

A review of African spirituality and food sovereignty and the gender aspects along the staple food value chain among smallholder farmers in western Kenya

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Abstract- There is vast literature on African spirituality under African traditional religion, but not much on African spirituality as a concept within the context of Kenya, whereas in the area of food sovereignty, most of the literature is on global food sovereignty and not much on food sovereignty in Kenya. On the other hand, there are studies done on food security in Kenya but with little mention of its relationship with food sovereignty.

The spirituality practiced by small holder farmers is not outside of their culture which in turn governs its application to the community's food systems and their practices towards their own food sovereignty. A smallholders farmers spirituality is also not separate from their ethnic identity and how their ethnic identity influences their farming practices which are able to sustain the community.

Both women and men are integral in the embodiment and practice of African spirituality in the continent, as well as in Kenya. Together, they make up the smallholder system and play an important role in developing their families and consequently their community by involving themselves in socio-economic activities alongside the spiritual ones in a quest for liberation from hunger and oppression. This paper highlights some of the studies that have been done in Africa in these aspects and tries to fit it in the smallholder farm household along the staple food crop value chain in western Kenya.

Index Terms- African spirituality, food sovereignty, gender, western Kenya

I. AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

African spirituality is the spirituality of African people independent of the naming systems given to the culture of those spiritual beliefs. The spirituality of African people cannot be separated from their ethnic identity and culture, and the smallholder farmers practice a spirituality that is historically part of their identity. African spirituality is organized based on the ceremonies, libations, holidays, rituals, taboos, totems, spiritual

leaders and observance of sacred practices that is demonstrates through the food value chain.

According to Opok et al. (2016), African spirituality is defined as the spirituality of African people independent of the naming systems given to the culture/rituals of those spiritual beliefs and that it is not a denomination. They further expound on their definition by mentioning that African spirituality lives inside Islam, Judaism, Christianity as much as it does inside *Vodun* or *Odinani* which are indigenous spiritual systems. Moreover, the study of Opok et al (2016) states that outside of Abrahamic faiths, and faiths found in the African diaspora, many African religions are inseparable from the ethnic identity and culture. In lieu of the definition of Opok et al. (2016), this would mean that the spirituality of the smallholder farmer in western Kenya is historically part of their identity and that their African spirituality illustrates itself in their way of living which includes how they plant their food crops to the point of harvesting and consumption. Irrespective of the religion smallholder farmer practices, there is African spirituality within it qualified by the rituals, taboos and practices that are observed through the staple food crop value chain.

Opok et al. (2016) further state that all spiritual systems practiced traditionally by Africans whether native or mainstream are organized along religions. They include the rituals of *voodoo*, *orisha*, and *serer* which according to them are all highly organized and without exception, function in a communal setting. The organization comes in the form of degrees of a priest class, ceremony, libation, religious holidays, creation stories, saints, and divine systems of punishment and rewards (Opok et al. 2016). This further exemplifies that nowhere in Africa is there 'spirituality' outside of a culture to contain and govern its application to a community, because they have vehicles which are cultural, symbolic and cognitive in nature for institutionalizing beliefs for posterity. Minnema (2014) also identifies culture as a pre-given constant which is seen as characterized by custom and habitual behaviour that is typical of traditional cultures of small and non-complex societies. In consonance with Opok et al. (2016) study, the spirituality of the smallholder farmer can be organized in a way

that it can function in a communal setting. Their spirituality would include a priest/priestess class, ceremony, libation, and most importantly, a spiritual dimension in how they plant, harvest, prepare and consume food. A smallholder farmers spirituality would not be separate from their ethnic identity and how their tribal identity influences their right to farming practices that are most sacred and suitable for the sustenance of the community.

Rudolf & McElchlan (2013), attempt to define food sovereignty by showing how it differs from food security which is vastly studied. They argue that food sovereignty considers the cultural, political and environmental aspects of food systems which is a major missing link to food security globally. They further illustrate that while the two terms of food sovereignty and food security are related, they differ in their approaches and results. Furthermore, they contend that food security focuses on the supply of food to communities, which ends up ignoring the power inherent in food systems, power that is expressed through food sovereignty, and not ordinarily practiced by rural communities. Desmaris (2008) and Wittman et al. (2010) elaborate how food sovereignty aims to link production to consumption by recognizing both the people and the power inherent in food systems thus affirming that food sovereignty is a grassroots movement which requires the ideas and practices of those on the ground rather than policies from the top.

