

Title: Theologizing food autonomy for maternal health: A case of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano in Limpopo Province.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless specifically indicated in the text, is my own work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology, in the school of Religion, Philosophy and Classics in the faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, South Africa.

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## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late parents, my mother who modelled a life of hard work and brought me up to believe that all things are possible to those who trust in the Lord. Your teachings and determination to give us the best in life will be cherished forever. This also acknowledges my father who believed in me and acknowledged my humanity from a very early age. Your love and support has become my bedrock.

I also dedicate this study to all the women who daily choose to raise their children despite challenges of patriarchy and poverty. I am sincerely grateful and will always cherish Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano for opening their lives to me in making this study possible. Indeed, Xikwembu xikahle!

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Most importantly, to the Almighty and loving God be honour and glory for keeping and strengthening me throughout this study.

## ABSTRACT

Food and health have been declared universal basic human rights for all people. However, studies have shown that women and poor rural women in particular lack access to adequate food and nutrition for their individual and family survival and therefore experience poor maternal health. Despite this, studies have shown that food insecurity is not a result of insufficient food production in the world and South Africa in particular and also that food is the mainstay of health. The reason why I suggest that food autonomy could offer a solution to Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano experience of food insecurity towards the promotion of maternal health is twofold. First, is that the society and women themselves regard household responsibilities and household food provision in particular to be women's responsibility. Second, research has shown that an understanding of the links between women's reproduction, production and caring activities could help solve problems women face in Sub Saharan Africa.

Since the MCSA commits to combat poverty and the empowerment of women as part of its mission, the research question of this study sought to examine the role that the MCSA has played in promoting MWM achievement of food autonomy towards maternal health. The methodology used in order to attempt to answer this question was in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano. These discussions revealed that food autonomy could contribute to the promotion of maternal health but that women's participation in food production is the only way they could achieve food autonomy. This study has revealed MWM's passion and determination to achieve food autonomy as women united to contribute money for seeds in order to start a food garden. This food garden is currently feeding eight women who are joined by three men. This transformative praxis could also change societies' perception of women and enable social structures, systems and economic institutions to incorporate women's full participation in the social agenda.

In the conclusion of this study, it was suggested that MWM hold two workshops and a Bible study. The workshops will conscientize women of the experiences gained during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and to strategize ways of sustaining a food garden. A bible study will be to promote the equal participation of women and men in the image of God in order to transform experiences of oppression and dependence towards the ability to achieve food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health for MWM.

## ABBREVIATIONS

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| FAC     | Food Aid Convention  |
| FAO     | Food Agriculture Organization                                  |
| GEAR    | Growth Employment and Redistribution                           |
| HRBA    | Human Rights Based Approach                                    |
| IFSS    | Integrated Food Security Strategy                              |
| CESCR   | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| CCPR    | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights           |
| L&D     | Laws and Disciplines   |
| MWM     | Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano                             |
| MWPSU   | Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union                     |
| RDP     | Reconstruction and Development Programme                       |
| RCFT    | Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology                  |
| ICN2    | Second International Conference on Nutrition                   |
| SUNRAY  | Sustainable Nutrition Research for Africa in the Year to come  |
| SSA     | Sub-Saharan Africa   |
| Circle  | The Circle of Concerned African Theologians                    |
| MCSA    | The Methodist Church of Southern Africa                        |
| CRC     | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child           |
| UNMDG's | United Nations Millennium Development Goals                    |
| UNFPA   | United Nations Population Fund                                 |
| WB      | World Bank   |
| WFC     | World Food Conference  |
| WHO     | World Health Organization                                      |
| WTO     | World Trade Organization                                       |

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

This study attempts to examine and understand how Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano (hereafter MWM) experiences of food security can contribute towards Mashobye women's achievement of food autonomy in the promotion of maternal health. Lack of food autonomy and poor maternal health among MWM has been aggravated by many factors such as patriarchy, historical, socio-economic, political, religio-cultural and gender inequalities. In South Africa, poverty is said to affect mostly the African black population particularly women. According to information drawn from the Input Paper for Health Roadmap 2008, NFCS-FB-I reports that 85 percent of women were unemployed in rural communities particularly in provinces such as Limpopo (93%), Mpumalanga (92%) and Eastern Cape (91%). Despite South Africa's middle-income ranking and impressive food-secure status, at a national level, this paper concluded that, "a significant percentage of the country's population still live in adverse socio-economic conditions."<sup>1</sup> At the provincial level, the prevalence of households experiencing food insecurity was highest in the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Limpopo, each with six out of ten households.<sup>2</sup>

Statistics South Africa states that South Africa is one of the countries in Sub Saharan Africa affected by poor access to food and nutrition at household level. Accordingly, 35% of the total population, about 14.3 million South Africans, are vulnerable to food insecurity which affects particularly women, children and the elderly.<sup>3</sup> On the same note, FAO report 2012 declares that South Africa is one of the twenty countries in the world which contribute 80% under developed pre-school children.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Combating Malnutrition in South Africa" (Input Paper for Health Roadmap, Development Bank of Southern Africa, September 2008), 15. [www.dbsa.org>Publication>Documents](http://www.dbsa.org/Publication/Documents), accessed 10/08/2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Combating Malnutrition in South Africa", 15.

