

**FOOD AND AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY: A CASE OF MILLET IN LANGO  
SOCIETY OF NORTHERN UGANDA**

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## **DECLARATION**

I TINO HEDDIE, hereby declare to the best of my knowledge that, this dissertation entitled “Food and African Spirituality: A Case of Millet in Lango Society of Northern Uganda.” is my original work and has not been presented to any institution for the award of a degree, diploma or any other qualification.

**Signature:** .....**Date :**.....

**APPROVAL**

We certify that, TINO HEDDIE has carried out research and written the dissertation entitled “Food and African Spirituality: A Case of Millet in Lango Society of Northern Uganda.” This dissertation has been submitted with our approval as University Supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research work to my husband Otim Samuel who has inspired my progress with his love and full support, taking care of all family affairs while I devoted time writing my work. Thank you sincerely for your faith to me. This book is also dedicated to my children Tracy Akao Otim and Elizabeth Abonyo- Otim, Peace Kerry -Otim, Jordan Jesse Otim, and Naney Apio who endured all the hardship of limited support for the basic family needs and missed my parental love during my study period.

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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

NPA-	National Planning Authority
NDP-	National Development Plan
SDG-	Sustainable Development Goals
NCDC-	National Curriculum Development Centre
NARO-	National Research Agricultural Organization
LRA-	Lords Resistant Army
CMS-	Church Missionary Society
UNESCO-	United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I discuss food and African (spi)rituality with focus on millet in the Lango society of Northern Uganda. The objectives included to: describe the religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used; explore ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance and explain how millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people. The study adopted a qualitative approach and artefacts were descriptively discussed. Interviews, Focus group discussion and observation methods with their respective tools were used to collect data from a sample of fifty (50) respondents constituted by traditional healers, traditional leaders, elderly, community members and religious leaders. Findings indicated that; the people of Lango believe in life after death and a spiritual authority or power called *Jok* which is responsible for human welfare. They have rituals for rain-making, Child cleansing, healing with their related ceremonies and performed by elderly people. Many of these rituals are conducted using millet either directly or mixed with other herbs. Upholding such rituals can promote production of millet and other foods thus mitigating famine. This practice has been negatively influenced by modernity and Christianity. It is recommended that: ordinances should be enacted to promote food production by all households; traditional practices that have positive influence on people's livelihood should be upheld and it should be permissible to practice both Christianity and traditional religions; a hybrid approach of mechanization should be used to boost millet production; and a relevant ecological theology and tree planting initiatives need to be developed to conserve the environment.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

In most traditions world over, food is renowned and treasured in most ritualistic practices. These practices aim at linking the living with the living dead by evoking the spirits of the great ancestors. Such spirits are often believed to respond to people's concerns through the elders. The elders offer some food sacrifice to appease them before they present their voices which are believed to be responded to. Food and spirituality are a strong hold of a good culture in which peace and unity prevails. 'Food' in my opinion is a social phenomenon, a binding factor for people with similar beliefs. It is thus eminent that various foods are treasured by different traditions in upholding their spiritual wellbeing. Food cultures vary from one group to another basing on their ethnicity and can potentially impact on the sustenance and production levels of such treasured food. Just as Matooke is treasured among the Bantu, cassava is a staple food of most of the tribes in west Nile. Although these foods may not have a stringent cultural attachment, their availability and production rate portrays the wellbeing of people in those societies that treasure them. It is worth noting that there are foods in all societies that are of a specific cultural importance. For instance, this study encompasses two major aspects; 'food and spirituality' with particular attention to the people of Lango. How Lango people use food in traditional practices is best understood in their context and connects them to the spiritual being. Among such foods treasured by the people of Lango is millet. The study thus focused on explaining the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the Lango people of Northern Uganda. It unveiled the various traditional and spiritual practices of the Lango people in which food is used. Foods themselves can be seen to convey a range of cultural meanings depending on the social context (Murcott, 1982). This Chapter comprises of introduction to the study,

background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, conceptual frame work, definition of key terms, and Scope of the study.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

The background is viewed in the two perspectives of historical background and conceptual framework.

### **1.2.1 Historical Background**

The Lango are the Nilo-Hamites group of people of the Ateker clan comprising the Karamojong, Kumam, Iteso and the Lango, who came from Ethiopia between 1600AD and 1700AD (Oruru, 2020). Although the Lango people belong to the Nilo Hamites group, they happen to speak Luo due to loss of their original language of the Ateker clan. They journeyed from Abyssinia in Ethiopia to the districts of Lira, Apac, Otuke, Alebtong, Amolatar, Dokolo, Kole, Oyam and Kwania (Arao, 2014 and Amone, 2014).

Food beliefs are among the oldest and the most deep-rooted aspects of all cultures across, which define their identity. Rabikowska. M., ed. (2010) expresses that food in its sensual dimension serves as vehicle for the recreation of the abstract meaning of home through materially involved activities. Such activities help to build a sense of belonging and togetherness for the members.

The food choices made by people, either as individuals or as a group can reveal an abundant amount of information about them; their views, passions, assumptions and ideologies. Food choices tell stories of communities, tribes, families, the adaptation, resistance, changes over time, and personal as well as peer identity (Shah 2018). For instance, consuming and preparing ‘polish food’ is an act of ritualizing belonging and also delineating the difference between

‘Poles’ and ‘others’ and it is an act of both acceptance and estrangement (Rabikowska. M., ed., 2010). The kind of food eaten in every society, as well as the idea linked between them, accrues from people’s cultural beliefs (Johnston and Cappeliez 2013).

The wider belief about food presents people’s identity in that it is one of the most important parts for the existence of human being or any other living organism; in order to obtain good health, accomplish one’s job and duties, recover from illness and more so to satisfy one’s cultural belief (Kapur 2018). Furthermore, the notion of food is guided by people’s beliefs and cultural transmission. The different societal settings identify by the type of food that people of a given place eat (Pliner and Salvy 2006). For instance, while certain foods are delicacies in some societies, such foods may not be so in other societies, it may be a taboo for others (Atungbou 2020). According to Atungbou, food such as fish, crab, prawn, snail and tortoise are eaten among the Zembe community of North Eastern India. This is contrary to practices in certain areas where tortoise and snails are not eaten because of a taboo.

The beliefs about food have spanned ages of the cultures of people. The Medieval age in Europe present their culture in a variety of foods and ingredients, in such a way that a combination of foods that they eat, whatever way they cook or even eat, does not matter, as long as it represents their belief. According to the Medieval age, you are what you eat, it matters not how you eat it or how you cook it as long as it represents you and your culture (Sibal 2018). The Medieval age believed in how food benefitted them. They identified themselves by the food that cured them from physical and spiritual ailments, and as such foods like bread was food for their strength, vigor and considered it as a source of refreshment of the brain, consequently representing their identity (Michopoulou and Jauniškis 2020). In the similar way, it was believed that food acquired from hunting was believed to provide people of the Medieval age with spiritual satisfaction of feeling self-supporting (Michopoulou and Jauniškis 2020).

In the Hopi Land, the people of the high desert of Northern Arizona practice contemporary food production basing on dry farming (Wall and Masayesva 2004). Accordingly, the farmers rely strictly on precipitation and runoff water, presenting a belief in aspects of a unique relationship between an ancient agricultural practice and the culture that it sustains. This practice of agriculture has kept the Hopi culture for nearly a thousand years. Besides, the people of the high desert of Northern Arizona, nearly enter into every aspect of traditional Hopi life contributing to values development because they share and pass on tradition in connection with the great mystery (Wall and Masayesva, 2004). In the same way Rabikowska (2010) explains that, the regular implication of meaning in certain recurrent practices services as a frame of self-identification, rooted in a memory of a context where those practices were enabled.

In the Central and Eastern Asia, Europe, China, India, and some parts of Africa since ancient times Millet is one of the first cultivated crops and has been a staple food ingredient (Amadou et al., 2011). It has been a prized crop in India and a staple diet for nearly one third of the world's population (Ashoka, Gangaiah, and Sunitha 2020). Studies have investigated that Millet is a source of food (Hrideek and Nampoothiri, 2017). Accordingly, millet has high nutritive value and ability to endure tense conditions like drought. It has been proved to be part of the human cultural food from time immemorial. The belief in the power of food in human behavior is attached to millet by Africans more than any other society (Hrideek and Nampoothiri 2017). Archaeologists observe that Africans were well known for using millet in many of their numerous food progressions in rituals.

Millet is an ancient grain that originates in Asia or Africa, and is an important staple food in Africa. The most popular varieties in Africa are the Pearl Millet and Finger Millet. The African finger millet, is one of the most nutritious of all the world's major cereal crops (Walker, 1961). It is high in starch and its proteins are more easily digested compared to wheat

protein. Finger millet also has one of the highest iron contents of any grain. Millet is multipurpose and is used in various ways across the continent. In West Africa, the main food dishes from pearl millet are two, which is a thick porridge across the French-speaking coast of West Africa, the pilaf-style millet is more popular (Serna, 1995).

In Uganda, specialists of rituals could add herbal medicines to food and perform prayers among the ancient Lango tribe. The ancestors are believed to have been fed by the blood of the sacrificed animal, the smoke of fire and the remnants of meat left around and outside the homestead. They also believe in burning and streaming of blood. Food rituals contribute to a creation of a habitual and habitable space of a new home where ‘normal’ life is to unfold (Rabikowska, 2010 p. 35). According to the Lango people, the burning and streaming of blood are believed to wash away evil (O’Byrne 2015). Washing away evil in this perspective bring a person to normal life free from possession. This is similar to the Gishu of Uganda’s Mt Elgon area, who traditionally grow a few food crops such as plantains and millet. These crops may be produced heavily for different purposes including traditional rituals (Racaud 2017).

In rural Eastern Uganda, the main traditional foods consist of sweet potatoes, cassava, millet, sorghum, and maize flour (posho). Besides, their accompanying dishes are groundnut paste, beans, vegetables, tomatoes, simsim, amaranthus and cucumbers. Since time immemorial, the people of Eastern Uganda consider these traditional foods as symbols of their wellbeing in terms of making happiness and health of both the living and the ancestors. Some communities carry out rituals while preparing these foods and while eating they believe that their ancestors are eating together with them a sign of kinship, community wellbeing and could cement friendships. Traditional foods symbolized their ancestor's wellbeing.

While in Lango, vegetables such as malakwang (Amaranthus) and ‘boyo’ sauce was traditionally cooked by women when men could go hunting for wild animals for meat. As a

result, it was commonly thought of as a sauce that could be prepared by women but that idea has changed. Now the sauce is believed to bring good luck in marriage, so it's often served at weddings throughout Northern Uganda (Tumuhe et al. 2020), and this has made most married women prepare greens served with millet bread *kwon kal* (food) as side dish for their married partners.

It can also be noted that, even in the biblical point of view, food was an essential item as explained in Exodus 11-12 about the Passover meal that the Israelites held in Egypt. It was unique in that they were to sprinkle the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and eat it in a rapid manner. Similarly, an Orthodox Jewish family was expected to eat up as much as possible all the foods in their house and it was not to be processed or packaged for the Passover. This was to remove all the leaven from the house where any fermented grain product, appetizer dough, breads, cakes, cookies, yeast, (baking soda and baking powder) were removed from the house as explained in Exodus 11-12. Boiled eggs which symbolized the suffering and oppression in Egypt where an egg could become hard, like the tolerance of Israelites. There was also roasted shank bone of lamb that reminded them of blood sacrifice that they were to make to save their lives. Similarly, bitter herbs that reminded them of being servants to slavery were also used. Greens symbolized the coming of Spring which brings hope and water reminds them of the tears they cried in Egypt. Hoarsest - nut, apple, cinnamon, wine mixture which has the appearance of straw were symbols of remembrance of the mortar used to build the Treasure Cities for Pharaoh.