According to Awolalu (1976), when discussing African traditional religion in order to distinguish it from African spirituality, the meaning changes slightly from that of African spirituality. Awolalu asserts that while Africa spirituality is found within Abrahamic religions such as Christianity and Islam and combines aspects of African traditional religion which exists as the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Africans. African spirituality is a religion which resulted from the sustained faith held by the forebearers of the present Africans, and which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians (ibid). Traditional here means indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by Africans today (ibid). Awolalu (1976), continues to emphasize that African traditional religion is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity, African traditional religion is not a fossil religion, a thing of the past of a dead religion. It is a religion practiced by living men and women (ibid). In lieu of the definition and extrapolation of African traditional religion by Awolalu (1976), there is a difference between the concepts of African spirituality and African traditional religion. In essence by the definition by Awolalu (1976) highlights African traditional religion as being a component of African spirituality. Therefore when one explores the African spiritual beliefs and practices of smallholder farmers, one would discover many elements of African traditional religion as well as elements from Christianity and Islam which were heralded by the colonial era in many parts of Africa. Sometimes these religions are practiced side by side in specific geographical locations and other times there is syncretism where a community combines various elements of different religions on demand. Awolalu (1976) definition would therefore help explain or understand the aspects of African traditional

religion discovered in the study and mentioned as African spirituality.

A review of Shiva (2016) on the process by which a disconnect arose between indigenous spiritual systems of the world and reflected in Africa as a continent and its particular spiritual systems and nature as highlighted in food sovereignty, shows that colonialism and industrialism destroyed the earth and indigenous cultures through four false assumptions. The first assumption is that humans are separate from nature and not a part of nature. In this case therefore, the smallholder farmer is assumed not to be spiritually connected in any way to the land on which they dwell, farm and sustain themselves on. The second assumption is that nature is dead matter, mere raw material for industrial exploitation and thus a tool to be used in a detached manner to get the most out of it by applying the least amount of effort. The third assumptions is that indigenous cultures are inferior and primitive, need to be "civilized" through civilizing missions of permanent colonization thus one would discover smallholder farmer who exhibit shame when utilizing African spirituality through their food systems and castigating those who apply ancestral knowledge while working on their land. The fourth assumption is that nature and cultures need improvement through manipulation and external inputs and that Green Revolution, genetically modified foods and gene editing are rooted in this false assumption (Shiva, 2016). All these assumptions when applied in the setup of western Kenya, contribute to the disconnect between African spirituality and food sovereignty among smallholder farmers and can be used to bring about their integration.

Shiva (2016) continues to affirm that many nations of the world were divided by colonialism and Africa was hugely divided by colonialism and more so, Africans were divided by gender, race, religion, class as they were colonized. However, before colonialism, humans were part of the Earth and food is the currency of life on Earth. (ibid). A review of Shiva's work shows that a food system that is at war with the Earth is also at war with our bodies. Furthermore, Shiva (2021) asserts that across the world, especially in times of the pandemic, there is a growing consciousness that the multiple energies humans are living through have their roots in an unjust, non-sustainable industrial-globalized food system and solutions to all the crises lie in creating local biodiverse, poison-free, chemical-free food systems that increase nourishment for all beings while reducing our ecological footprint and connecting it to the spirituality of the people (ibid). Shiva (2016) continues to show the spiritual dimension of food and that the food we eat can be a big contributor to the problems or solutions. She states that eating consciously and spiritually can be a big contributor to the solutions and that what humans need to keep in mind is that food is the currency of life. Shiva (2016) also states that when one is participating in destructive industrial food systems, they are participating in breaking the cycles of life. This means that through the staple food crop value chain, one needs to avoid processes that are not ecologically, environmentally and process friendly as they may also be harmful to body. . To eat in a spiritual way means to eat food that has been prepared with love. One should avoid eating anonymous foods cropped from anonymous seeds where one does not know what went into the manufacture (ibid). All beings are living, all beings are sentient. Eating is a conversation with other living beings. Anonymous foods disrupt that communication and our health and

seeds should remain sacred (ibid). Shiva's (2016) study contributes to giving the ecological dimension to food sovereignty which in essence is the nexus that is missing when it comes to utilizing African spirituality alongside food sovereignty.

1.2 Gender and African spirituality along the staple food crop value chain

Oduyoye (2001), Mwaura (2016) and Phiri (2002) have done extensive research on the spirituality of African women. Oduyoye (2001) illustrates how African women use story as a source of theology and so tell their own stories as well as study the experiences of other women including those outside of their own continent but especially those in Africa whose stories remain unwritten. The writer also elaborates that these stories are weaved together into what forms beliefs related to spiritual and cultural life within an African set up (ibid). She affirms that story telling is important to spirituality because it is a medium of communication and that stories are educational and lend meaning to events in people's lives (ibid). Phiri (2002), on the other hand observes that storytelling can be used to delve into the past to enable one to use the past to understand and affect the present differently. On the other hand, Mwaura (2016) highlights that African woman play a crucial role in the development of their communities and thus her study shows how African women bring a very special input into the spirituality of their communities in general, especially in smallholder farm households. Oduyoye, Phiri and Mwaura's studies (2001, 2002, 2016) respectively, on women and their spirituality, lends relevant information in the aspect of gender. However, it is inadequate and limited as it relates to the disaggregating and understanding gender within a community.