<sup>3</sup>Stats SA: Measuring Poverty in SA, 2000, quoted in Food Security Policy for South Africa, Department of Agriculture Republic of South Africa, The Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa, Pretoria, 12 July 2002, 22. [www.nda.agric.za>foodsecurity>policies](http://www.nda.agric.za/foodsecurity/policies), accessed 27/08/2016.

<sup>4</sup> UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: Trends, Scope, Causes and Consequences, 2012, 17-18. [ftp.fao.org>docrep>fao](http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao), accessed 15/05/2015.

Despite this, FAO reports that 70% of women in Sub Saharan Africa work in food related industries like commercial agricultural farms and subsistence food production while men migrate to cities.<sup>5</sup> Yet these women suffer poor nutrition because of low wages and poor working conditions. As reported by one of the participants, hunger causes poverty in one's life and it cannot be easily eradicated. The gendered concentration of poverty prevalent in rural areas in particular is fuelled by socio-economic, cultural and religious factors and practices that oppress and discriminate against women and contribute towards poor maternal health. Therefore, addressing gender and the inability to achieve food autonomy for maternal health, in relation to the church's response to issues of food autonomy for women, is significant to this study. It is echoed by the South African MDG's report 2013.<sup>6</sup> According to WHO,

.....the poor are exposed to greater personal and environmental risks, are less well nourished, have less information and are less able to access health care, they thus have a higher risk of illness and disability ... Poverty is often defined in absolute terms of low income – less than US\$2 a day. In this way, poverty undermines a range of key human attributes including health and contributes to high levels of preventable illness, disability even premature death across population groups particularly the poor, women, children and displaced populations.<sup>7</sup>

Hence the South African democratic government undertook to improve food security as part of Section 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. As a result, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (hereafter RDP) in 1994, gave priority to improving food security for historically disadvantaged people. The Integrated Food Security Strategy (hereafter IFSS) of 2000 was brought in to streamline and integrate the programme. According to South Africa's MDG's report 2013, one of the ways to achieve MDG5 – improve maternal health – is to empower women and promote gender equality.<sup>8</sup>

A study undertaken by De Cock suggests that food security at household level in South Africa is determined by a household's capacity to produce their own food or having purchasing power.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, understanding Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's experiences of food

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<sup>5</sup> UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Worku, S. National Coordinating Committee of South Africa Millenium Development Goals 2015 Report. Statistics South Africa, 2013, 75. [www.stassa.gov.za](http://www.stassa.gov.za) > MDG > MDG\_Cou... accessed 10/05/2015.

<sup>7</sup> WHO, Poverty. [www.who.int/topic/poverty](http://www.who.int/topic/poverty). Accessed 22/05/2015.

<sup>8</sup> Worku, National Coordinating Committee, 75.

<sup>9</sup> N. De Cock & M. D'Haese & N. Vink & C. J. van Rooyen & L. Staelens & H. C. Schönfeldt & L. D' Haese. "Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo Province, South Africa". 2013, 277. (*Food Sec. (2013) 5:279DOI 10.1007/s12571-013-0247-y*). [scholar.sun.ac.za/handle](http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle). accessed 22/06/2015.

autonomy in relation to maternal health is crucial to this study. On the other hand, the Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union (hereafter MWPSU) is a Methodist Church of Southern Africa's (hereafter MCSA) "connexional" women's organisation to which MWM affiliates. The MWPSU teachings and activities to which all its affiliates adhere include prayer meetings, pastoral visitation, fundraising and outreach projects. These selfless services focus more towards the church and others and as such often fail to address primary issues like lack of food autonomy and maternal health for its members.

According to the Laws and Discipline (L&D), in its commitment to undertake mission, the MCSA commit to "address poverty as a way of being in solidarity with the poor".<sup>10</sup> L&D further intends to "unlock women's potential so as to benefit society and to openly debate public issues including reproductive rights for women, family planning and family life",<sup>11</sup> among other things. As a result, the MCSA establishes and allocates part of the Mission of the Church at Connexional, district, circuit and local society to Organisations, Units, Orders and Committees for their respective purposes.<sup>12</sup> MWPSU is a connexional women's organisation to which MCSA women's organisations affiliate and represent in undertaking mission at a local society, like MWM at Mashobye in Letaba Circuit, Limpopo district, as will be discussed in chapter two.

## **1.2 Background and Motivation**

The reason for researching this topic is that, first as a Black African woman in South Africa, I have seen the suffering and discrimination poor people experience in the church and society. For instance, in the MCSA, commonly, Ministers are not sent to rural communities simply because they cannot afford to pay for one due to their state of poverty. Second, as a Minister in rural Mashobye, I am equally interested in the MCSA involvement in women's struggle for liberation

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<sup>10</sup>*The Laws & Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Eleventh Edition* (Salt River: Salty Prints 2007), 229.

