mostly in the middle of the compound, and in many cases defensive walls that are usually constructed using rock bolders and/or large stones (see Tubosun, 1981, 1995; Tubosun & Andah, 1983; Andah, 1983b; Folorunso, 1983, 2005; Ogundele, 1983, 1993; Igirgi, 1984; Gundu, 1984, 1999; Ndera, 2009; Chia, 2014; Nomishan, 2014; and Shagba, 2017).

Ethnographically, compounds in contemporary Tivland are relatively similar to what has been observed on the hill-tops. However, there exist some modified features that have surfaced from the advent of modernization. This is evidence in towns and village centres where settlement structures are mostly constructed using cement or burnt bricks and roofed with iron sheets. This has largely proven that there is cultural continuity amongst the past and present Tiv people (Ogundele, 2006; Ndera, 2013; Chia, 2014; Nomishan, 2018).

In the past Tiv compounds comprised of two or more households belonging to a single extended family as evident in the arrangement of compounds in settlement clusters on the hill-tops. Thus, the oldest man in the compound took leadership responsibility on all the households within the compound. All the households clustered around one big *Ate* (reception hut) which

served as a resting or meeting place for all members of the compound and a receiving point for all visitors (Bohannan & Bohannan, 1953; Ndera, 2013).

In the same way, the oldest woman in the compound took leadership responsibility for all women and kitchen matters. Though this has largely been modified in the present Tivland, seen that contemporary Tiv people live in smaller house units which comprise most of the immediate family members (both in towns and villages), the ancient culture of allocating the leadership responsibility to the oldest member of the family is still found amongst the Tiv people. Thus, most settlements in Tivland are located close to riverine or swampy areas to cope with the water needs of the people as pipe-borne water systems are absent in most areas (Ndera, 2013).

Usually, the number of living rooms/huts in each household depends on the number of adult male children living in a household. Just as it was obtainable in the past, each household has living rooms/huts, one granary or storeroom, one kitchen, two or more bathrooms and sometimes one or two toilets. As stated earlier, tradition Tiv compounds are constructed in a circular or oval pattern with most of the structures falling in a regular line, except the bath places and the toilets which are usually situated outside the immediate circle of the compound. The bath places are constructed between 3m to 6m outside the compound. One of these bath places is usually located close to the living hut belonging to the oldest man in the compound, while the remaining ones are located at any other part of the compound to serve other members of the household. The distances between the structures are between 1m to 3m. The minimum size of a hut is placed at 3m to 4m in diameter. Also, granaries are located very close to the living hut/room of the head of the household or any brave adult for the purpose of security.

Furthermore, the kitchen contains all cooking materials like pots, plates, grinding stones, mortar/pestle, turning sticks, a heart, a pot for the storage of drinking water, and a pot mounted close to the heart for drying of meat and other perishable foods. In the past, two grinding stones were usually kept in the household. One was kept in the *Ate* for grinding of grains. While the other was kept close to or inside the kitchen for the grinding of ingredients like pepper, tomatoes, locust beans spice, vegetables and herbs amongst other spices.

## **Conclusion**

Like every other natural phenomenon, the origin and development of the Tiv people of Central Nigeria have been very dynamic. Migrations as a constant issue in human history have also been effective in all human races throughout the world. No human group can claim not to have migrated from one region to another and also to its present abode. This is the same story associated with the Tiv people of Central Nigeria. The ethnic group began with their patriarch 'the Tiv', his wife 'Ayaaya', and his two sons; 'Ipusu and Ichongo'.

Thus, Ipusu and Ichongo have since expanded into a large tribal nation, occupying 14 Local Government Areas in Benue State. More so, as stated earlier, the Tiv sons and daughters are also found in large numbers in other States such as Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Cross River and the Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) Abuja, with others living in Cameroon Republic.

Though the Tiv sons and daughters are living in different locations in Nigeria and part of Cameroon, their settlement patterns are significantly similar, demonstrating the traditional architecture of their ancestors. The worth of note here is the unique means by which the early Tiv man transferred this knowledge to his children; an act that has ensured the survival of Tiv traditional architecture into the present generation.

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