A review of Orbis (1975) work sets African women in their role and contexts as pertains to spirituality. He affirms that in traditional African life, women play a significant role in the spiritual activities of the society. One of the areas their role is prominent, he asserts, is in the offering of prayers for their families in particular and their communities in general. He continues to assert that in many areas in Africa, there were (and still are) women priests (priestesses) and almost everywhere in Africa the mediums (who are so important in traditional spiritual practice) are nearly always women and that those who also experience spirit possession are in most cases also women (ibid). Orbis (1975) continues to illustrate the deep significance of African women in the Spiritual heritage of their communities. He adds that traditional healing using medicinal herbs and nutritious food cultivated within the community is a spiritual profession of both men and women and it is more often under women practitioners who handle children and women in special rituals (ibid). An example of a spiritual ritual performed by women as exemplified by Ohaja (2021) and Orbis (1975) is shown in menstruation which was intimately linked with the passing on of life. He also shows that many Africans perform spiritual ceremonies during rites of passage and many of these rituals are performed by women (ibid). Orbis (1975), gives an example of how in Ghana, the Ashanti mother of a concerned child prays that she may grow to full maturity and bear children on the onset of menstruation which is a rite of passage. This, he continues, is the wish and spiritual responsibility of every mother for her children during every stage of rites of passage (ibid). A prayer offered by a mother would be

accompanied by libation of wine and drink from cultivated crop from the families farm and with an invocation that said, *"God upon whom men lean and do not fall, receive this wine and drink. Earth Goddess, whose day of worship is a Thursday, receive this wine and drink. Spirit of our ancestors, receive this wine and drink. This girl child whom God has given me today, the Bara state has come upon her, Do not come and take her away and do not permit her to menstruate only to die."* (Gyekye, 1987)

A review of Mbiti (2016) illustrates that in many parts of Africa, it does not always rain enough and lack of rain is seen as a spiritual sign of great significance requiring petitions, prayers, libations and rituals. Rainmaking is a revered calling with a great significance for smallholder farmers. Rainmakers are therefore important members of the community and many of these rain makers are women (ibid). According to Mbiti (2016), rainmaking ceremonies are performed, a role fulfilled by women, at which sacrifices, offerings and prayers are made to God, beseeching him to give more rain or to let it rain. Women's role was to pray to God to beseech him for rain and their prayers would be for the welfare of the people and animals at large since all depended on water along the staple food crop value chain (ibid). Mbiti (2016) also highlights the spiritual role of African women in enhancing food sovereignty in their communities through their spiritual beliefs and practices which includes mediation for their land and the community through prayers and performing rituals as rainmakers. It is therefore clear that women participate in the spiritual rites of passage of their societies and made their own contributions for the welfare of their lives, their families and of society at large through the offerings of prayers and libations. According to Mbiti (2016), the prayers are small windows that open into the spirituality of women which indeed is the spirituality of all human beings. As women share with God in the great mysteries of passion on life, so they share in giving human life a spiritual orientation (ibid). Most importantly, role of women in integrating African spirituality in food sovereignty is enhanced by combining leadership in the spiritual arena with leadership in community governance especially when it comes to food sovereignty.

Mwaura (2016) also integrates women's spirituality with their socio-economic activities of which food sovereignty is an aspect. She says that women's involvement in the socio-economic activities alongside the spiritual ones is a quest for liberation from all that dehumanizes them and quotes the scripture as a mandate that is derived from the Gospel (Luke 4:16-20). She continues to say that even though gender in African spirituality is a quest for liberation, some scholars observe that approaches to liberation which resonate with earlier development models in the 1960s and 1970s remain welfare-oriented meeting practical gender needs but not strategically addressing the root causes of women's vulnerability and marginalization in present day context (ibid). Mwaura (2016) further explains that women's experiences of injustices arise from a web of interconnected factors such as that addressing one area. For example, gaining education does not overcome the fundamental and inherent vulnerability faced by women because of their gender. Mwaura's study gives a glimpse on contexts of vulnerabilities for women that might affect how they apply African spirituality in food sovereignty. A woman might be educated but still be vulnerable as she explores farming, even though she has a right to sustainable farming systems as a

woman. She may not be able to acquire land by virtue of being female despite her education or lack thereof. Mwaura (2016) lends a lens for comparison on the factors that causes the lack of integration between food sovereignty and African spirituality by women despite having a rich spiritual heritage from the past.