<sup>11</sup>*The Laws & Discipline*, 227.

<sup>12</sup>The MCSA regards itself as a connexion, which is a description of its constituency of the MCSA, made up of twelve districts spreading across six countries of Southern Africa- South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland. The connexion is responsible for the administration, leadership, co-ordination and governance of the MCSA. *Laws & Discipline*, 2007. 53. A district is an area under the jurisdiction of the conference, made up of associations of local circuits. A circuit is made up of a number of societies. It oversees and co-ordinates the work of societies, and promotes and ensures the implementation of mission imperatives throughout the Circuit. A society denotes a local congregation. *Laws & Discipline Eleventh Edition*, 2007. 64, 73,125.

from poverty, hunger and diseases. This means that this research bears an insider's perspective into the challenges South African women face in accessing food for maternal health. Third, as a student of Gender, Religion and Health, my interest in women's health made me realize that maternal health goes beyond reproductive health rights to issues of poverty alleviation, food and nutrition. My attention was then drawn to investigating how Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's ability to achieve food autonomy can contribute towards the promotion of maternal health. In this way, my interest was to investigate whether the emancipation of women from poverty, hunger and poor health in particular can be possible through their ability to achieve food autonomy. Olowu notes that,

(food security) is intricately linked with a woman's multiple roles expressed in her productive, reproductive and supportive roles. It is contended that even focused efforts aimed at resolving the problems faced by women in performing one or other of their roles, may fail to produce adequate results, if the issues underlying each function and their connections are not fully understood.<sup>13</sup>

Hence the aim of the study was to understand how Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's achievement of food autonomy can contribute towards the promotion of maternal health. In order to achieve this aim, the study determined the following key research question, sub-questions and objectives.

### **Key Research Question**

In light of the significance of Food Autonomy for Maternal Health, how can Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano be empowered to achieve food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health?

### **Sub-questions are:-**

1. What is the significance of Food Autonomy for Maternal Health?
2. What are the experiences of MWM about food autonomy and its effect on maternal health?

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<sup>13</sup> Dejo Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security in Lesotho: Implication for an Integrative Rights-Based Approach". *A Journal for Gender & Behaviour*, 2013, 11(2), Ife Center for Psychological Studies/Services, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 5383.

3. To what extent has Methodist Women Prayer and Service Union teaching contributed towards Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's understanding of food autonomy and maternal health?
4. How can the findings of this study be used to promote a theology of food autonomy among the Methodist Women's Manyano Prayer and Service Union in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa?

**The objectives of the study are:**

- To investigate the significance of food autonomy for maternal health.
- To analyze the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano about food autonomy and how it affects maternal health.
- To establish to what extent the teachings of Methodist Women Prayer and Service Union contributed towards Food Autonomy in relation to Maternal Health.
- To establish how the findings of this study can be used to promote a theology of food autonomy among Methodist Women's Manyano Prayer and Service Union in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

**1.3 Location of Study**

This study was located within the Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano in the rural village of Mashobye situated in Vhembe district. Mashobye village forms part of 27 villages that make up Thulamela municipality in the Northern part of rural Limpopo Province of South Africa. Limpopo is "classified amongst the poorest provinces of South Africa with the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape".<sup>14</sup> The population is made up of the majority who are Tsonga speaking, followed by Northern Sotho, Venda and mixture of other languages. Most residents from Mashobye village practice Christianity while others follow African Traditional Religion. Mashobye village experiences poverty exacerbated by patriarchy, historical, socio-economic, political and gender inequality, and currently, poor service delivery like most rural villages in South Africa and Sub Saharan Africa. Mashobye village infrastructure development is poor, as roads are in a very poor state which makes access in and out of the village for work and

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<sup>14</sup>Department of Agriculture: Republic of South Africa, 2002, 22-24.

economic activities difficult. There is also a shortage of schools, and health services are only accessible from a mobile clinic twice a month in the adjacent village about seven kilometres away from Mashobye village.

Most of the households in this area are headed by women because most men of working age migrate to cities in search of work. In addition, young people move to neighbouring towns to access institutions of higher learning as there are no tertiary institutions in the village or in close proximity. According to Statistics South Africa 2011, Thulamela Municipality, of which Mashobye forms a part, has a population of 618 462 living on 3835 square kilometres of land, with 85% of the population living on tribal land. The Thulamela Municipality population is the highest populated in Vhembe District, comprising 47.7% of the population, which is divided between 44% male and 56% females.<sup>15</sup> This study aims to investigate how food autonomy can promote maternal health for Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano.