It has also been noted in Leviticus 11-12 and in Deuteronomy 14 where Jesus Christ told Moses and Aron about the animals, birds and insects which could be eaten. For instance, those with divided hooves and able to chew the cud were allowed to be eaten while those that chew the cud and have cloven hooves such as the hare, even the swine which has cloven hoof but does

not chew the cud were regarded unclean and not supposed to be eaten. In this piece of work, it can be discovered that some cultures prohibit some foods eaten by another culture as delicacies. For example, some ethnic groups in Western Uganda like Banyankole people do not eat fish. Failure to abide by the above would often result in spousal annoyance and unhappy children.

### **1.2.2 Conceptual Background**

The strategic objectives of National Development Plan III (NDPIII) focus on various aspects such as value addition, strengthening private sector, enhancing the productivity and social wellbeing of the population among others. (NPA, 2020). The social wellbeing of the population is dependent on many factors ranging from natural and human religious and families to national level. Being the backbone of Uganda, most families in Uganda heavily rely on agriculture for their wellbeing. Wellbeing is more concerned with healthy living which is an aspect of good feeding. Good feeding can be perceived in many ways such as spiritual, social, traditional/ritualistic among others.

More so, NDP III works in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially goals one to three. Sustainable Developments Goals one to three focus on; ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, ending hunger, achieve food security, improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, ensuring healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages respectively. People are defined as healthy as to what they eat. For instance, Igbo tribes use kolanut to accept any visitor, serve it as kola during any igbo ceremony or occasion, without which the Igbo ceremony is incomplete. It is believed that praying with kola nut (*oji igbo*) is what Igbos use to connect with ancestors through a powerful prayer. In Igbo cosmology, *Cola acuminata (Oji Igbo)* is the officially recognized kola nut that has cultural significance and attachment (Ikenna, 2021).

Similarly, in West Africa, kola enjoys a much-revered status as a sacred plant. ‘Kola brings life’ is a common say in West Africa where kola nuts are ceremonially shared as a sign of peace and honor, to welcome friends or strangers, to seal agreements and seek favor with the family of one’s bride to be. Prayers are usually for life, happiness, good health, children, prosperity and good harvest. It is a fact that the blessing of the nut is exclusively done by the old who are known for their mastery of oratory in their effort either to express an act of gratitude or give praise to the Almighty – Supreme God, the gods, deities, goddesses as well as ancestors in a special language (Ikenna, 2021).

The Lango people from time immemorial are generally religious (Ocholla-Ayayo and Odeck 1980). They traditionally believed in a higher spiritual force called Jok, and an array of other spiritual forces including the ancestral spirits. “Jok” is associated with unusual happening that cannot be controlled empirically (Hayley 2014, Ocholla-Ayayo and Odeck 1980, Olupona 2014). The spirituality of the Lango people is focused more on their traditional beliefs that they cherish. They believe in performance of magic where the end result is for the good of the society. One of the joks was the jok-Lango, a spirit in-charge of diseases which were not affiliated to demon possessions. Another one was the jok-man, a spirit with powers believed to be in human form, which is in-charge of all spiritual possessions (Hayley 2014, Ocholla-Ayayo and Odeck 1980, Olupona 2014). All these spirits are evoked through traditional rituals for various reasons. Similarly, all the traditional rituals are accompanied and conducted with some food sacrifice among which millet is central. The redemption of the ancestral spirits and their belief systems is necessitated by the food offered to appease them.

Amone (2004) narrates that, the Lango cultivate millet for food and for making beer and also grow numerous vegetables. Millet is a principal food crop, because it is the crops that the Lango have grown for the longest period of time. These food crops are integrated into religious and

symbolic conceptions more than other food crops. The use of millet in Lango community has similar purposes traditionally, spiritually, socially and health wise as the use and importance of kola nut in the Igbo community.

Generally, food carries a lot of cultural symbolism and spiritual values. In northern Uganda for instance, during traditional ceremonies and practices, millet is cooked and distributed among people. This division shows a sense of fellowship between the living, the dead, and the spiritual world since there exist strong beliefs, fears and respect for the spirits of the ancestors among most African people (Galli, 1973).

However, two distinct forces 'Christianity and modernity' are pressing the traditional belief systems in a way that negatively impacts not only on the use of millet but also the traditional lives of the Lango people. Christianity to a larger extent disregards the long treasured traditional ritualistic practices of the Lango people. The ancestral spirits have gradually been abandoned as rituals are not common. As per the current social context, the diminution of ritual performances has resulted into low production of food and millet in particular, yet millet plays a significant role in ritual and mystical life of the Lango people. Rabikowska (2010) asserts in the perception of the 'Polish' that 'the own food' cannot be replaced and it is expected to be made at home. It is food, which both the living and the dead cherish, and it unites the community with their ancestors. Even if Christianity and modernity supersede, the spiritual beings (spiritual world) will still demand their 'own food'. This poses a significant peril on the status of traditional practices which will in the long run negatively influence the wellbeing of the current generation. Their linkage with the ancestral spirits will be deterred making them disrespectful to spiritual world whose reaction might be gross. In this study, efforts are to examine the belief and ritual systems of the Lango people in relation to food and particularly millet use in their traditional practices.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Food and culture have attracted scholarly attention for decades (Osseo-Asare 2005, Montanari 2006, Anderson 2014, Reddy and van Dam 2020), in the same magnitude as food and spirituality (Platovnjak 2021, Reinhardt Falk 2022, Coveney 1999, Jung 2004). The scholarship however is largely centered either on major world religions or present African traditional cultures and spiritualities while disregarding African traditional religions. There is thus little scholarly writing on food and Spirituality more especially millet and its use among the people of Lango. African spirituality and traditional practices have been greatly influenced by two major factors- Christianity and modernity. Christian religious teaching and influences have a far-reaching impact on African culture which is regarded profane. Similarly, due to modernity, the younger generation has little or no knowledge of their culture. The long-treasured spiritual and cultural lifestyle, practices, values and rituals of the Lango people are at risk of extinction. The current status of upholding traditional practices and ritual performances among the Lango people is so insignificant that it is likely to break the bondage between the living and the living dead. Production of traditional foods such as millet that have been used in traditional practices has drastically declined yet millet plays a significant role in ritual and mystical life of the Lango people. This substantially affects food sustenance and results into famine as millet is a staple food. More so, if Christian religion is over emphasized in disregard of traditional practices, the current generation is likely to devalue such traditional practices and discard them. There is a danger of such generation to be disconnected from their ancestral spirits hence bringing doom to the society. The current study seeks to avert the shrinking of cultural practices involving food and spirituality especially millet use among the Lango people by exploring and exposing the religio-cultural significance of millet, and proposing good practices that can stabilize millet production as food.

## **1.4 General Objective of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to establish the relationship between food and spirituality with particular focus on explaining the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the Lango people of Northern Uganda.

### **1.4.1 Specific Objectives of the Study**

1. To describe the religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used.
2. To explore ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance in the broader context of global food crises.
3. To explain how millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people.

### **1.4.2 Research Questions**

1. In what manner do the people of Lango embrace the religious and spiritual practices in which food is used?
2. How can the religious elements in millet use contribute to food sustenance in the broader context of global food crises?
3. How is millet used in religious activities among the Lango people?

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The study is expected to make a contribution to the ongoing dissertation on traditional food intervention in the country, looking at it from the perspective of recent developments in Africa and beyond. This will consequently help to increase production of food, millet inclusive, and hence alleviating famine in the region.

These results will also help religious leaders to discover some of the foods that were used as compared to what is available and used today and look into their relevance. They will be able

to embrace the spiritual ideology, aspect and use of millet in the traditional societies and other religious perspectives. It will provide valuable information for academicians pursuing similar or related studies besides adding literature to the existing body of knowledge.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is viewed in the three perspectives of Geographical, content and time scope as presented in the subsections below.

### **1.6.1 Geographical Scope**

The study was conducted in Apac district, Lango sub-region in Northern Uganda. It focused on the sub counties of Inomo, Cegere and Akokoro. Apac district lies north of Lake Kyoga and borders the district of Masindi in the west, Lira in the East, Oyam in the north-west, Gulu in the North and Nakasongola in the South. Apac district is chosen because it is one of the traditional districts in Lango, and millet consumption and traditional practices have been prominent.

### **1.6.2 Content Scope**

The study focused on explaining the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the Lango people of Northern Uganda. Reason for selecting and considering millet among the foods used for spiritual purposes, the nature it is used in religious spiritual activities was part of the content. Ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance in the broader context of globalization was sought as well.

### **1.6.3 Time Scope**

As culture is part and partial of man, relationship between food and spirituality with particular focus on explaining the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the Lango people was traced back for a full decade. Such practices that prevailed from 2014 to 2024 were focused on. The period was considered due to the fact that many cultural practices have drastically diminished within this scope of time with a few elders embracing it. The study was conducted for a period of eighteen months within 2023 & 2024 and the findings of this study are expected to be valid within a period of five years due to the rigor of rampant changes in modernity that are sweeping away most cultural practices.

### **1.7 Definition of Operational Terms**

**Spirituality:** The belief that there is something greater than oneself or something more to being human than sensory experience. It expresses the act of trusting in supernatural being that is hoped to bring change, transform and redeem lives.

**Food:** In this study, food is used to mean use of various edible substance in performing traditional rituals and cultural practices. It may be plant or animal material.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This Chapter presents the review of literature related to the topic of study. It covers the perspective of the researcher, the views of various authors and other world views on the spiritual aspects and values of millet. It is presented according to the themes derived from the specific objectives which include; Religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used, ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance, and how millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people.

However, different cultures have different foods which are held with great values as not only food for the body but also for the soul. It is food which links them to their ancestors and gods of the land. Before delving into the perception of millet use by the Lango people, it is worth recognizing other African cultures that treasure various foods. This helps to draw cross-cultural relevancies to the current study.

#### **2.1.1 Yam and Yam festivals in West Africa**

Studies on yam and yam festivals in West Africa, especially Nigeria are diverse. Yam is not only food. Yam is lifestyle, survival, history, economy, social status and spiritual. Exploring the works of Chinua Achebe, especially things Fall Apart, Yam production is phenomenon and informed the religious life of the people of Umofia. It represented status, success, and masculinity, symbols of divine and ancestral blessings in the African spiritualities. Clearing the fields, planting of seed-yams, and the yam harvest demanded hard work physically and spiritually as events were accompanied with religious worship and other clan rituals (Achebe 1994). Yams are present at cultural events like installation of new Kings and traditional

marriages and other religious festivals as indicative of god's blessings (Unya 2021). Yam constituted a religious heritage, as it was associated with spiritualities.

With specific reference to the Igbo people of Nigeria, yams occupied a sacred position. People were dedicated to the production of yams, almost as a religious cult (Ukpokolo, Okoye, and Lawuyi 2018). There are certain taboos and abominations associated with the yam crop, which would result to death in the event of disobedience (Ukpokolo, Okoye, and Lawuyi 2018).

The discussions on yam demonstrates the importance of food and spirituality in African scholarship. Unfortunately, there seems to be insufficient scholarly focus on specialized studies of other cultures on food in the context of religious studies in specific cultural settings, which necessitates the current endeavor.

### **2.1.2 Matooke in Uganda**

Matooke is the staple food among many Bantu speaking cultures in Uganda like Buganda, Busoga, Bugisu and Kigezi regions. However, scholarly literature on matooke from the cultural, ritual and religious perspective is minimal. A.M. Rietveld, S. Ajambo and E. Kikulwe examine matooke from the economic perspectives and how the matooke economy advantages or disadvantages women. Taking the gender trajectories in the study, the writers focus on how the contemporary rural Ugandan economy associated with matooke have impacted on gender roles and positions in the contemporary market economy of Uganda (Rietveld, Ajambo, and Kikulwe 2016).

Juan Sebastian Rojas Costales writes on Matooke, but takes a sociological perspective in which he focuses on the economic values of Matooke in Kabarole district. The matooke is commodified as an article of trade, and how the buoyance of the trade impacts of people's socio-economic lives (Costales 2018). Costales obscures the cultural and traditional values of

matooke given his foreign origin and potential audience that informed his research. This demonstrates the invisibility of African scholarship on matters of culture and values that concerns them, which is left in the scholarly works of western anthropologists and sociologists. The current research finds validity not only as a homegrown researcher on the subject, but also present the intrinsic spiritual values of millet as lived and experienced by the Lango people.