A review of gender and spirituality would not be complete without addressing the issue of ownership and acquisition of land by gender. There would be no staple food crop value chain without ownership of land, neither would there be any spirituality without a context which is earth. The staple food crop value chain begins at the preparation of land and there would be no land preparation without the ownership or acquisition of land. Kireu (2016) renders that in African spirituality, land is sacred and is God given and there is no separation between the earth, the rites and rituals performed on it as well as the living and the ancestral spirits. All were held in continuity, flowing and being interdependent. A review of Kireu (2016) suggests that when it comes to women and land, the issue of vulnerability is apparent in post-colonial times. Kireu therefore shows that the discrimination as concerns land trickles down to food sovereignty in how and if women are able to determine their food sovereignty. According to Kireu (2016) discrimination and powerlessness as concerns food sovereignty begun with changes during the post-colonial period and she gives an example of the Maasai of Kenya. Kireu (2016) also emphasizes that in precolonial era, the Maasai never owned land as it was considered as a gift from God. She continues to highlight that the Maasai people thus lived on and used the land without ownership (ibid). Furthermore, men were the heads of the household (in the sense that they led, although women were the ones who dealt with 'real' issues) (ibid). The studies of Agarwal (2003), and Platue and Baland, (2001) also illustrate that the biasness in land inheritance rights favour male relatives, leaving both widows and daughters at a disadvantage. Kireu (2016) further extrapolates that when the Government of Kenya embarked on land distribution programs, it was the men who were given land and most of the land distributed was not fertile. Initially as the barren land was divided, women were not permitted to participate in any discussions on land issues (ibid). Miller et al. (2011) illustrates that inheritance was about making sure that the male heir maintains the family name and secures ownership and thus further passing the land to his own sons. Because of further sub-divisions of infertile land, women became more vulnerable and had to walk far to fetch water to take care of their families and their animals (ibid). The women thus continued to become more marginalized, disconnected from the land and more vulnerable as society members but despite this, it was the women who kept in touch with their culture through informal educations that involved story-telling and being taught about their culture because formal education was not esteemed for the girl child (ibid). Kireu (2016) highlights that after informal school, young girls would become integrated to their societies and most would get married and the disconnection with the land despite the oral tradition that they would receive, would continue from one generation to another. Kireu (2016), shows that the disconnect between gender, spirituality and food sovereignty became prominent on the onset of colonization and lends valuable information in understanding how land distribution affects food sovereignty and a possible lack of integration of African spirituality in utilization of land as expressed by the women in the community further divides the community from attaining food

sovereignty. African spirituality and food sovereignty therefore heavily requires the participation of women through the staple food value chain for greater success .

Howard (2003), on the other hand goes back to show that the link between women, spirituality and the seed is an ancient one. She further illustrates how women's link to seed is through food, health, culture, ecology, spirituality and social relationships. She highlights that in their roles as seed custodians, plant breeders, farmers, herbalists and mothers, African women's daily work involves an intimate involvement and knowledge of plants and further states that women are the unacknowledged and unseen experts on seed and on both domesticated and wild biodiversity (ibid). Howard (2003) lends an integrated perspective of African women's spirituality and their food sovereignty because women from ancient times are connected to their seeds. Her study is integral to the aspect of Gender in food sovereignty and African spirituality.

Pionetti (2012) affirms the role of women in African spirituality and food sovereignty by stating that in Africa, as in other regions of the world, women are responsible for most of the harvesting and post-harvesting activities and therefore save, select and breed seed. For them, farming and breeding are one and the same activity as the many challenges they face require not only knowledge but also the ability to innovate and apply their spirituality (ibid). The study of Kergna et al. (2010) among smallholder livestock farmers in Mali, West Africa and the study by Njuki & Mburu in ILRI (2013) among the East African countries also illustrate that women were more likely to be considered the owners of small livestock and to have a say in the disposal and sale of these and their products, and in the use of income accrued from the sales as compared to larger livestock. The life-giving function of women is thus embedded in a sophisticated knowledge system. Pionetti (2012) also states that as seed custodians, women are often responsible for rituals around key moments in the crop cycle and act of celebrating these life cycles gives meaning and importance. Pionetti (2012) study lends a deeper understanding on the spiritual role those African women play in food sovereignty.