#### **1.4 Research Design and Methodology**

This study was conducted as an empirical research which used one-on-one in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. A detailed discussion of these tools is provided in chapter four. In addition, the design of the study, including choice of research design, sampling, data collection procedure and analysis and ethical issues, are further discussed in chapter four. The study also made use of secondary source materials that are relevant to the topic, such as published and unpublished books and journals, internet articles, thesis and unpublished papers as well as relevant documents from the MCSA. This enabled me to collect the necessary information relevant to the study.

#### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework chosen for this study is the Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology as developed by Clifford. This framework provided a perspective from which Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's lack of food autonomy and poor maternal health could be analysed. Like other feminist analysis, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology uses the experiences of women in a particular social location as its point of departure and asserts

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<sup>15</sup>Statistics South Africa, 2011. [www.stassa.gov.za/?page\\_id=993&id=thulamela-municipality](http://www.stassa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=thulamela-municipality). accessed 10/10/2015.

that patriarchy negatively affects all of women's life experiences.<sup>16</sup> According to Clifford, patriarchy enables dominant voices to condition, discriminate and marginalise women's experiences.<sup>17</sup> In this way, understanding the influence and effect of patriarchy on the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano about food autonomy in relation to maternal health was vital for this study. This framework enabled me to listen to Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's experiences, understanding and belief of how food autonomy can promote maternal health. Furthermore, discussion groups enabled Mashobye Methodist Women Manyano "to listen to and validate their experiences of food autonomy and its relation to maternal health so as to probe their causes towards the identification of practical steps in addressing lack of food autonomy".<sup>18</sup> Hence, RCFT enabled me to identify the oppressive and discriminating effect of patriarchy, Christian teachings and biblical interpretation, culture and gender on women.

Phiri and Nadar critique religion as oppressive to women's health in the way in which religion influences women's thoughts, emotions, personalities and social relationships as they seek their relationship with God.<sup>19</sup> This argument is important when dealing with the contribution of the church to Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's ability to achieve food autonomy in relation to maternal health. RCFT advocates for a feminist theological interpretation of the Bible and church teaching oppression, or liberation of women and men from patriarchy. Therefore, it is important to detect patriarchy and androcentrism in biblical texts, church teachings, and their interpretation because words not only enable communication but also condition our thinking.<sup>20</sup> This framework helped reveal how political institutions and structures, church teachings, gender inequality and culture discriminated, marginalised and denied MWM the ability to achieve food autonomy towards the promotion of maternal health.

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<sup>16</sup>Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 36.

<sup>17</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>18</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>19</sup>Isabel ApawoPhiri and Sarojini Nadar. 2006. "African Women, Religion and Health in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye". In Isabel ApawoPhiri and Sarojini Nadar (eds) "*Treading Softly but Firmly*",(Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publications, 2006), 8.

<sup>20</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

Kanyoro notes that gender analysis takes into consideration ways in which roles, attitudes, values and relationships regarding women and men in society are constructed.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it was important to assess how the church influenced the participation of women in achieving food autonomy in relation to maternal health. In this way, gender analysis enabled me to question Christian practices relating to women's health. RCFT argues for the construction of a liberating interpretation and empowerment for women in order to create societies that are more just and equal. Furthermore, this framework enabled me to recognise the need for a transformative 'praxis' that will enable MWM to achieve food autonomy towards the promotion of maternal health. As Clifford says, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology "seeks a liberating theological core for women and envisions a deeper transformation and true reconstruction of both church structures and civil society".<sup>22</sup>

### **Limitation of the Study**

The challenge of the study was that as interdisciplinary research between theology and food security, I needed continued awareness and balance between the two disciplines so as not to compromise the findings. I had to be conscious of this fact, to ensure that though the study undertook an interdisciplinary approach as recommended in the Gender, Religion and Health discipline, it remained focused on a feminist theological view.

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<sup>21</sup>Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*. (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>22</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 33.

- Language posed another limitation. This meant that I had to revise the questions, rephrase and paraphrase to facilitate understanding between myself, the interpreter and participants in the study in order to obtain appropriate data for the study. I had to be cautious not to manipulate the questions in order to get the answers that I wanted but rather to seek clarity. This encouraged engagement and allowed participants to clearly express their views, understanding and experiences about food autonomy and its relation to maternal health.
- A limitation was to interview only twelve Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano members, in the community where there are Pentecostals, African Traditional Religion and Indigenous religion. This limitation indicates that only a small portion of the village was covered, leaving a large area where a great deal of information could have been obtained.