## **2.2 Religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used.**

In the works of Savanna Evans, food is more than just sustenance. It is an essential part of every culture; part of cultural heritage and a way of expressing oneself and connecting with others (Evans, 2023). ‘Food has also been seen as a cultural affair; people eat in a socially organized fashion’ (Murcott, 1982 p. 203). Food is deeply ingrained in people’s cultural identity and serves as a representation of their heritage, history, and values. As a cultural heritage, food is a way of life that is passed down from generation to generation (Evans, 2023).

Evan’s views are very impressive but lack specificity. In this light, the current study explores millet among as the cultural food of the Lango people. But to the Lango, millet is not just traditionally eaten (cultural) food. It is food which feeds the soul—connecting the living to the long tapestry of ancestors and traditional religious beliefs. Unlike Evans, the current study investigates deeply into the spiritual sensitivities and religious values attached to food among the Lango people to be specific.

Lush (2023) described food culture as the beliefs, attitudes, and practices related to producing and consuming food. In his view, food culture lies at the heart of human relationship with food and the food systems that produce and deliver it. Foods themselves in the view of Murcott (1982), can be seen to convey a range of cultural meanings depending on the social context. Every culture has a particular staple food, which they attach not only to cultural values but also spiritual ones. Lush further noted that food is so much more than just fuel. It gives us identities

as humans, and people associated with a particular culture and spiritual beliefs (Lush, 2023). Food fosters religious celebrations and family gatherings. This explains why Rabikowska. M., ed. (2010) asserts that Easter is the time of a year when the recollection of family gatherings and memories of food preparation permeates daily chores and cooking practices. Without such recollection of family gatherings, the religious spiritual essence would be void. Indeed, as highlighted by Lush, preparing, sharing, and eating cultural foods is both a physical act and also a symbolic act that links the individual intrinsically with their personal family history (Lush, 2023).

Regarding the African mind, this assertion draws us deeper to the African ancestors, who are the roots of family history. Rabikowska. M., ed. (2010) adds that the need to be linked with home intensifies and the material evidence of belonging ‘there’ is sought. The preparation and consumption of food provides a material means for expressing the more abstract significance of social systems and cultural values (Murcott, 1982). Specifically, it serves to elucidate that the Lango people’s food (millet) links the living to their ancestral roots.

Lush’s view that eating the food that we enjoyed as a young person transports us back in time to our childhood is more interesting. In this regard Murcott (1982 p.204) expresses that what people are prepared to take inside their bodies reflect their social identities and their membership of social groups. Food nourishes both the body and the spirit, and makes humans nostalgic about particular people and events in the past. As mature persons, we still remember and cherish the hands that participated in the food processes that was responsible for our growth. The current study emphasizes the power of connectivity and spirituality associated with people’s attachments to millet as the food that mothered people to maturity.

In the works of Corrie E. Norman, food is a central matter in all religions. He rhetorically states: “in the beginning there was food, and that religious people have related to their gods, to each

other and to the world through food” (Norman 2012, 400). He presumes that humanity makes meaning in communal rituals or taboos and dietary regulations through food. Claude Levi-Strauss (as cited in Murcott, 1982) proposed that the place of eating and drinking in myths and rituals provides the medium for people to express their conviction that they are civilized and human, rather than savage and animal. Norman, however states that though food is a significant religious matter, scholars of religion have not significantly ventured into the study, but have left much of the analysis to anthropologists, whose focus is basically food within cultures (Norman 2012). Norman’s observations are candid and valid in the current endeavor, which is aimed at analyzing millet, from the religious perspective of the Lango people. It is however important to add that, although the focus of the study is on religious and spiritual life of the Lango, it is performed as part of their culture like all other African traditional religions.

In his article on Religious ethnic food, Kwon (2015) discusses the religious dimensions of food in various world religious traditions. Among other issues, Kwon observes food as having religious, ethnic, cultural and ritualistic values. Food has also been seen as a cultural affair (Murcott, 1982) which acts as an ethnic marker (Pollock as cited in Rabikowska, 2010) and carries out reproductive meanings recognized by members of the same group. Such groups in the perception of (Douglas as cited in Rabikowska, 2010) celebrate their belongings through food-related rituals.

To Kwon, “every community has a distinct dietary culture that symbolizes its heritage and socio-cultural aspects of its ethnicity. The cultural dimensions of societies are well emphasized in the UNESCO declarations that reaffirm the humanistic missions of cultural diversities and identities as a human right issue. Food and religion are part of societies’ cultural heritage.

### **2.3 Ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance**

Apart from millet, yams are held in great esteem in West African states, as partly the embodiment of their cultural heritage and its symbolism for strength in society. It is polemicized as: ‘the food is yam, and yam is food’; ‘the farm is yam and yam is the farm’, yams are the pillar of food sustenance (Simpa and Nmadu 2019). The slogan of upholding the status of yam among these West African States is rooted in the people’s culture. The practice promotes the production of yam which is their staple food thus alleviating famine.

Evans further underscores the importance of cultural foods in the context of chronic food challenges around the world. He urges the formation of food banks like SLO food banks, for purposes of not only preserving cultures but to ensure food sustenance—food which nourishes the body and the soul (Evans 2023).

On other hand, beliefs help with the challenges encountered in everyday life, such as family losses, crop failures, or extreme weather disasters. The celebratory and collective dimensions of farming rituals involving millet, which cannot take place without women, provide positive motivation and social capacity to engage in sustainable foodways and agricultural practices.

### **2.4 How millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people**

In India, there is a sense of cultural performances involved in preparing finger millet using grinding stone. For years, women sing while planting, harvesting or preparing millet. Songs are sung about how the millet could stop disasters like flood, bring unity, and detect draught, among others (Pandian, 2009). The songs sung mostly woke spiritual beliefs involving gods, suggesting intimately farming ways of life remain connected to wider systems of folk religion, faith that nourish and sustain them. Beyond the secular, a crucial aspect of food ways activities

involves reaching out to the divine and the spiritual, since jok crops and food preservation are ultimately believed to be the consequences of divine blessings (Ibid)

According to E. W. G. Masterman (2005), millet is one of the oldest foods known to humans and possibly the first cereal grain to be used for domestic purposes. It is mentioned in the Bible, and was used during those times to make bread. Millet has been used in Africa and India as a staple food for thousands of years and it was grown as early as 2700 BC in China where it was the prevalent grain before rice became the dominant.

Millet was also mentioned in the bible several times, like the Spirit of Jehovah addressing the prophet, take for yourself wheat and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and spelt, and put them into a single vessel, and make them for yourself into bread. Ezekiel 4:9, 12-13.

In Africa, all the main annual millet festivals combine religious rituals, a focus on food for both divine and human consumption, and connections to the agricultural season. The main harvests after the new moon shows the most auspicious day for future hopes. So, the house where the millet will be stored is cleaned, endowing love and fertility. During festivals and religious ceremonies, women's control over millet food preparation endows them with a crucial mediating role in rituals supplicating deities. Moreover, in the life of the village, the gift-like properties of regular food sharing carries (much more than commoditized food selling) a 'fundamental persuasiveness' which according to (Adapon 2008, 42) endows women with a capability to promote and strengthen ties of social reciprocity and solidarity.

Food beliefs are among the oldest and most entrenched aspects of many cultures that exert deep influence on the behaviour of people. "The cultural background determines what is eaten as well as when and how" (Williams, 1985: 290, 567). In different parts of Africa, people have diverse feeding habits that have been passed over from generation to generation. Without discounting the biological and psychological functions, food in many African communities is

used for performing various religious rituals and rites. Among the Luo of Kenya, the ritual specialist may add herbal medicines to food and conduct prayers. The blood of the sacrificed animal, the smoke of the fire are also thought to wash away evil (Shipton 1989:41).

The food habits and dietary patterns are often related to the ecological zone within which people live (Oniang'o, Mutuku, & Malaba, 2003). Millet is considered to be healthy and a solution to problems including old age, illness, and cosmetic aspects such as wrinkling of the skin and expanding breadth (Lupton 1996:137).

According to Jerkins (1983), in some societies seeing millet in the dream signifies your surroundings will grow more hopeful. It has a human connection of hope and beliefs and associated with good luck hence making it integral part of the lives of people in Africa. Showing that there is a spiritual element and connection between people and millet.

In some parts of East Africa, farmers pray in the hope that the *jok* will bless them with rain to bring the dry fields back to life; millet and other sweet dishes are offered to the rain god and then shared among people (Steller 1993)

Among the people of Lango, millet is used for various spiritual related activities, it plays a key role in spiritually uniting people and as well celebrate certain events, like initiations. Among the Lango 'Jok' is any unusual and apparently causeless nature that occurs in the community. This *jok* may be abnormal natural objects such as those with peculiar shapes like stones, roots or other objects like the stick the Bushmen used for digging, which later was used as a rain making stick. It can also be 'gato two' which is a form of mystic ceremony by which the power "tupo" is attracted into the body of an animal and absorbed into the body of "etogo" power (Amone, 2004). Millet is used to perform various rituals and spiritual activities related to the *jok*. During the last funeral rites, it is eaten to show love for the dead. Millet bread is also used

to chase sicknesses away in the families or communities (Hayley, 1946). According to UNESCO (2014), the male-child cleansing ceremony performed among the Lango people of northern Uganda, is a healing ritual for a male child believed to have been impotent. During the ceremony, the mother and male child spend three days inside the house and eat unsweetened millet porridge. The child is treated as a baby for the duration of the ceremony. On the third day, they exit the house and sit at the entrance, accompanied by a paternal cousin. The child's hair is shaved and woven into strands, which are mixed with softened ficus bark and shea butter, then tied around the child's neck, wrists, and waist. Remaining strands are rolled into a ball, and thrown three times to the mother, cousin and child. The three are then smeared with shea butter and served pea paste, millet bread and a millet-yeast brew. Jubilations begin thereafter with ululations, singing and dancing, confirming that the child has regained his manhood. The ceremony promotes reconciliation and restores the social status of the child. Limited practice, however, is affecting its viability. Many bearers are aged and the practice is increasingly performed in secrecy for fear of excommunication

Millet is also used for blessing leaders so that they are able to perform. They are given some traditional food that included boiled pigeon peas seasoned with simsim paste and kal (millet). Usually, water is sprinkled on the candidate using 'oboke olwedo' leaves after eating the food ritual. This symbolizes that one has been cleansed and ready to serve (Daily Monitor, 2012).

Furthermore, when a woman gives birth, she is kept in the house for three or four days; if she has given birth to a baby boy, she is supposed to take three days and four days when the baby is a girl. Thereafter she is brought out and subjected to eating this food ritual, which includes millet, to signify that she and the child is ready and blessed to continue in this world (Daily Monitor, 2012).

In the Lango community, such historically derived folk religious beliefs and rituals involving millet remain the crucial source of values, ethical norms, and emotional resilience, expressing their particular ontological way of being. Millet is the most common food offered to the spirits in Lango (Isiko, 2019), its grains is used to make a local brew used in times of celebrations and festivities and it is also given to spirits as an offering. Drinking “*kongo-lango*” millet brew was a means by which people could group “*akiba*” themselves after work (Gilbert, 2010).

The above literature reveals the significance and value of millet not only to the people of Lango but to the people of Africa as well. Millet plays a key role in the lives of the people of Lango and it is part of their identity.

## **2.5 Gaps identified in Literature**

Although there is quite enormous information established in regard to millet and its values, there is still little available information on the context concerning Ugandans especially the spiritual aspects of millet among the Lango people. Unfortunately, studies about millet are only left to the field of science and nutrition, which leave out the spiritual values. Therefore, the study will seek to fill this gap by explaining the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the Lango people of Northern Uganda, a case of Apac District.