Furthermore, Pionetti (2012) realized that for the four decades of research and action she had engaged in, most farmers of the world are women who grow food as nourishment, not for commodities and that they grow food for health, not disease. Through wars and famines, through floods and droughts, she asserts that women keep alive the spiritual memory of their seeds and foods and that women have the potential to lead the transition to regenerate the earth, her biodiversity, health and nutrition (ibid). Pionetti (2012) also highlighted the role of women in bringing about food sovereignty while utilizing African spirituality because of their important role as custodians of nourishment among farming households.

1.3 African spirituality along the staple food crop value chain

Gumo et al. (2012) shows how African spirituality is practiced along the staple food value chain by emphasizing that African spirituality has been enhanced through the environment where humanity worshiped and venerated everything under the earth, on earth, between the earth and heavens and in the heavens above. Bayers (2017) also states that traditional African and

religious belief systems were practiced concurrently during planting whereas Fisher et al. (2009) elaborated that African spirituality is linked to traditional agriculture which highlights old practices through which humans have been interacting with nature and managing ecosystem services. Consequently, various methods to restrict the utilization of certain natural resources are employed as a way of conserving the environment and continuing the relationship between the African person and their environment which is an ecological perspective and thus lends an ecological angle to this study. The smallholder farmers households are part and parcel of their environment even as they practice African spirituality.

Most importantly, Mbiti (1969) supports the ecological view by stating that Africans exercise their spirituality in all of their daily activities as he notes that Africans are notoriously religious. Wherever the African is, there is spirituality and he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party, or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university (ibid). Spirituality deeply permeates society that it is further carried into the political realm where if an African is a politician, he takes it to the House of Parliament where policies are made (ibid). Mbiti (1969) is relevant in bringing the ecological angle to the study as well as illuminating how spirituality is present when policies are made concerning the governing and utilization of land as an aspect that brings about the nexus between African spirituality and food sovereignty.

Gumo et al. (2012) continues to set the ecological dimension by saying that humankind, according to African thought and belief, is not an isolated creature. Humanity is only part of the universe which is full of animals, plants and inanimate objects, and is not isolated and all these components are relayed to each other in various ways since they are dependent on the supreme God for their appearance and continued existence (ibid). Gumo et al. (2012) further highlights that African philosophy on resource utilization and environment protection is spiritually based and thus major conservation efforts and control of resources are influenced by spirituality. The African spiritual worldviews create respect to nature, reverence of hills, forests, animals and rivers and this practice is still held by some African communities, especially among the Luhya of Kenya who use their spirituality for example to conserve nature and especially forests (ibid). The author contributes to the perspective of ecology as an aspect of food sovereignty and how a smallholder farmer integrates African spirituality in their farming systems.

Galli (1973) asserts that among most of our African people, there exist strong beliefs, fears and respect for the spirits of the ancestors. Animals are used for ritual sacrifices to appease the ancestors and deceased spirits who guard the destiny of the living (ibid). The use of animals for spiritual rituals and sacrifices is part of the nexus between African spirituality and food sovereignty. Galli (1973) gives the example of the Nguni of South Africa who sacrifice a goat and consume it on the arrival of a new baby (ibid), part of an illustration of integrating African spirituality and food sovereignty. He highlights that if the ritual goat sacrifice was omitted, the anger and punishment of the ancestors would be apparent by their 'burning' the child and the consequent failure of the child to grow and thrive (ibid). To restore equilibrium would then call for elaborate rituals, animal sacrifices and services of

traditional practitioners and spiritual elders (ibid). Galli (1973) further shows how African spiritual beliefs concerning food are handed down through the ages and are passed from one generation to another and these beliefs transcend education or social status. Moreover, Shazali et al. (2013) illustrates that the beliefs concerning food can occur and be transferred spontaneously without intent thus with little encouragement and motivation from the surrounding, from the known to the unknown as community members get engulfed in the festivities and spiritual practices that accompany the practices. Galli (1973) also offers practical examples of how African spirituality and food sovereignty are intertwined in indigenous societies in Africa and therefore contribute towards a worldview of practical examples.

Mwale and Chita (2015) also reiterate concerning the practice of African spirituality along the staple food crop value chain that harvest festivals in which the gods and ancestors are thanked for the harvest are an essential aspect of African tradition. Therefore, the sacrament of the first fruits is an essential rite in a complex series of other rites such as birth, childhood, puberty, adulthood, death, and rebirth (ibid). The crops undergo the same process of regeneration, the fruits of the field ripen each year and each year the people protect themselves against danger (ibid). Therefore, whatever threatens this process is given a religious interpretation and needs a spiritual response (ibid).