## **1.6 The Structure of the Study**

Chapter one provides the introduction to the study and covers the background, motivation, research questions, objectives, methodology, theoretical framework and structure of the study. Chapter two discusses the history of the Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union of which Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano is in connexion. This chapter further examines the role of the church in promoting or limiting women's ability to achieve food autonomy in relation to maternal health. This chapter focuses on the third objective of the study, which is to establish how MWPSU teachings contribute towards food autonomy in relation to maternal health. In order to achieve this objective, I used data from literature resources relevant to the study. Chapter three provides literature review relevant to the study. This chapter addresses the first objective which describes the significance of food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health. Chapter four discusses the methodology, detailing research design, data collection procedures and analysis, and research ethics. It also articulated how RCFT was used for analysis and interpretation of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano experiences. Chapter five analysed MWM experiences and presented the findings of the study. This chapter addresses the second objective of the study, which is to analyse the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano in relation to food autonomy and how it affects maternal health. In order to achieve this objective, I used data collected from field interviews, focus group discussions and

literature sources relating to the study. Chapter six provides a theological reflection that sought to establish how the findings of this study can be used to promote a theology of food autonomy among MWPSU in the MCSA. This chapter corresponds to the fourth objective, which is to establish how the findings of this study can be used to promote a theology of food autonomy among MWPSU in the MCSA. In order to achieve this objective, I used data from themes that emerged from field research findings and literature sources relevant to the study. This chapter suggests a transformation of the church, socio-political and economic institutions and structures to enable women's achievement of food autonomy in relation to maternal health. Chapter seven concludes the study and provides recommendations for further study in this area.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I introduced the study and attempted to describe its importance by outlining my personal motivation for undertaking the research. I provided the statement and objectives of the study and described the location from which the field research was conducted. Furthermore, I explained how data was collected using in-depth, one-on-one unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and literature review using resources from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and the internet which I found relevant to the study. I also described why the theoretical framework of Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology was used to analyse the data collected. In conclusion, I provided the structure of the dissertation according to the objectives of the study as well as a conclusion.

In chapter two, I provide the historical overview of Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union and analysed the effects of its teachings on its members with a particular focus on Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's ability to achieve food autonomy in relation to maternal health. This chapter analysed the establishment of Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union and how the church teachings influence women's ability to achieve food autonomy in relation to maternal health. This chapter addresses objective three of the study, analysing to what extent the Methodist Women Prayer and Service Union teaching contributed towards food autonomy and maternal health. In order to address to this objective, I have used data collected from literature sources relevant to the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE HISTORY AND TEACHINGS OF THE METHODIST WOMEN PRAYER AND SERVICE UNION

#### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced and outlined the introductory part of the study. This chapter provides a brief history of the formation of the Manyano currently known as the Methodist Women Prayer and Service Union (MWPSU). This chapter also explores the impact of missionary teaching, its influence on women's views of themselves and how this contributed towards women's lack of food autonomy and poor maternal health. This is because the arrival of Methodism in Africa and Southern Africa in particular affected women's social, economic and political situation. Therefore, one cannot discuss MWM's ability to achieve food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health outside the history of the MCSA and the historical effect of MWPSU teachings on the current status of MWM. As will be illustrated in chapter five, lack of food autonomy is a major cause of poverty and vulnerability to poor maternal health for rural women in general and MWM in particular. This chapter will also discuss how MWPSU has been affirmed as a place of hope and a local agent of transformation in MWM's ability to achieve food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health.

##### 2.1.1 The Arrival of Methodism in Southern Africa

According to the Laws & Discipline of the MCSA, Methodism was founded in Britain by Rev John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley as a revival movement to "reform the then Church of England",<sup>23</sup> and "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land".<sup>24</sup> However, Kumalo attributes the arrival and development of Methodism in South Africa to five historical streams. These streams consisted of a group of Methodists from Great Britain, the Wesleyan Missionary Society, General Wesleyan Missionary Society, other Methodist Agencies like the Wesleyan Methodist and the Primitive Methodist Church as well as Revs, Samuel Broadbent, Rev Thomas

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<sup>23</sup>*The Laws & Discipline*, 12.

<sup>24</sup>Randy L. Maddox. *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 67. Wesley believed that the spiritual revival found in the doctrine of Christian Perfectionism is available to all people through faith in Christ and a desire to grow in His likeness. For more of this see Kumalo (2009), 27-30.

Laidman and Rev James Archbell.<sup>25</sup> Besides the first two streams, which were led by lay people who came with British troops in 1795 and 1802 respectively, the development of Methodism in South Africa was led by missionaries. In fact, the first Methodist missionary arrived in the Cape in 1814 commissioned by the British Conference.<sup>26</sup> Missionaries worked among settler communities developing Methodist work while also founding mission stations among indigenous people.

In 1882, the British Conference constituted the South African Conference with Jurisdiction over all Methodist Missions, Churches and Ministers in South Africa exclusive of the Transvaal Province. In 1926, the South African Conference resolved to become independent from the British Conference under the name ‘the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa’, with full control over its Members and Properties. This new independent body was recognised by the Parliament of the Union of South Africa (Private) Act 1927.<sup>27</sup> In 1932 the name was changed to ‘The Methodist Church of South Africa’ by the provision of the Act of 1932. Due to the spread of its work and activities beyond the borders of South Africa, the name was further changed to ‘The Methodist Church of Southern Africa’, Act No. 111/1978 in 1975.<sup>28</sup> The Methodist Church of Southern Africa<sup>29</sup> (MCSA) is one of the largest mission oriented churches, spreading across six countries of Southern Africa.