The scarcity of scholarly literature on matooke is very astonishing given the popularity of the food stuff in the cultural, ritual and religious values in the lives of these communities. Most of these writings are made from social scientific perspectives like Economics and Sociology, ignoring the historical and religious aspects of the food stuff despite the glaring evidence that begs for investigation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research methodology that was used in the study and provides a description of how the research was undertaken. The chapter comprises the research design, study population, sampling, data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, possible challenges and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research was qualitative and adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design. Cross sectional study is an observational process where data is collected from a population at one specific point in time and outcomes are measured simultaneously. This method is effective and efficient because it allows a researcher to look at numerous characteristics at the same point in time without manipulating the variables (Sekaran, 2010). A section of traditional healers, traditional leaders, elderly, community members and religious leaders were studied so as to understand the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the Lango people of Northern Uganda.

The research utilized a qualitative approach because of its in-depth strength at exploring key factors. This design enabled the researcher to obtain a detailed and deeper understanding of the spiritual aspects and values of millet among the people of Apac District. The key informants for the study included traditional healers, traditional leaders and the elderly. Face to face interactive interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used as data collection methods.

### **3.2 Study Area, Population and Sample Size**

The study was conducted in Apac District, located in Northern Uganda, 1° 59' 0" N, 32° 32' 0" E. It focused on the sub counties of Inomo, Cegere and Akokoro sub-counties. The main economic activities in the area are agriculture and trade.

The population of the study were the elderly people above the age of 65, traditional healers, traditional leaders, community members and religious leaders. According to baseline studies, the population is estimated to be ninety-five (95) excluding the community members who are perceived to constitute the entire population in general. This is the sampled population believed to be knowledgeable about the cultural and spiritual antecedents of the Lango people. Although many potential respondents were talked to in each sub county, this work is constituted by views from a total of 50 respondents who were sampled from the three sub-counties and subjected to three different tools of data collection. This was constituted as follows; five (5) traditional healers, ten (10) traditional leaders, ten (10) elderly, twenty (20) community members and five (5) religious leaders. This total of 50 respondents was arrived at through purposive and Snowball sampling procedure in which the researcher was directed to potential resource persons in each sub-county.

### **3.3 Selection Procedure**

The study employed purposive and snowball sampling technique to select the participants for the study. A purposive sampling is where a researcher selects a sample based on their knowledge about the study and population. This is what guided the age composition of 45 (elderly people) and above. Potential study participants were recruited into the study by visiting them at their households and work places. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which the purposely selected research participants helped the researcher in identifying other

potential subjects. In this case, the researcher further utilized the LC1 community structure as an entry point to some villages and to determine, locate and identify the appropriate participants.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

Field data was collected through interviews, focused group discussions and observations in which qualitative research tools were used.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

This is a qualitative method of research often used to obtain the interviewees' perceptions and attitudes to the issues in question. Interviewing is one of the commonly used methods of data collection in the social sciences. Any person-to person interaction, either face to face or otherwise, between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind is called an interview (Ranjit, 2011). One on one interviews were held with 13 respondents and only one church leader. Each interview was facilitated by interview guide with open-ended questions appropriately designed to solicit information about the practice in the study area. The interview guide included a list of unstructured interview questions that does not follow any predetermined pattern of questions or themes. This enabled the researcher to explore the full breadth about objective three and one which sought to explain how millet is used in religious spiritual activities among the Lango people and find out religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used, respectively.

#### **3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions was applied for community members. There were two (2) FGDs comprising ten (10) participants each. It was held as a complementary method to assist the

researcher in collecting more information on topic which could otherwise not be discovered in formal interviews. Focus group discussion guide was designed to collect data for objective two on ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance in the broader context of globalization. The composition of each group was open to people above 18, with a minimum level of education as Senior Six and above. In this group, the researcher introduced the topic with sufficient information about the use of millet in Lango. Participants were also requested to mention some uses of millet in the cultural sense, and their contributions gave clues and leads to areas of focus that enriched the study. Against this background, the researcher introduced the question on how Lango region can enhance millet production in the global food crisis. A group member of each group was used to write down their responses to the questions on the papers provided.

### **3.4.3 Observation**

Observation is way of gathering data by watching behavior, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting. While in the field, the researcher was informed of an ongoing cleansing ritual of a child in the home of Ajok Buladina in akwiaworo village, Inono Subcounty. The researcher approached the scene on the third day of the final stage of the cleansing ritual. With the help of one female FGD participant, access was granted to observe the ritual.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a dynamic process of weaving together recognition of emerging themes, identification of key ideas or units of meaning and material acquired from the literature. Data analysis involves organizing data to enable its interpretation, prior to its analysis; its processing followed the steps of editing and establishing the frequency of responses. Thematic analysis was employed in this context. It is a method of analyzing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts where the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. The data collected was read in order to look for similarities and differences and subsequently find themes and develop categories. The patterns were developed into categories, each transcript was examined closely for phrases, sentences or paragraphs, i.e., participant's quotes, which stand out for the researcher as central to the broader area of interest.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

The research adhered to its responsibility in protecting the interests of the respondents. Permission was secured from the university to allow the student carry out the research and proper guidance was also offered by the supervisor in order to ensure that the study is carried out according to standard. Importantly, on the part of the participants, no one was coerced to respond to this study, instead informed consent was obtained and participants were asked to participate on their own freewill. The respondents were guaranteed protection through anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher generated knowledge through honest conduct and reporting. Some respondents and participants did not want their pictures to be taken. For instance, in the cleansing ritual at Inomo, the women refused video recordings and pictures of the event. The researcher adhered to this concern.

### **3.7 Limitations and Mitigation Strategies**

First and foremost, it was assumed that the respondents would be objective and truthful in the information they give in response to the study. However, some of the respondents gave less-than accurate responses or exaggerations. In some places, elderly respondents mistook the researcher for a patient seeking healing, and demanded for a pay before they address the research concerns. These respondents were not adhered to for fear of lacking objectivity since they were interested in payment of money for them. Some resourceful people were hard to reach to, especially in the remote villages.

Secondly, financial constraints hampered smooth running of the research. The study needed good logistical support in terms of transport facilitation and buying refreshments for the study participants. Owing to the limited finances, the researcher was not able to engage many focus group participants in order to generate debates and resolutions that are relevant to the study. It is hoped that, with better financial organization, the researcher will revisit the subject at a later time for probably a different course. Lastly, for accuracy of the data to be ensured, this study required face to face interviews. This however needed a lot of time for data gathering and analysis. The researcher had to work extra hours each day to cover all targeted activities to finish within set timelines.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Before exploring the religious and (spi)ritual life of the Lango, it is important to mention its geographical bearings. Geographical factors play a significant role in the formation of religious beliefs and practices (Kong 1990, Stump 2008, Stoddard and Prorok 2003, Sayem 2018). The terrain, climatic conditions and physical features, together with sociological factors like cultural interactions (Cornwall 1987, Assimeng 2010) greatly influence the formation of religious beliefs and practices of a given people, the Lango people inclusive.

##### **4.1.1 Lango People**

Lango people belong to the Nile Hamitic ethnic group, and studies on their origin are in plenty (Uzoigwe 1973, Hayley 2014, Owiny 2021, Curley and Blount 1971, Okello 2004). Lango region is largely located in Northern Uganda stretching to the north east. It consists of the districts of Lira, Alebtong, Apac, Dokolo, Amolatar, Kole, Oyam, Kwania and Otuke. The terrain of Lango is largely flat grass land, situated at an altitude of 1,050m above sea level. The region's soil is described by the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) as very deep and very fertile (Kirunda and Nakato 2023). The climate of the region is an average annual rainfall of 1,434mm, and temperature ranging between 16.8 and 30.5C (Lira-District 2024). This serves to illustrate that Lango sub-region has since time immemorial offered ample climatic conditions for finger millet growing, because millet is proven to grow well under such geographical and climatic specifics (Upadhyaya, Reddy, and Sastry 2008, Luitel, Siwakoti, and Jha 2018). By this geographical advantage, millet growing became "integrated into religious and symbolic conceptions" (Lango-Economy 2023) as part of a cultural heritage. For so long, the land tenure system of the Lango people has been communal. No body owned land. Land

belonged to the community which included the spiritual realities (ancestors) (URN-News 2023, Rugadya, Nsamba-Gayiiya, and Kamusiime 2008, Owino 2021). Lango subregion shares boarders with Acholi in the North and North West, Karamoja in the North East and Teso in the South. Given its geographical and sociological locations, there is a lot of shared cultural and religious values and ideologies with other tribes like the Acholi, Teso and Karamojong.

Lango people practice agriculture. They plant crops and also rear animals. Millet is said to have been the prime crop grown by the Lango by earlier social-scientists, and it is said to have been indigenous group together with simsim, *Lapena*, beans and *malakwang* (Driberg 1923, 98). As early as the close of the arrival of British colonialist in Uganda, millet was the famous crop grown. It was the “chief food” and also used for making beer called *kongo* among the Lango (Driberg 1923, 99; 101). The kind of millet grown and eaten by the Lango people is finger millet. Its botanical name is *Eleusine coracana*. It is known to be draught resistant and can grow even in arid and semi-arid places. Finger millet is native to Uganda and Ethiopian highlands, which makes it a prehistorically a food stuff among the Luo speaking people of East Africa (Andrea et al. 1999). It is said to be reach in proteins, carbohydrates, fiber and vitamins (Devi et al. 2014, Ramashia et al. 2019, Thapliyal and Singh 2015, Gleim 2023), with greatly recommended by food scientists as the remedy to combat diabetes and obesity in humans (Devi et al. 2014, Srivastava and Sharma 2012).

#### **4.2 Religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used**

This subsection is discussed in three perspectives; the cultural life of the Lango people, the spiritual life of the Lango people and the use of food in their traditional practices. It presents the results of the findings for objective one of the study.

#### 4.2.1 The cultural Life of the Lango People

Lango traditional religious and practices (rituals) are African in nature. Although the contemporary society is infiltrated by foreign religions like Christianity and Islam, the culture of the Lango is premised on its African religious heritage. Traditionally, the Lango believed in a spiritual authority or power called *Jok*. *Jok* is a complex phenomenon, which may refer to a host of spirits or particular spirit or, with the influence of contemporary religions idea of a higher, *jok* may denote “God the creator.” According to earlier anthropological studies on the Lango society, *Jok* denoted ancestral spirits—which included recently dead great people in the Lango society (Brown 1923, Driberg 1923). *Joks* dwell in nature and transcend places and spaces. They can dwell in trees, rocks, water bodies or in spaces. Among the notable *joks* worth mentioning in this chapter are *jok Adongo* who dwelt in trees. Although *Jok Adongo*, would manifest in any tree, the deity had a preference for *figs* and *kigelias* (Driberg 1923). Shrines, commonly called *ot-jok* (house of *jok*) or *abila*, are established under such trees, where worshippers would bring offerings and prayers. Offerings included animals and food items, which included millet bread. In the Lango legends, there was in north of River Moroto *yat akobo bala dano*, “a tree which spoke like a man.” Accordingly, the tree embodied *jok Adongo*, and under it was a priestess, who received visitors and offerings, and was a custodian to the deity (Driberg 1923, 219). *abode* was water bodies. Other *joks* included: *Jok nam*, *jok Lango*, *jok Orongo*, *jok marini* among others.

*Jok* is responsible for human welfare. It is benevolent and from *jok* comes human life assuring benefits like rainfall, good harvests and good health. On the other hand, humans have a responsibility to *jok* in form of worship and recognition. *Jok* would punish the whole society in case of neglect. Besides, proximity to *jok*'s abode was considered fatally dangerous because of the divine essence, which demanded that humans avoid sacred places unless under proper

safeguards. Lango people therefore revered hills, sacred trees and certain spots along water bodies as home to *jok*, and interestingly refrained from building homes and villages carelessly, less they build on the paths which *jok* is in the habit of traversing (Driberg 1923).