According to Mbiti (1987), African people have so many spiritual associations with food, some of which are linked with the concepts of God, such as the belief that he has absolute power over the universe and the production of food. Studies by Riang'a et al. (2017), Chakona et al. (2019) and Mbogoh et al. (2019) also assert that food beliefs and practices are practiced among other ethnic groups in sub-saharan Africa. According to Castagnetti et al. (2021), the offering of crops completes a harvest cycle by recognizing and returning the energy of life (in the form of food) to its spiritual source. African spirituality along the staple food crop value chain is thus seen where animals and plants which constitute human food are used in rituals and sacrifices Mbiti (1987). Sibanda (1997) also notes that Africans have spiritual bodies and objects which are used for various contextual practices. The spiritual significance of a particular animal or plant may differ from one community to another as shown by Gumo (1993) who illustrates the example of communities who undertake spiritual practices often binding oaths or purification rites, which involves the use of certain animals. Hens and cocks may be used as sacrifices to God or mediators between God and humanity, including ancestors while burnt offerings are widely considered to be essential too (ibid). This is something similar to what [Kimmerer \(2013\)](#) calls "ceremonies of practical reverence," powerfully pragmatic "acts of reverence," in which manifest and material action has seemingly unmanifest and immaterial effects. Gumo (1993) highlights that there are also myths which tell how domestic animals originated at the same time or in the same way as man himself. Cattle, sheep and goats sourced for sacrificial and other spiritual purposes are examples found in most Kenyan communities (ibid). On the other hand, Mbiti (1987) describes how many people have sacred attitude toward their animals and example of the Nandi, Pokot, Samburu and Maasai who pray everyday to God for the safety and prosperity of their cattle (ibid). Based on this review of Mbiti (1987) and Gumo (1993), it is evident that there is a sacred relationship between the

environment, animals and food. Christianity is also interconnected with the farming beliefs and practices in (2 Corinthians 9:6-8; Hebrews 13:16) where brethren are reminded to sow generously in order to reap generously in time of need.

According to Bordet (2015), when someone is unwillingly hungry or malnourished, there is not much room for spirituality because it essentially means that the human and the environment are disconnected. There is no oneness or reverence with the environment if food is scarce and it means that spirituality is absent (ibid). Martinez & Pascuel (2013) also state that rural household members adhere to different food beliefs, with some of the rejected foods being nutritious foods but for a limited time. Bordet (2015) also continues to highlight that lack of food makes the body to hurt and the mind to be obsessed with the lack of food and thus the soul thus has no room to thrive. She highlights that since the body and soul are one, only heroes or extraordinary characters can develop a beautiful spiritual life when lacking adequate food, or not having access to food (ibid). Furthermore, she explains that hunger is a burden imposed on the poorest of poor which in turn defeats the purpose of spiritual enhancement (Bordet 2015). Bordet's article augments the premise that without African spirituality practiced within the context of food sovereignty, there would be no food security for smallholder farming nations. Bordet (2015) illustrates that the four dimensions of food security which are availability, access, stability and utilization have in themselves a spiritual dimension. She further emphasizes that food must be available, in sufficient quality and quantity for all in the area one lives and that food production and marketing must be practiced in a spiritual manner; and that smallholder farmers and traders have a responsibility in this. (ibid). In addition to this, Bordet (2015) points out that food must be accessible; that is affordable at a reasonable price, as a spiritual practice. Food that is grown by smallholder farmers and cooked with attention and love can contribute to the wellness of the body and soul and moreover, sharing a meal with the family and community is a righteous act and affirms the sacred nature of food (ibid). Bordet (2015) highlights that the spiritual dimension of food security derives from the commitment of those who are healthy and food secure to help the hungry in becoming food secure, and more generally to change the course of strongly unequal social organizations, political systems and ill-conceived policies that tolerate abject forms of poverty. To achieve this entails the application of spiritual values and forms of action aimed at changing the state of things (ibid). The review of Bordet (2015) enhances the premise that to realize food security among smallholder farm households, there needs to be a nexus between African spirituality and food sovereignty.

1.4 The relationship between African spiritual beliefs and food sovereignty practices of smallholder farmers

A review of Nkosi (2016), shows that the nexus between African spirituality and food sovereignty is an ecological one that begins at land ownership. Food sovereignty begins with land ownership or acquisition and the consequent utility of the land in ways that are culturally, spiritually and ecologically sound. He expands his thesis on Spirituality, Land and Land Reforms in South Africa by discussing that while land is a birthright of every African indigenous person, it has a communal dimension whereby all members of the community are expected to share its resources,