### **2.1.2 The Formation of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa**

According to Grassow, the spread of the Methodism movement from the coastal to inland areas of South Africa was due to the colonial government’s discovery of minerals, particularly gold and diamonds in the Witwatersrand and Kimberley, and by the evangelical efforts of Barnabas Shaw and William Shaw.<sup>30</sup> As missionaries settled in different parts of South Africa, they established missions supported by their various sending agencies, building schools, universities

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<sup>25</sup> Simangaliso R. Kumalo, *Methodists with A White History and A Black Future: The People Called Methodists in KwaZulu-Natal* (Eikenhof: Upper Room Ministries, 2009), 37-39.

<sup>26</sup> Peter S. Grassow, “1820 Settlers, open spaces, and theology: a reflection on how the 1820 Settlers’ theological views shape our understanding of uninhabited land”, A paper Presented at Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, (2012), 1.

<sup>27</sup> *The Laws & Discipline*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> 2007 Yearbook, The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House and Book Depot, 2007), 22. Yearbook is a name given to the minutes of the MCSA annual conference in which the directory, annual reports and resolutions for the work of the church is recorded.

<sup>29</sup> This is a Methodist term that denotes the whole geographical area of the MCSA spreading across six countries of Southern Africa- South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland.

<sup>30</sup> Grassow, “1820 Settlers, open spaces, and theology”, 3.

and hospitals. Akyeampong and Fofack observe that missionaries took an active part in politics, working alongside the colonial government on one side and the local indigenous tribal government – Chiefs on the other side.<sup>31</sup> Methodist schools produced some of the finest Black leaders who actively participated in various sectors of society, particularly in the struggle against Apartheid,<sup>32</sup> which segregated South African people along the colour line oppressing the majority black people. The MCSA Conference 2014 recorded a membership of just over 850 000 across the connexion.<sup>33</sup> The Missionaries' evangelism project for indigenous 'kaffirs'<sup>34</sup> spread alongside the growth of MWPSU and contributed to the building of schools, universities, hospitals, as well as training in agricultural and home economics, among others. MWM is an affiliate of the Connexional MWPSU in Mashobye Methodist Society, Letaba Circuit of the Limpopo District.

### **2.1.3 The Formation of Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union in South Africa**

According to Kumalo, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa was the first to establish a Women's Manyano organization, in 1870 in Dundee, Natal.<sup>35</sup> Gaitskel attributes the establishment of the Women's Manyano,<sup>36</sup> to the efforts of the wives of missionaries who mostly contributed by evangelising African women, teaching them sewing and instructing them on the role of motherhood, wifehood and worker. It began in the Methodist Church and spread to the Anglican Church and American Board Mission.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the formalisation of the MCSA

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<sup>31</sup>Emmanuel Akyeampong and Hippolyte Fofack. *"The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development: Historical Perspective and Policy Implications. Part 1: The Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods"*. (Policy Research Paper 6051, The World Bank Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network Gender and Development Unit, 2012), 18-24.

<sup>32</sup>This was a system of government by the White racist regime that separated South African people along racial lines.

<sup>33</sup>2014 Yearbook, *The Methodist Church of Southern Africa*, (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House and Book Depot, 2014), 16.

<sup>34</sup>This was a derogatory name which was used for indigenous Africans by the White Colonial regime.

<sup>35</sup> Kumalo, *Methodists with A White History*, 89.

<sup>36</sup> This is a Xhosa name originally given to African women's prayer unions in South Africa, originating in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. It is derived from the verb 'ukumanya' meaning 'to join' or 'unite', 'unity' or 'kopano' in Setswana or Sesotho. When the Methodist mission reached Natal at the end of the nineteenth century, a Xhosa hymn book was used. Thus it happened that a number of Xhosa words associated with the MCSA and Christianity entered the Zulu language. The term Manyano was adopted by the Methodists and has been used ever since to denote their church women's organization. Manyano is also called 'Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union'. See Theilen, U. 2003, 3 and Haddad, B. *The Manyano Movement in South Africa: Site of Struggle, Survival, and Resistance*, 2004, 4.

<sup>37</sup>Deborah Gaitskel, "Power in Prayer and Service Women's Christian Organizations" in Elphick Richard and Rodney Davenport *Christianity in South Africa Political, Social & Cultural History*, (Cape Town: Credo Press (PTY) LTD, 1997), 18.