The Lango believe in life after death. The world of the dead is the world of ancestors, also called *jok*. The spirit of the dead is called *tipo*, and death and funeral rituals are done purposely to pacify the *tipo* of the deceased. The *tipo* is generally perceived to be dangerous, especially of a person who died from a violent death. Ceremonies of such deaths often involve sacrifices and food offerings to propitiate the dead. In the aftermaths of Barlonyo massacre, some Lango people still believe that the remains and spirits of the victims of the LRA war were not buried properly. That their spirits still haunt the community. That they were “they were just thrown away,” which has spoiled the world as perceived by the Lango people (Proctor 2013).

Burials were often followed with ceremonies and celebrations. Burial ceremonies take place in two stages: the first stage is called *echuban*, which comes immediately the corpse was buried. Mourners celebrated as they recounted the deeds of the deceased. A feast, which included meat from slaughtered chickens and sheep or goat and millet bread are eaten. The second stage is called *punyu me gonyo tol*, meaning the “feast of the undoing of the string” (Proctor 2013, 11). On the day of the *punyu*, everyone shaved their heads. Everyone attending the *punyu*. On the day of *punyu*, goats and bulls were slaughtered cooked and roasted for feasting. Millet bread was served as food, while local brews made from millet and sorghum were served for drinks. However, millet grown by the deceased was strictly not be consumed or used for making brew. *punyu* was to be celebrated with new millet crop grown by the living (Proctor 2013). Beer and millet bread would also be poured directly on the grave during the *punyu* to symbolize libation and communion with the dead (Agonya 2023).

The spirit of an ancestor may demand that an *abila* or shrine be built for it. The *abila* becomes a residence of the spirit, to which people would take food offerings especially millet bread and locally made alcohol from millet. *Tipo* would reveal his will or intent to the living relatives by either speaking directly to people, through dreams or cause minor misfortunes, which will force the living relatives to consult a medium locally called *ajoka* for proper interpretation of the *tipo*'s demands (Driberg 1923). An angry *tipo* brings sickness on human beings, kills domestic animals and can destroy crops. One of the ways they afflict human beings is being afflicting idiocy. Appropriate measures are made to appease the angry spirit. However, some spirits may be obstinate, and they are always punished in a form of exorcism by the help of an *ajoka*. An *ajoka* is brought to the victims' location and is presented with a male goat on arrival, which he kills ceremonially. The *ajoka* then smears intestinal dung on the chest of the haunted victim. An *aja* containing cowries is then shaken by him to avert evil influence, and he places ready a newly-made jar with a narrow mouth, at the bottom which is some of the goat meat and pieces of millet bread. By the jar, he puts in position a lid, with which he is ready to close the jar. When all is ready, the *ajoka* again shakes the cowries vigorously and calls out loudly to the ghost "so and so come here and take your food." The haunting spirit would enter the jar, and the *ajoka* would seal the jar immediately inescapably trapping the ghostly in the jar. The jar is then taken far away from often to swampy places where it is buried. The haunted victim is freed from the demonic possession and would live a normal life (Driberg 1923).

The *ajoka* is a medium. Both men and women can serve as an *ajoka*. He or she speaks the will of the *Jok* to the consulter. The consulter always comes with a present often in forms of millet beer, millet flour or millet bread, portions of which are served in the shrine and the rest retained by the *ajoka*. Depending on the gravity of the cause for consulting the *ajoka*, the consulter may be required to present chicken or a goat among other gifts like money (Driberg 1923). *Ajoka*'s

function extended from dealing with spiritual to treatment of physical diseases using herbs and plants as medicines.

Cleansing ceremonies are common among the Lango people either as a means of staving off bad omens especially in young children or as atonement for the crimes committed. One elaborate ceremony is the cleansing of male children to become manly in strength and sexuality (Suwed 2013), and cleansing of victims and culprits' violence. For example, rape is viewed among the Lango people as a polluting act which upsets the cosmological equilibrium, and has to be dealt with in order to restore social balance in society. The social disharmony caused, for instance by rape especially to women is called *rucurucu*. This is a state of disorientation and stigma caused by the rape experiences. In the after months of the LRA war, several women were raped and even mothered children to LRA rebels. The Lango families have had to perform cleansing rituals in order to reintegrate such victims to society and also deliver the women from the psycho-social stigma (Apio 2016). Other important ceremonies included rain making ceremonies and child cleansing ceremonies.

Marriage is very central among the Lango. Every man is expected to marry and every woman to be married. From childhood, people are prepared for marriage life. At marriage ceremonies, parents of either side (groom and bride) bless the marrying couple. Sex outside marriage was prohibited. The culture forbade girls having sex before marriage and also committing of adultery (Oketch 2023b). Like any other African culture, the Lango value marriage as a means for procreation and perpetuation of society. Marriage is a communal affair, involving rituals and celebrations. Qualities of a good wife among the Lango are: hard work, hospitality and childbirth (Kihangire 1957). The strength of a woman is judged by her ability to perform agricultural tasks, cook for her family, welcome visitors and bear children to the family.

Childbirth is a joyous experience for the family and clan, which is followed by relevant birth rituals. There are however birth occurrences, which by their nature appear abnormal, and call for relevant rituals. For instance, the birth of twins or the leg and breech presentations or children born with teeth are associated with divine interference, and calls for special rituals, less of which the children would die. Under normal circumstances, the birth of a child is attended to solely by women. The mother is secluded while in labour and after birth of the baby for a number of days in her house. During this period is deemed ritually unclean and spiritually dangerous to the society. The new mother is served with millet porridge called *nyuka*, and is ceremonially cleansed to return to normal life a close female relative. The cleansing ceremony is dramatic: the new mother sits at the entrance of her house with the baby held on her laps in a particular posture.

#### **4.2.1 The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Lango People**

Christianity took long to take shape among the Lango people. Introduced in 1903 by the CMS through the agency of Luo speaking evangelists like Alur Sira Dongo and Odora of Aduku (Ward 1991). The Catholics mandated the Verona fathers to establish the base. Verona fathers were an Italian society founded by Bishop Daniel Comboni, whose center of operation was in Sudan (Ward 1991). Although the Christian missionary influence in Northern Uganda was not as fast as elsewhere in the protectorate, both the Acholi and Lango gradually became Christians.

One of the reasons advanced for the slow response to missionary Christianity was the name Lubanga, used for God. The missionaries who had successfully used the Ruhanga name in Bunyoro to represent their heavenly God, erroneously thought that Lubanga would work for the Lango people, instead of using the traditional concept *jok* for God (Ward 1991). The missionaries rejected the name *jok* because of its ambiguity which evokes ancestral spirits and

other nature gods. Yet, to the Lango people, preaching Lubanga evoked the images of *jok-Lubanga*, a malevolent evil spirit responsible for tuberculosis of the spine (Ward 1991).

By the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Christianity had taken root among the Lango people. Moreover, following the contemporary wave of Pentecostal movements and the prevailing religious freedoms, precipitated by the contemporary life challenges associated with poverty and pandemics like HIV aids, wars like LRA and general economic hardships, very many people of Lango had become Christians. It has to be born in mind however, that to many people of Lango, the Christian faith reinforces rather than displaces their spirituality. Through a series of adaptations, assimilations and hybridity, the African traditional religious values are incorporated with Christian beliefs to produce a new form of Christianity which makes sense to the believers (Gifford 2008, Kalu 2013). It has also been asserted elsewhere that, “When pressed, many Langi do not count themselves as “Christian” or “traditional,” but as “both” (Proctor, 2013, 8). This statement means that the Lango wouldn’t go by Christian or traditional identities, but would evoke a spirituality which encompasses duo ideologies of both Christianity and traditionalism. They believe in hybridization in religion as they focus on both Western and the traditional religions. Performatively, the Christian Lango people practice Christian rituals as well as African traditional rituals. For instance, they practice traditional marriages alongside Christian marriage ceremonies. They perform traditional naming rituals as well as Christian Baptism, which often come with new names for children. Festivities like Christmas and Easter are performed alongside African practices. One respondent, only identified as Owiny asked a rhetorical question in the course of this study—apparently responding to the pejorative term directed at traditional rituals that “If our people die because of these ritualistic problems, who will be the Christians in their churches?” (Owiny 2023). Owiny’s rhetoric simply affirms that the population of Christians in the churches is made up of people who practice the ritualistic traditions of the Lango people.

### 4.2.3 The use of food in Lango traditional practices

Spiritual life in communities like the Lango community cannot be complete without food. As noted above, Millet among the Lango has been the staple food since time immemorial, and it is the food which the Lango ancestors ate. Millet has become the culture of the people. A people's culture has a lot of influence on the kind of foods eaten in each community and the beliefs associated with them.

Millet food among the Lango is believed to be shared between the living and the living dead. It is the food that generally describe who the Lango people are. It is a food item in the traditional folklores, proverbs and stories. Despite this fact, there is either little or no focus on the traditional or religious aspects, values and implication of millet by the current generation of scholarship. Moreover, to be specific, there are not many studies so far done by the indigenous scholars, on the subject of religious and spiritual values of Millet as food among the Lango people.

Writing from the context of Acholi, Charles Amone's work becomes an important resource, an inspiration to approach the subject of this study. It is noted that there are so many cultural and linguistic affinities between the Acholi and Lango communities. As noted earlier, the two tribes neighbor each other in a geo-political enclave called Northern Uganda. Charles Amone affirms that, millet is cultivated for food (Kwon Kal) and the first crop to be planted by every Acholi farmer is finger millet. The main celebrant during such functions as honoring of twins, funeral rites, marriage and offering of sacrifices to the gods must eat millet bread (Amone 2014). All these spheres evoke the spirituality of the Acholi people, which is shared with the Lango. Amone explains the religious function of millet as used in a ritual called *Lwongo tipu*. This is a ritual for calling home of the spirits of people who died and were buried away from home. The ritual is performed using millet bread by a special elder, who would put pieces of millet

bread in a gourd, then would call the name of the dead with instructions to come and “eat millet because he /she has missed it for a long time.” When the spirit comes into the gourd, the gourd is sealed and is transported to the intended place (Amone 2014, 162). Sylvain Racaud, a French scientist made a similar observation about the Lango people: that Lango people use peas, locally called ‘*apena*’ and millet flour ‘*kwon kal*’ to perform rituals to cleanse and bless those who have been enthroned into leadership positions or such persons who are believed to have died or whose whereabouts have not been established for a long period of time (Racaud 2017). These descriptions serve to elucidate that in the Luo cosmology, millet is food which is not only for the living, but also for the dead. Millet is a communicative and a communal means by which the living interacts with the dead.

#### **4.3 Ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance**

In this chapter, the question being addressed is how the cultural and spiritual use of millet can be used as a mechanism to enhance food-production in the context of global food crisis. This question is relevant in this study because Lango region, as part of the wider global society is a victim of global food crises which are occasioned by a number of challenges like climate change, wars (locally and internationally), pollutions and epidemics (like Ebola and HIV/AIDS), pests and diseases, refugee crisis among others.

The effects of the LRA war in Lango and the rest of northern Uganda are well documented (Rodriguez 2004, Kazibwe 2023, Branch 2005, Dolan 2000, Nannyonjo 2005). As if the devastations of the war are not enough, the region, in which Lango find itself is a victim of the devastations caused by global climate change. Among many manifestations of global climate change is global warming, which is characterized by drought and unbearable rainfalls (Al-Yasiri and Géczi 2021, Shahzad 2015, McNall 2012, Kaddo 2021). Both drought and heavy rainfalls cause devastating consequences to human survival, which in religious terms can only

be called divine punishments. Humans, throughout history, when faced with such terrible climatic challenges would ask: where did we go wrong? Why have the gods forsaken us? And would in most cases implore the divine help through prayers and rituals for nature to relent. These natural hazards often exert a heavy blow on food security.

Lango is an agricultural region, and majority of farmers are peasants that depend on weather conditions to grow food in seasons. The life is patterned in seasons for ploughing, planting and harvesting. The effects of global change have distorted the farming calendar, to the result that people no longer know when the rain is serious and when it is not. Lango and the Northern region at large are victims of drought and famine as such (Branch 2018, Nakalembe 2018, Moosa 2020, Apunyo 2021). In fact, 2009 11 people were recorded dead in Lira due to hunger (Opio and Apunyo 2009). In 2022, Lango was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> affected region with hunger after Teso and Karamoja (Okello 2022). So many of such stories and accounts of famine (including the invasion of locusts) in the region are awash on internet and local stories, which cannot be exhausted in this chapter.