especially in the rural areas, under some form of traditional authority. According to Nkosi (2016), it is the general belief of African people that land is a gift from God and from the ancestors and that communities are given land by God through their lineage to be good stewards of Gods resources. Being a good custodian thus includes conserving the land and utilizing it to feed the community in sustainable ways (ibid). This is in line with studies by Howes & Chambers (1980) as well as Pulido & Bocco (2003) who illustrate that various activities were practiced towards protecting natural resources among them animals, water, plants, trees and human health. Nkosi (2016) continues to give examples of the importance of land in the African spirituality context, one which includes how in many African families, the umbilical cord of a new born baby is buried, and in other communities how when a boy is circumcised, the foreskin and blood is also buried. The sacredness of land in Africa is linked further to the fact that the ancestors are buried in it and without land there would not be a home for a dead body while in some communities, when someone died, one would not be allowed to touch the soil with a hoe, to plough or till the land until that person is buried (ibid). Nkosi (2016), further emphasizes that in African spirituality, land is valued as a resource of livelihood since the land produces food and water which gives life to all living things. During the hunting and gathering times, when people went looking for herbs, he illustrates how African people would perform rituals using incense to request their ancestors to give blessings in their foray and pray before the land was dug (ibid). Nkosi (2016) furthermore describes that the custom of making or asking for rain through the help of the ancestors and God still features strongly in some communities and that a number of communities also continue to make sacrifices before they eat from the year's harvest to thank God and their ancestors. Nkosi (2016) is integral to this present study because it shows how land is a physical resource with a spiritual significance and thus everything that is done on the land has an effect on a smallholder farmers livelihoods.

According to Karyongi (2016) and Mbunda (2017), one of the greatest challenges to utilizing African spirituality in the context of food sovereignty is the dissociation with the land which is the genesis of every community and is where the story of every family member ends. He gives the example of the Maasai of Tanzania who display that the connection with the land is integral because land is the basis for livelihood given that the earth provides grass, other plants and water for their livestock and this is part of the food system where food sovereignty is practiced. He asserts also that the earth is also where crops are grown, and wood fuel for food preparation is derived from and that the earth also provides sacred plants like *oreteti* which are used for meetings, rituals and medicine (ibid). Karyongi (2016) and Mbunda (2017) is integral to the study in showing how linking the spiritual significance of the land and smallholder farm households brings about food sovereignty.

On the other hand Hambira (2016) illustrates that food is one of the most basic human needs and the state of food security has to be ensured before one turns to any activity in life because this was the case in the ancient world and remains so in contemporary times. He further emphasizes that concern with food and the protection of its sources permeates all human thought and activity (ibid). He gives an example of Christianity where food was very central to the spiritual formation and direction of the spiritual

community. (ibid). The Passover meal (Exodus Chapter 12:1-11- NIV Bible) is given as an example and the Christian celebration of the Eucharist (Luke Chapter 22:7-8- NIV Bible) too which are at the very heart of anyone who practices Judeo-Christian faiths (ibid). Whatever therefore threatens the people's source of livelihood, whatever threatens their source of food threatens their very existence threatens them not only socially, economically and morally, but also spiritually and in other words, it shapes either indirectly or directly their view of God (ibid).(rephrase) Hambira (2016) contributes to this study in enhancing the thesis that the nexus of African spirituality and food sovereignty brings about food security.

Shiva (2021) concludes the review on the relationship between African spirituality and food sovereignty by expanding on the relationship that humans have with food where she highlights that beyond the connection that humans have with food they are generally connected to nature. She asserts that the forests are sources of water and the storehouses of a biodiversity that can teach us the lessons of democracy, pointing towards leaving space for others while drawing sustenance from the common web of life (ibid). She illustrates how the poet Tagore saw unity with nature as the highest stage of human evolution. In his essay "Tapovan" (Forest of Purity), Tagore writes:

"Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, and material in the forest, not the city. India's best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers and lakes, away from the crowds. The peace of the forest has helped the intellectual evolution of man. The culture of the forest has fueled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life, which are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in sight and sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in diversity, of democratic pluralism, thus became the principle of Indian civilization." (ibid).

Through much of Shiva (2021), we see that it is this unity in diversity that is the basis of both ecological sustainability and democracy and that diversity without unity becomes the source of conflict and contest. She highlights that unity without diversity becomes the ground for external control and this is true of both nature and culture and gives the example of the forest which is a unity in its diversity, and that we are united with nature through our relationship with the forest (ibid). Shiva (2021) sheds light into the relationship between the smallholder farmers, the land and their spirituality as one that has several aspects and yet united as one, also borrowing from the systems theory that has been used to conceptualize this present study.

Shiva (2016) augments the interrelation between the smallholder farm household,, the food they grow and the environment therein by showing that a reverence for food and the way food is eaten, and the food that one eats is important and matters greatly because food makes us who we are, physically, culturally and spiritually. By championing greater food sovereignty, sustainability and seed rights for local farmers around the world, Shiva (2016) asserts that food and culture are the currency of life and that you cannot have one without spiritualization.