women's organisation, which is now known as the Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union, is said to have happened in the 1830's among the Tswana and Zulu missionary stations through weekly sewing classes. As Manyano developed, Gaitskell notes, by the 1880's, Eastern Cape Missionary wives grouped women together for Bible studies, prayer and testimonies which became the lifeline for women's groups to date.<sup>38</sup> As a result, by 1940, Black Methodist had more than 45 000 members, and by 1970, the Anglican Mother's Union had almost 34 000 members, which was ten times more than White co-religious church women.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, the L&D states that the MCSA establishes Units, Organisations, Orders and Committees in order to allocate part of the Mission of the church at connexional, district, circuit and local society. MWPSU is one of the organisations established in the MCSA by the wives of Missionaries and sustained by Black MWPSU members to exercise mission from "African women's perspective".<sup>40</sup> As Oduyoye notes, women have founded religious associations, initiated church communities and created ministries to make churches effective despite cultural constraints and societal and religious prejudice against women.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the MCSA's spread to the interior of the country resulted in the establishment of the MWPSU throughout the connexion. Hence, Cragg and Millard regard the emergence of Women's Manyano as the "most significant development in the life of the African Church as the organisation evangelized, raised funds and positively influenced its member's family life."<sup>42</sup> In resonance, Kumalo says that as women began to move into leadership structures of the church, starting at the local level as society and circuit stewards and moving to Lay President (the equivalent of a Presiding Bishop) and Bishop, they created space for themselves and lobbied for their recognition.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Gaitskel, "Power in Prayer and Service", 18.

<sup>39</sup>Gaitskel, "Power in Prayer and Service", 19.

<sup>40</sup>Beverley Gail. Haddad, "The Mothers' Union in South Africa: Untold Stories of Faith, Survival and Resistance" in Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devrakshanam Betty Govinden & Sarojini Nadar (eds) *Her-Stories Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002), 102.

<sup>41</sup>Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface: Naming Our Mothers" in Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devrakshanam Betty Govinden & Sarojini Nadar (eds) *Her-Stories Hidden histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002), xi.

<sup>42</sup>Donald Cragg and Joan Millard, *Open Doors Methodism in South Africa 1883-1933*, (Salt River: Methodist Publishing House, 2013), 53.

<sup>43</sup>Kumalo, *Methodists with A White History*, 89.

## 2.2 Missionary Wives Contribution to Evangelism in the MCSA

Accordingly, missionary wives' supported their husbands' evangelism projects by focusing on teaching and training married African women on a new way of motherhood, wifhood and worker.<sup>44</sup> First, African women were organized into weekly meetings for sewing. Second, these weekly sewing meetings developed into a 'class'<sup>45</sup> for instruction on motherhood and family Christian formation. This was because dressing in Western clothes was regarded as a sign of seeking baptism, Christian instruction and conversion.<sup>46</sup> Third, these teachings were meant to inculcate Christian ideals of marriage, fidelity, wifhood, morality, maternal and domestic responsibility as a standard for a new life. Evidently, this training suggests a gendered perception that women were responsible for household reproduction, production and caring even though their ability to achieve food autonomy and maternal health was restricted.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, these weekly meetings developed into biblical training, nurturing Christian spirituality, and teaching women to pray, while being held accountable for keeping Christian families and special identity within the church. In this way, women found a space in which they could be themselves in an encouraging and receptive context amongst their peers where they could "freely express themselves".<sup>48</sup> As a result, these supportive relationships proved beneficial to women's future struggles as they united through the Word of God. Despite negatively affecting women's ability to produce food, missionary teachings imparted new values which affirmed self-worth and personal empowerment in a systematic all-female enterprise. This enterprise moved women out of traditional isolation to create teams of united and single-minded sisters who contributed to the evangelistic growth and mission of the MCSA throughout Southern Africa. Even though domestic ideology curtailed women's full participation in the image of God, these meetings offered MWPSU opportunities to develop choices while forging their own faith among various institutional activities.

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<sup>44</sup>Gaitskell, "Power in Prayer and Service", 18.

<sup>45</sup>A distinctive Methodist structure in which Christian spirituality and community is cultivated (L&D 2007:27)

<sup>46</sup>Gaitskel, "Power in Prayer and Service", 19.

<sup>47</sup>Uta Theilen, *Gender, Race, Power and Religion: Women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Post-Apartheid Society*, Studien Zur Interkulturellen Geschichte Des Christentums. Frankfurt am, (Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 63.

<sup>48</sup>Theilen, *Gender, Race, Power and Religion*, 245.

According to Theilen, Manyano organisations provided women with a social and spiritual sense of belonging and remain a trusted point of contact in which women can be empowered beyond the patriarchal limitations of the church.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Haddad asserts that these meetings helped women “express their indigenous African Women’s spirituality”.<sup>50</sup> Equally, Mokitimi equates the contribution of women in Africa with the success of women in the church, saying “the full and free salvation” for Christ made women “co-workers with God” and “co-workers with men”.<sup>51</sup> This earned MWPSU recognition as “the backbone of our circuit work” or “pillars of our church life”.<sup>52</sup> Hence, Gaitskell points to the political and social involvement of Manyanos and how the movement organized women to support the 1913 female anti-pass demonstration in Bloemfontein, the Herschell store boycott of 1922, the Natal beer protest of the 1920’s, and the mobilisation of the Potchefstroom women’s protest of 1929 against residential permits.<sup>53</sup> All these activities enabled women to participate in broader social and political activism affecting their lives.