The focus of this chapter is to establish how the religious and spiritual perceptions of millet can enhance food sustenance in the region. But before this connection is drawn, it is important to recapitulate some of the important ideas associated with millet: It was demonstrated that millet has been known among the Lango as their staple food. The region has been home for millet as well as Lango people, even before the arrival of European colonialists.

Notwithstanding their traditional agilities, the Lango people have grown up knowing that *kwon kal* is food, and food is *kwon kal*. It is the food eaten by their fore fathers and fore mothers for generations. Millet is used in many Lango rituals and traditional ceremonies. These rituals are health related for instance cleansing and healing rituals from a variety of conditions related to human health. Millet products like bread and beer sooth the entry to the spiritual realm. In the

previous chapters it was illustrated how spirits are motivated by the millet bread for appropriate management, and how Jok, like Jok Adongo would respond appropriately when pleased with offerings of either beer or food. The *Ajoka* (diviners) would use millet products to inquire into the spiritual arena on behalf of people who want solutions to their problems.

Millet is the food which defines masculinities, as it is manly to produce and feed one's family on millet. A family head is recognized by his ability to provide food whether for feeding the family or for ritualistic performances. This gives task for a man to work hard to ensure that there is plenty of harvest of millet by the end of the year. 'When I was a young man, my father could task me to produce at least a sack or two sacks of millet which would be kept for emergency' an elder explains in an interview. In his view, such practice made their family to have millet grain at home all year round. Similar propositions or ordinances can be enacted to promote production of millet by all households. This religious and cultural mindset of the Lango people can serve as an important resource in all efforts geared to food sustenance.

Owing to the geographical location of Lango together with the fertile soils, the region has a comparative advantage in millet production. The contemporary droughts associated with climate change can be managed if appropriate adaptations are made.

Millet by its nature is a drought resistant crop. This doesn't mean that it doesn't need water. It simply means that the crop can yield even during a dry season. This reality calls for paradigm shift in the agricultural practices of the Lango people. Modern farming practices like irrigation can help to bolster millet production. It is interesting to note that in some areas like Lira, irrigation is being applied in rice growing for instance the Olweny Irrigation Scheme (Oketch 2021). Extending the technological skills of irrigation to millet growing shall reduce farmer's dependence on the unpredictable rainfall seasons. Moreover, unlike crops like rice, millet will require minimal amounts of water for essential growth.

Agriculture modernization thrives well with availability of land. Land has to be large enough in order to enhance innovations like irrigation and mechanized farming. Owing to the customary views and ownership of land among the Lango people, together with the spiritual worldviews that prohibit building of homes to places which are thought to be the paths of *Joks*, mechanized farming is possible. Millet can be planted on large farms under cooperate schemes and ownership. It is important to note that, among the Lango, *Joks* travel in form of strong winds, and there are places which are known to be the paths of the jobs. Such strong winds were inevitably dangerous to settlements, which were mainly grass-thatched houses. It is not risk to suggest that such paths of the *Joks* can be productively used for millet production. After all, the winds of the *Joks* would facilitate pollination of the millet farms for better production. The efficiency of wind as the pollination agent in cereal crops like wheat, barley and rice has been highly scored in many scientific studies (Bitzer and Patterson 1967, Prasad, Reddy, and Sharma 2022); and specifically, effective on millet production in India (Khan et al. 2024).

Agricultural modernization is associated with increased outputs. An increased millet production is the prayer of every person in the Lango subregion. In all the rituals associated with rain and agriculture, the elders would pray to the concerned *Jok* for good harvests. It is not an over statement that increased production of millet will bolster the food basket, which shall fill the granaries in Lango. The increased outputs shall not only become food, but also source of income because millet products constitute trade items with the neighboring countries like South Sudan, Kenya, Congo, Dem. Rep., Indonesia and Malaysia (Rupiny 2009, Kadede 2017, Okoli and Abegunde 2022). Suffice to note that millet products are highly demanded by other regions like Teso, Karamoja, West Nile, Ankole and Nyanza (in Kenya).

Against modern farming approaches are views that millet production and process should be reverted to traditional methods. Some informants like Yoram Okello (Okello 2023b) and

Peninah Acom (Acom 2023) who, in an interview were asked about possible approaches to improve millet production opined that traditional methods of food production and processing should be restored in order to ensure food security. For example, in the past, millet was harvested from the garden when it was still fresh especially when the seeds are still white. It is brought home and kept in the house for a day, then it is brought out to dry under the sun. Later it is taken back inside the house for two days then again brought out for a day. In the third time it is finally brought out to dry for the last time. This was a fermentation process that made the starch in it to get concentrated as too much sun shine can take the starch away (Acom 2023).

Whereas these views may sound unrealistic and out outdated, shouldn't be dismissed arbitrarily. There is need for researchers and food scientists to explore the traditional knowledge values in food productions, and incorporate the traditional knowledge with new skills and technologies that sustain production and production of millet. It is interesting to note that, there is a scientific explanation on the effect of sun heat on the formation of starch. For instance, direct heating induces starch damage in wheat, altering its molecular order (which influences its crystallinity), pasting properties as well as its retrogradation and staling behaviour (van Rooyen et al. 2022, Mathobo et al. 2021).

Traditional practices like granaries shouldn't be discouraged because they enhanced food safety and storage at a home level. Granaries were built in a certain style, and materials use for granary building were special. The traditional technology of using certain straws, cow dung and architectural designs prevented millet cereals from being invaded by weevils (Okello 2023b). In another development, Lango people had a traditional mechanism of controlling pestes and diseases. The burning of certain herbs in millet plantations was believed to control insects that would destroy millet crops (Okello 2023b). The death of this cultural knowledge values has resulted into use of chemicals which have had devastating consequences to both

botanical and human lives. According to the East African Grain Council, millet is one of the grains which is contaminated with aflatoxin chemicals in East Africa (Abet 2022).

The problem with traditional modes of farming and production of millet is that such approaches promote subsistence farming and consumption, which cannot meet the contemporary demands of mass consumption of the global capitalistic society. The high demand for millet products today calls for equally high production and supply, hence need for improved technologies. Millet is not only used as food in Lango, but also elsewhere, and is also used as raw materials in production of beers by breweries and factories. Millet is also used in the production of food supplements because of its nutritional values that contain nutrients such as calcium, dietary fiber, polyphenols, and proteins (Hassan, Sebola, and Mabelebele 2021, Gupta 2023). In developed economies, millet is being transformed into tablets and capsules to be used as supplements. This offers an important avenue for millet exports from Lango, which would improve on house hold incomes and standards of living.

Along the same lines, given the ritual values associated with millet, the nutritional and health values can be standardized through research, and be incorporated in alternative medicines in Uganda. Alternative and herbal medicine has played an importance role in treating various disease which could not be treated by pharmaceutical medicines. For instance, there are many herbal medicines that are associated with treatment of sexual dysfunction in men. Related, there are numerous accounts from the field research that associate millet with cleansing and restoring men's sexual prowess (Odong 2023, Okello 2023a, Oketch 2023b, Anywar 2023).



**Pictures showing some of the industrial Health related products extracted from Millet.**

The outbreak of pandemics like Covid-19, Ebola and others have regenerated questions and debates that vitalize indigenous knowledge values and medicines. In Uganda, the creative innovation of Covidex for instance by the University professor using various plant extracts, is a pointer that nature and the natural environment as known and passed over through history offers important solutions to global problems.

As noted already, the Lango religious life centers around nature. Trees and water bodies play a significant role in the religious life as embodiment of Jok, especially Jok Adongo and Jok Nam. To reiterate, *Jok Adongo* resides in trees while *Jok Nam* resides in water bodies. Among other things, both deities are responsible for rainfall and fertility, both of which are essential for agricultural life. Unfortunately, Lango is a region where trees have been massively cut purposely for charcoal, timber and creating space for human settlement. For instance, the Amuru forest reserve has been encroached upon, with up to 1000 acres cleared and consumed

by illegal human activities (Ojok 2022, Nkuutu et al. 2000). The shea trees, which formed the dense forest cover in Otuke district have suffered the blades for charcoal burning (Muguya 2021, Nkuutu et al. 2000). Efforts to restore the forest cover are undeniable in Lango region (Oketch 2023a, Ajwang 2023), which is also a pointer to the realization of the value of trees to Lango's future. There is however need for more campaigns and efforts of eco-theological nature. This should be a homegrown eco-theology (Ikechukwu Anthony 2022, Akullah 2021, Ekpenyong Obo Ekpenyong 2021) which is premised on traditional and contemporary spirituality in Lango sub region. Kuloba R. Wabyanga has argued that Africans in Sub-Saharan region have had a relationship with nature. Trees and forests, for instance were revered as either deities or home of the divine (Wabyanga 2024). This idea reinforces the religious heritage that Jok (Jok Adongo, for instance) lives in trees, and can enhance protection of trees and forests. This idea serves to inform and emphasize that the deforestation in Lango region cause a spiritual disequilibrium. It has upset the *Joks* (gods) of the land. They (*Joks*), like elsewhere in the African religious thoughts (Igbo and Ugwuoke 2013, Okoye) and the Christian bible (Genesis, 7-8; 1 Kings 16-18) have responded to human injustices, disrespect and profanation with punishments on the community in forms of drought, floods, hailstorms, famine and death (Adega 2023, Awolalu 1976). Eco-theology can be incorporated in African church sermons, liturgies and songs and delivered to church goers. It can also be delivered through Lango cultural institution like *Won Nyaci* and *Ot Cokere Owitong*. This move, it can be argued is in line with other efforts aimed at protecting the sanctity of the natural environment.

Bringing the Popal decree of 2008 in perspective, (which mentioned environmental degradation as one of the new eight sins (Pullella 2008), an eco-theology which uses Lango spiritual resources to protect the environment is timely. It will instill fear and respect for forests as sacred places with the likely ecological benefits of combating desertification in Lango, which is obviously dangerous to millet farming as also other crop productions. Killing millet

production, it can be emphasized is destroying the fabric of Lango society which since time immemorial has been sustained on millet. The ancestors upon whose foundations Lango are founded will starve, because *Kwon kal* (millet), the food which is shared between the human and spiritual realm will be in acute scarcity.

#### **4.4 How millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people**

From the field data collected, a number of respondents contributed their views on the subject of millet in Lango spirituality. It has to be noted forehand that the Lango society looks sociologically divided into modern and traditional. The modern world is seen as the society of the educated, elites, Christians and civility, while the traditional is the society of the old, traditionalists and witchcraft. It is the researcher's conviction in this paper that these expressions are totally misleading and superficial. The so called 'modern' is just an expression worn on the surface, and in actual sense traditional knowledge values and solutions are often sought whenever people are faced with challenges. Besides, it was mentioned in the previous chapter that, the Lango would revert to their traditional systems for solutions to their problems without leaving Christianity or modernity.

Against this background, some of the responses that inform this research should be understood. The labels of traditional practices as witchcraft should be understood sociologically rather than phenomenological, as indeed such practices demonstrate a culture and a spirituality as practiced by the people for a longtime. It is the spirituality that defines their relationship with the divine reality and acts as a driving force in social cohesion.

One of the respondents made an argument that, "if only we want the culture and traditional aspects to perish, then we can underrate the significance of millet" (Agonya 2023). This powerful statement serves to illustrate that millet is engrained in the various traditional customs

and practices, without which millet loses meaning and value. In this section, I proceed to present data on millet use in the African cultural practices, and then followed by the contemporary use of millet especially in Christian faith.