According to Shiva (2021), food sovereignty is defined as not only sovereignty over food but also sovereignty over one's

life, livelihood and health and that human beings are interconnected; therefore, food sovereignty is an ecological process of co-creation with other lifeforms that begins with seed sovereignty: saving and using living seeds as well as involving care for the land and soil. She asserts that we cannot have food sovereignty if we do not feed the soil organisms and that food sovereignty is based on organic farming and avoiding chemicals and poisons while also including knowledge sovereignty, economic sovereignty and political sovereignty in one's food sovereignty(ibid). Shiva (2021) shows that the seed is the source of life, the source of food and that to protect food freedom, one must protect seed freedom.

In Shiva (2021), she explains how she not only emphasizes advocacy that enabled the masses to reconnect with the sacredness of seeds and consequent food, but she also enforces advocacy that enables the community to reclaim seeds that were owned by the community and to resist seeds that patented and driven by capitalist enterprise at the expense of ecologically sound seed banks. The advocacy and creation of seed banks snowballed into creating opportunities for farmers to grow more nutritious crops and also have climate-resistant seeds to deal with the environment where they are prone to climate change and climate disasters(ibid). Shiva (2021) continues to highlight how she helped write laws that recognize that plants, animals and seeds are not human inventions as well as doing advocacy work which involves fighting cases on biopiracy, the patenting of biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. In addition, Shiva (2021) through participatory research, showed that when one intensifies biodiversity instead of chemicals, and measure nutrition per acre instead of yield per acre, they can grow enough nutrition for two times the world population. From Shiva's study, it is pertinent that there is need for all stakeholders along the staple food crop value chain (farmers, buyers, sellers, processors, government agencies, religious organizations and NGOs) and all aspects of agency ought to collaborate and ensure that the nexus between African spirituality and food sovereignty can be used to achieve food security among smallholder farm households .

1.5 Discussion and conclusion

A smallholder farmers spirituality and culture can be evaluated based on how their lives and community in general is impacted and they should be venerated because of their role as the preservers of spiritual wisdom and knowledge. For a community to be sovereign in its food systems, it has to consider contextual aspects that include traditional, religious, cultural, symbolic, political and environmental aspects. The way to achieve food security is through food sovereignty which highlights smallholder farmers deciding and producing their own food through organizing themselves and making decisions towards the kind of activities to engage including what and how to conserve seeds, plant, harvest and consume. This gives them an integrated right to food approach to achieving community food sovereignty.

Gender and food are linked when one understands the power and control in the food system Ghale et. al (2018). Hunger is disempowering and men and women's rights put food sovereignty on the agenda. The major challenges that women face in achieving food sovereignty include denied land allocation rights, high input and food prices, contamination of food during planting, post-harvest handling and agroprocessing, and changes in the landscape through deforestation and demarcation. Linking food production

to consumption and presenting food as sacred establishes a means of handling these challenges.

For African people, spirituality focuses on preservation of the well being of the human and the promotion of what enhances life while on earth. This requires a healthy and natural environment. Animals, forests, tree species, sacred forests, lakes and mountains all served to remind indigenous communities of their need to respect their environment for sustainability. Good weather meant that a community was in harmony with nature while drought, famine or floods showed that there was disharmony. Spirituality permeates and is integrated in the daily life of an African including how he plants, harvests, processes, cooks and eats his food. Since spirituality permeates all aspects of an African life, the practices to protect special areas, species and to ensure the sustainable use of land and water finds expression in African spiritual rituals and practices. These practices are pertinent for integrating African spirituality and food sovereignty for a possible continual improvement of the food security situation of smallholder farmers in sub Saharan Africa.

In Kenya, agriculture is the backbone of the economy. 61.1% of Kenyans live in rural areas engaging in agriculture (World Bank 2013). Kenya is dependent on agriculture with peasant men and women being active advocates of food sovereignty. Peasant farmers have actively been pulling down cash crops like coffee trees and instead planting organic food crops (Brownhill, 2008). By actively working towards restoring the countries soils and agrosystems, agroecology is becoming a reliable way to achieving food sovereignty. Further efforts should also be made by the agricultural sector to accelerate the economic growth through strategic programs like crop production management, providing quality seeds, and effective fertilizers to boost productivity. Mainstreaming outreach programs while targeting age and gender equitably, and highlighting the role of African spirituality and food sovereignty should also be undertaken at the community grassroots level. In Kenya, this can be undertaken by County agriculture departments at the ward level in order to attain better community food and nutrition security and can be a model that can be implemented at the National level for a wholesome food and nutrition security for all.

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