1). Child cleansing ritual. In a ritual which the researcher observed, a ceremony is conducted to cleanse a male child from potential weakness as an adult. The age of the boy was possibly 1 year, because the child hadn't mastered certain skills like speech. The function is conducted and presided over by women who are closely related to the family. The mother, together with her son had been confined in a house for three days. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day the child and mother are brought out, and guided to hold a pot to place on three cooking stones. Their hands are smeared with shear butter oil as part of the cleansing. Amidst singing, more oils are smeared on both the mother and the child while wishing them blessings and fertility. The child and mother are then sent back to the house for the next three days, after which final steps in the cleansing is illustriously completed. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, the child is brought out with both parents. The hair of the child is ritually shaved off. A cooking pot is set on fire to prepare the ritual meal for the family and other people present. Both the mother and the little boy (who is guided to hold the mingling stick) are to prepare the millet bread and *lapena* for the people to eat. When the meal is ready, both the mother and child are served the food which they eat from the entrance of their house. The father is also served food but using the cooking stick, which is to be eaten from behind the house. Upon finishing the food, the father is supposed to throw away the cooking sticks far away, never to bring them back into the house. Some of the millet food is used for anointing the little boy and his parents on the foreheads, shoulders, knuckles, elbows, knees and ankles as a means of strengthening the joints and thwarting off bad spirits which would make the child lose his manliness.

The centrality of millet in this ritual is a phenomenon, as millet is believed to be the reason Lango men are viewed or view themselves as strong. In “we are strong because of our millet bread” Amone instructs that “Acholi men and women living in urban centers all over Uganda flock to local hotels that serve millet bread” (Amone 2014). He further illustrates that families that feed on other food stuffs are a sign of failure. Viewed from the perspectives of the Lango cleansing ritual above, millet meal symbolically made in the ritual is a sign of cleansing the child and the family from possible failure as the child grows. The ritual serves to instruct that the child has to be man by centering *kwon kal*, less of which he would have lost his manhood. It also serves to instruct that the manhood in the ritual does not necessarily mean lacking sexual power. It simply means lacking stamina as viewed from the masculinity constructs of the Lango society: A man has to eat *kwon kal*, has to be strong physically and has to grow millet (Odong 2023).

2) Rainmaking Ritual. As part of rain-making, there is a ceremony called *oworon*. It is partly an initiation and partly an occasion when community people congregate to honour their elderly people. The elderly would instruct the youth—initiates in the mysteries of rain making. The ritual is elaborate, and takes place under sacred trees. Millet bread (*kwon kal*) is served together with meat. Sacrifices of millet flour and other items like a ram are presented to the *jok* under the sacred tree. The initiates are further anointed with local brew made from millet and sorghum, and further smeared on the forehead, chest and cheeks with a paste made from a mixture of millet flour and water. The food and brew are all voluntarily contributed by the local people in society.

Each of the initiates is given a spear of rain, which is ceremonially used and passed over. If the spear happens to be new, it is ritually consecrated with these words: “May the harvest be a rich one. You spear of rain, bring good rain and fruitfulness that our granaries may be filled with millet....”

The rainmaking ceremony, locally called *myelo kot* or *lamo kot*, would take place between April and July annually. All the initiates go to the tree with their spears, accompanied by women and girls. An *agat* ceremony is performed, in which prayers are made to *jok* to ensure rainfall and good harvests. The prayer is accompanied by bell dances, sacrificial offerings, which included chickens, local beer and *kwon kal* (millet bread) (Odong 2023). As to whether rain came or not is a different matter. The essence of the current discussion is the centrality of millet. Interestingly, the ceremony involved prayers for rain and good grain harvests to fill granaries. The goddesses responsible for agriculture like *jok Adongo* and *jok nam* are appealed to provide fertility. They are also offered millet as gifts, which make the providential relationship more of cyclic than linear.

3) Healing rituals. There are so many health and healing rituals in which millet is used. In various diseases and ailments ranging from physical to spiritual, millet is used either directly or mixed with other herbs. The healing is often administered by an *ajoka* or elderly women and men with experience and vast knowledge of the conditions. In the previous chapter we noted of how an *ajoka* would trick a demon out of its victim using millet bread, and how the victim's health is restored. To that it can be added that it is administered to a woman who has bad omen especially those whose children always die at birth, she can later have successful conception, births and then bear children (Atim 2023).

According to traditional healers, their role is to administer traditional herbs and recommend the required greens or vegetables as a sauce accompanied with millet bread. This portrays that millet is not used in isolation from other foods, although it remains clear that millet bread remains an essential ingredient. There are herbs and greens that are used together with it. In an interview with one of the female traditional healers, no medicine works effectively without *kwon kal*.



**Picture 1. Taken by the research team: A traditional healer Terosana Achola explaining how traditional herbs are processed and how they work**

To reiterate the view that “if only we want the culture and traditional aspects to perish, then we can underrate the significance of millet,” as stated by Agonya, millet facilitates continuity of life. Cultural rituals are meant to give meaning to life, and offer spiritual solutions to contextual problems of the Lango. In one of the rituals explained to the researcher, the problem of infertility in women is aggressively confronted. The woman is believed to be contaminated or under a spell, which has tied her womb. In a cleansing ritual, her family members arrange for a big cow which is surrendered for the ritual performance. The cow’s mouth and legs are tied. It is not supposed to cry or bellow. The woman and the elders ‘*etogo*’ from the husband’s side sit on it while saying; ‘we need good health’ till it dies. The dead cow is later skinned and the inside organs are prepared and cooked. The woman eats with the millet bread and other relatives enjoy the actual meat (Anywar 2023). Millet is further an important element in

enthroning leaders and community elders. These are people who are charged with various responsibility as either political, social, civil or even religious leaders. Famous leaders in the land who have ritually been fed on millet meal include Late. Milton Obote, the first prime-minister and later president of Uganda, and currently Jimmy Akena, the area member of parliament for Lira (MonitorReporter 2012).

Millet in the contemporary Christian church is used as food, eaten in homes and also Christian ceremonies. Moses Okello (nrn), who is an Anglican church minister observed that, being a staple food, millet is always among food crops offered in the church especially those who may not have money to offer in cash. No offertory of this nature is rejected, even Cain and Abel offered their best harvests to God (Okello 2023a). Okello, who also belongs to the Lango tribe, equates the offering of millet in an offertory to the offerings of Cain and Abel. But equating it to people who are poor brings in perspectives the offering of the poor widow in Mark 12:41-44, which was acceptable before God. Okello's assertion intrinsically demonstrates the sentimental values which himself, but more so the Christians attach to millet. As noted, before in the Lango traditional cultures, worshippers presented millet offerings before Jok Adongo or Jok Nam for blessings of rain, good harvests, victory in war and as thanks giving offerings.

Moreover, the continued it is revealed by many "modern" Lango people that they would have millet bread on every festival. Rosemary Atim, in an interview reveals that to her any meal without kwon kal (millet bread) is not food. That even during festivals like Christmas, Easter, all other foods like rice, chapati, matooke etc. have to be predicated by kwon kal for the meal to be complete (Atim 2023).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Introduction

In different parts of Africa, people have diverse feeding habits that have been passed over from generation to generation. Without discounting the biological and psychological functions, food in many African communities is used for performing various religious rituals and rites.

This dissertation examined millet in the cultural and spiritual aspects of life of the Lango people. In doing so, it first explored the religious and (spi)ritual practices of Lango people in which food is used, ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance as well as how millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people. It was demonstrated that, Lango, as John Mbiti would say are fundamentally religious people.

#### 5.2 Summary of the findings

By the epoch of British colonialism and Christianity, the Lango had developed a religious ideologies and ritual life that explained their understanding of livelihood. In regard to the religious and (spi)ritual practices, Lango people practiced African traditional religion as their life, culture and way of living.

Religion was engrained in society, and their belief system influenced their relationship with nature. The veneration of the ancestors gave a profound relationship with nature like trees, forests, swamps and water bodies as home to the *Joks* (gods).

In the view of profound relationship with nature like trees, forests, swamps and water bodies as home to the *Joks* (gods), the Lango had a rain making ritual. This enabled them to value trees, forests, swamps and mountains as habitats to the *joks* or paths through which *joks* pass. This reverence for nature not only maintained ecological equilibrium, (which can only be understood in local spiritual terms as *joks* are-at-peace with the local people), but also influenced the land tenure system. To the Lango, land belonged to the gods, and could only be communally used.

The nature of land tenure systems helped to control land overuse and land-exhaustion. Farmers were free to abandon an overused and unproductive lands to fallow and regain fertility. Proper ecological conditions which were created by the religious landscape was conducive for food, especially millet production. This promoted food production and sustenance.

Millet is an organic crop, with significant nutritional values as discussed above. The increased human populations as well as reduced lands for agriculture, contemporary climatic changes and a shifting attitude from traditional foods and knowledge values have subjected communities, Africans and Lango in particular to acute food shortage and resultant hunger. Findings showed that many people have developed laziness in agricultural work. In their view, enacting laws and policies in form of ordinances can be of importance in encouraging all households to produce a specified quantity of millet and other foods.

In the wake of globalization and capitalism, so many things have gone wrong. Globalization has opened Lango to international community, which under free market and mobility has inflated Lango with foreign food commodities. In Igbo cosmology, *Cola acuminata* (*Oji Igbo*) is the officially recognized kola nut that has cultural significance and attachment (Ikenna, 2021). The argument in this dissertation is not to close Lango or isolate it from the rest of the world but to argue that the foreign food cultures are unsustainable and undependable. Their

presence entirely depends on the consistence of their supply and affordability as the market prices. For instance, following the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war, there was an acute shortage of wheat, which caused a significant inflation to wheat products like bread and chapatis in Uganda (Luwedde 2023, Xinshen Diao et al. 2023). Millet, which has served as the staple food has become secondary not only in terms of production but also consumption in preference to wheat bread, rice and other foods. As observed by various authorities locally and internationally, it is important to emphasize the value and propagation of such indigenous crops and food varieties like Millet as a response to the global food crises (Whitehead 1992, AFSA 2022, Olstad et al. 2023, Trichopoulou 2012, Charles Lwanga et al. 2020).

The strategic objectives of NDP III emphasize value addition, strengthening private sector, enhancing the productivity and social wellbeing of the population among others (NPA, 2020). This works in line with the SDGs especially goals one to three that focus on; ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, ending hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture and ensuring healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. Emphasizing millet production and food sustenance can help to achieve these goals and plans.

The sustainability of food production equally depends on the relevance of such food in the particular user community. Therefore, basing on this concept, if food production is increased, hunger can be reduced, improving health and promoting livelihood of the population is achieved. It can thus be asserted that food production and sustenance is a developmental matter

Basing on how millet is used in religious and spiritual activities among the Lango people, it was demonstrated that millet as food stuff has been essential in the cultic life of the Lango. As a heritage, millet is food, which was eaten by the Lango ancestors. It is what defines Lango people as strong people. To the Lango, food is *kwon kal*, and *kwon kal* is the food. It is an

African belief that ancestors are still part of the human family, and they play very crucial roles and duties as overseers (Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata 2014, Ekore and Lanre-Abass 2016, Ikyoive 2017). They visit their living relatives, and even demand for food (Mulambuzi 1997, Ige 2006). As demonstrated in the deliverance ritual in which a spirit is to be removed from a victim, *kwon kal* is used as a bait to trap a stubborn spirit before it is arrested and exorcised from its victim.

Human relationship with the spiritual world is enhanced through *kwon kal*. It is unthinkable that the living dead would demand for bread and tea, rice or chapati from their living relatives, but the food which they cherished while still alive. The culture and tradition of food should not be influenced by external religions and modernity.

In African traditional religion, Lango people would pray for rains and good harvests of millet to fill their granaries. At the same time, Millet was presented by worshippers as food offerings before gods in sacred places in order to gain insights into the spiritual arena or receive blessing. Millet food, therefore becomes an article of spiritual interaction and transactions between the living and the divine. It maintained the spiritual equilibrium, which unleashed blessings from the spiritual realities, and also regulated human behaviors and responses to the divine.

Traditional cleansing rituals are equivalent to act of contrition in Christianity. Christian Religious leaders should positively reconsider traditional ceremonies and not label them delish. Use of various foods in cultural practices links people with their ancestors. This promotes harmony between the living and the dead. Such practices should be promoted in religiously, socially and culturally acceptable manner.

### 5.3 Conclusion

Traditionally, the Lango believed in a spiritual authority or power called *Jok* which is a complex phenomenon and may refer to a host of spirits or particular spirit. With the influence of contemporary religions idea of a higher, *jok* may denote “God the creator.” According to them, they can dwell in trees, rocks, water bodies or in spaces. The joks were categorized according to their roles and is responsible for human welfare.

The Lango believe in life after death. The world of the dead is the world of ancestors, also called *jok*. The spirit of the dead is called *tipo*, and death and funeral rituals are done purposely to pacify the *tipo* of the deceased.

Cleansing ceremonies are common among the Lango people either as a means of staving off bad omens especially in young children or as atonement for the crimes committed. They are conducted with food sacrifices among in which millet is eminent.

Focusing on ways in which the religious elements in millet use can contribute to food sustenance in the broader context of global food crises, it can be concluded from the findings that; using this cultural and spiritual aspects of millet can serve as an ideological wagon for interventions that can enhance millet production as a contribution towards food sustenance in the contemporary world.

It has to be noted that the Lango society is sociologically divided into modern and traditional. The modern world is seen as the society of the educated, elites, Christians and civility, while the traditional is the society of the old, traditionalists and witchcraft. It is the spirituality that defines their relationship with the divine reality and acts as a driving force in social cohesion.

Some of the traditional practices include; Child cleansing ritual, a ceremony conducted to cleanse a male child from potential weakness as an adult. It is conducted and presided over by women who are closely related to the family. Millet food is used for anointing the little boy and his parents on the foreheads, shoulders, knuckles, elbows, knees and ankles as a means of strengthening the joints and thwarting off bad spirits which would avoid impotence.

In addition, as part of rain-making, there is a ceremony called *oworon* which is partly an initiation and partly an occasion when community people congregate to honour their elderly people. The elderly instruct the youth—initiates in the mysteries of rain making and millet bread (kwon kal) is served together with meat.

More so, there are so many health and healing rituals in which millet is used. In various diseases and ailments ranging from physical to spiritual, millet is used either directly or mixed with other herbs.

#### **5.4 Recommendation**

It is important to emphasize that this work is not a call to maintain the traditional cultural beliefs and practices on millet production. Rather it calls for a multi-dimensional approach, which combines both traditional knowledge values and modern technological and scientific knowledge to enhance millet production.

There is acute need to ensure both quality and quantity in order to meet the current demands for nutritious food locally and internationally. It is argued that studies by food scientists need to be focused on traditional models of production and storage as well as pests and disease controls. Questions related to mass production should be addressed competently by both local, national, and international authorities towards commercialized farming.

Efforts towards addressing climate change should be encouraged. Government efforts to protect the environment like forests and wetlands should be supported. The tree planting initiatives should be doubled in order to combat desertification.

Owing to the cultural beliefs in trees as embodiment of the divine, a relevant ecological theology needs to be developed and preached as part of the environment sensitization initiatives. The contextually developed and culturally grounded eco-theology which uses the spiritual infrastructure and consciousness of the people may yield good results in dealing with climate change and promote food production.

For the many people who have developed laziness in agricultural work, enacting laws and policies in form of ordinances can be of importance in encouraging all households to produce a specified quantity of millet and other foods. This can be initiated by elders and local leaders.

It is important that Christian religious leaders work in conjunction with the traditional religious leaders to uphold positive traditional practices that have influence on people's livelihood. Practices that can uphold sustainable food production and improve the health of people should be encouraged and supported.

### **5.5 Areas for Further Research**

Many factors have influenced culture either positively or negatively. Further research on culture-related aspects, modernity, gender and culture shall be of great importance. Such areas for further research include;

- Modernity and the fate of cultural practices in Lango sub-region.
- Understanding the prospects of Christianity and the restoration of indigenous cultures in Uganda.
- Gender prospects and management of food related rituals in upholding traditional practices.

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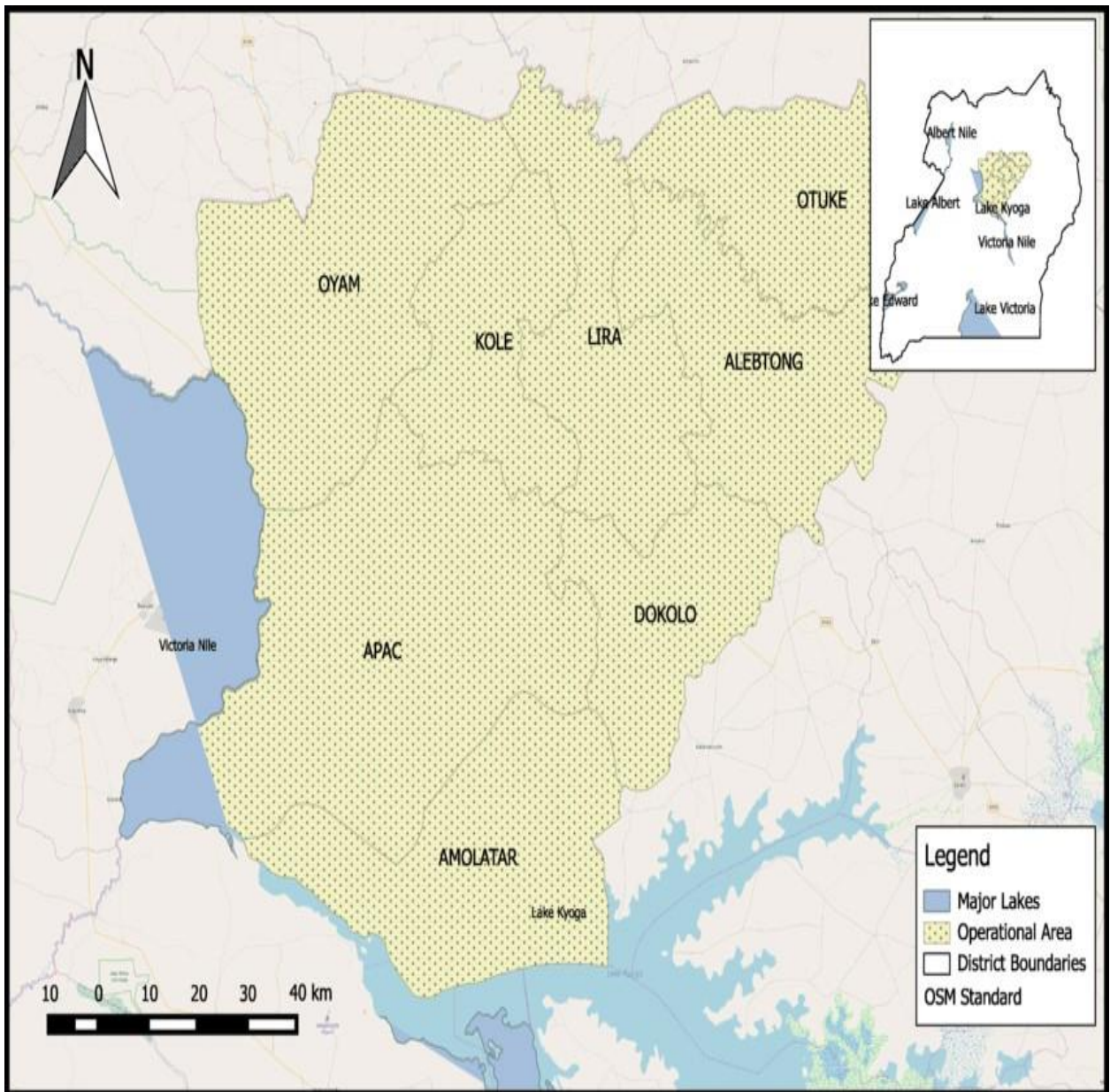
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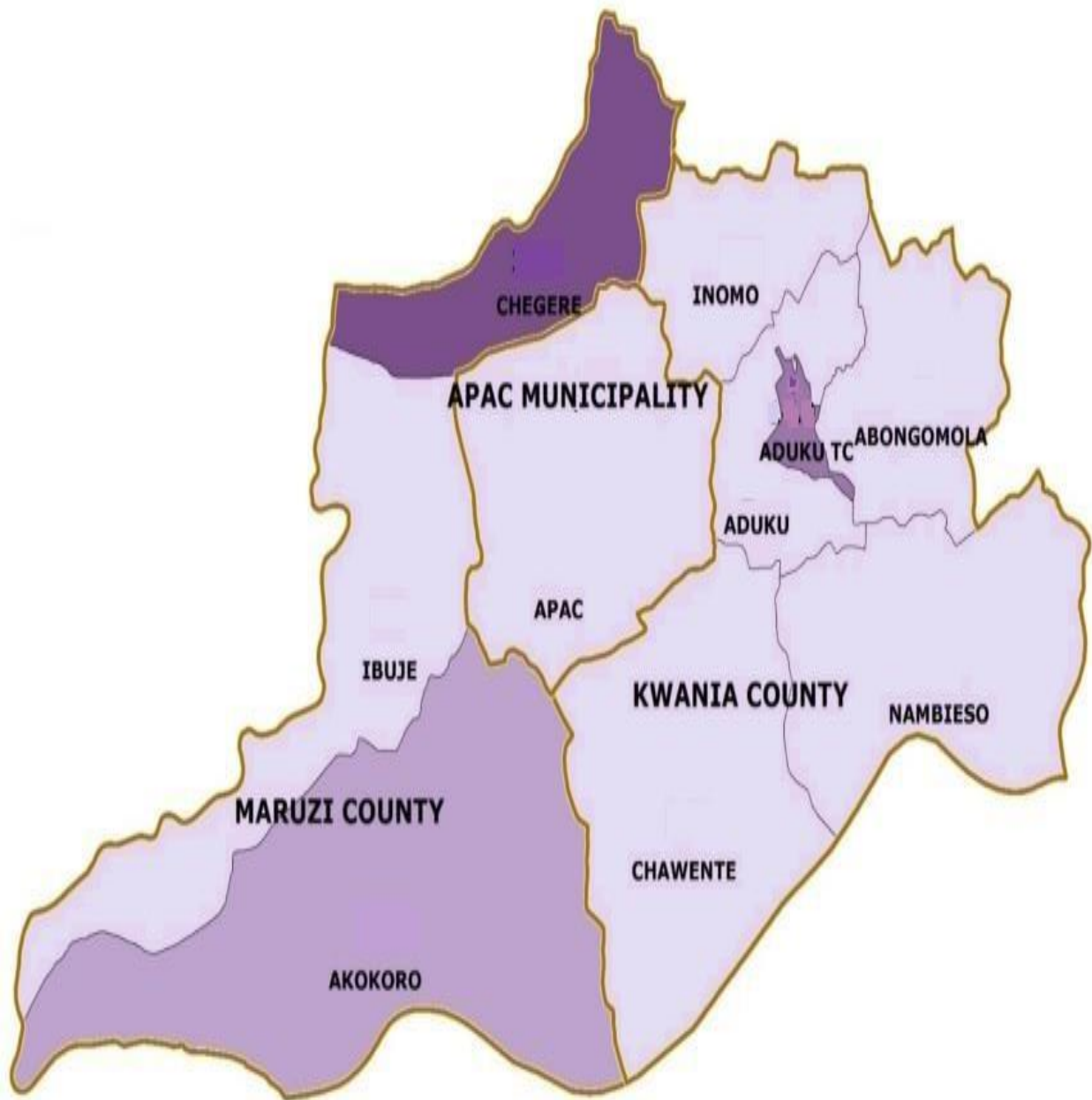
## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Map of Lango Sub-Region



Map Adopted from the UBOS data base and Website

**Appendix II: Map of Apac District showing Sub-Counties**



**Map Adopted from Apac District Website**

### Appendix III: Some More Pictures



**A 90 years old Muzee in an Interview with the researcher, at Inomo Sub County, Apac District**



**A 99 years old grandmother during an interview with the researcher in Akokoro, Subcounty**



**The researcher in one of the Focus Group Discussions**