Despite the tremendous contribution missionaries made through evangelism and education, their perception of Western culture as superior to African culture influenced them to impose both Christianity and a Western way of life, worldview and ideologies by undermining local religion, tradition and culture. For instance, Clifford notes the influence of the colonial teaching which was based on the Victorian family ideology and “the cult of true womanhood”.<sup>54</sup> It was presumed that women have a superior morality because of their maternal nature; therefore they could be trusted to impart good moral values to children and become suitable homemakers for their husbands or male relatives, thereby contributing to a more humane society.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Gaitskell argues that the family model imposed by female missionaries on their subjects provided an “ideal answer for a family model against Western industrialization”,<sup>56</sup> but it destroyed the African communal food production system and progressively isolated African women from

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<sup>49</sup>Theilen, *Gender, Race, Power and Religion*, 246.

<sup>50</sup>Haddad, “The Mothers’ Union in South Africa”, 101.

<sup>51</sup>Mokitimi, G. 1965. “Women’s Manyano” in Garrett, A.E.F. (ed). *South African Methodism Her Missionary Witness*, Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 1965), 90-91.

<sup>52</sup>Mokitimi, *Women’s Manyano*, 90-91.

<sup>53</sup>Gaitskell, “Power in Prayer and Service”, 16.

<sup>54</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 12.

<sup>55</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 24.

<sup>56</sup>Deborah Gaitskell. “Housewife, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Woman in Johannesburg”, *Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 241-256.

achieving food autonomy. Instead, a new Christian family model of “Male breadwinner, dependent housekeeping wife and mother and dependent school going children”<sup>57</sup> entrenched women’s dependent consumer status to the detriment of family food security and poor maternal health. Coupled with a Western view that agricultural production was man’s work and women’s involvement rendered them a “Beast of burden”,<sup>58</sup> missionary training discriminated against women’s participation in food production and reinforced their dependent and subordinate status. Hence it set a socio-religious norm for men to be involved in the public sphere making political and economic decisions, while women were confined to a domestic sphere “producing and raising male citizens to lead society”<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, the role of motherhood was socially valued and “elevated above professionalism”<sup>60</sup> because culturally it ensured societies’ survival.<sup>61</sup> Akyeampong and Fofack reckon that gendered division and subsequent male headship found resonance with the African worldview because it also entrenched and affirmed the pre-colonial contested hierarchical social structure with males as superior.<sup>62</sup> Having been imparted through Christian teaching, it appealed to African reverence for God (Modimo, UNkulunkulu, Thixo) or Superior Being, making MWPSU endure the burden of household responsibility even without capacity to achieve food autonomy.

### **2.2.1 MWPSU Teachings and its Contribution towards Food Autonomy and Maternal Health**

As shown above, missionary training confined African women to the domestic sphere and limited their daily activities to household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children and family morality. Accordingly, the domestic ideology offered married women the status of ‘angel’ in a private and child-centred home, which found resonance with the African worldview of women as respected custodians of morals, culture, and rituals.<sup>63</sup> First, it separated the home and workplace, progressively isolating women from production, allocation and

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<sup>57</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 241.

<sup>58</sup>Gaitskell, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 225.

<sup>59</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 12.

<sup>60</sup>Margaret Mead, “A Comment on the Role of Women in Agriculture”. In Tinker, I and Bo Bramsen, M. (ed). *Women and World Development*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, (Washington D.C: Overseas Development Council, 1976), 9.

<sup>61</sup>Akyeampong and Fofack, “The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth”, 27.

<sup>62</sup>Akyeampong and Fofack, “The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth”, 24.

<sup>63</sup>Akyeampong and Fofack, “The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth”, 12.

distribution,<sup>64</sup> which undermined women's involvement in agricultural and rural societies' subsistence food production and their ability to achieve food autonomy. Second, despite Christian teachings that afforded African mothers a "vital role of safeguarding female chastity, marital fidelity, maternal and domestic responsibility",<sup>65</sup> it socialised African women into dependence on males for subsistence living. Third, it reinforced women's role of service and selfless giving to others at the expense of women's personal needs. Moreover, studies have shown that in pre-colonial societies, particularly among African societies practicing subsistence agriculture, "women and men shared the hardships and benefits of subsistence production".<sup>66</sup> In this way, women could influence food production, allocation and distribution and determine the quality and quantity of their individual and family's food and nutrition. Hence, Mead observes, one of the consequences of removing women from food production is a decrease in agricultural production particularly where males migrate for wage work.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the removal of women from food production did not relieve them of household maintenance and caring responsibilities to which food is one of the key components. This was further reinforced by socializing women to accept that participating in public life was tantamount to renouncing "feminine virtues of silence, reticence, modesty and chastity",<sup>68</sup> driving women to passivity. Essentially, this characterized the inherent part of being an African Christian woman from which "women had almost no way of freeing themselves"<sup>69</sup> from an ensuing dependent, consumer status and, particularly, their inability to achieve food autonomy. Yet the domestic ideology continues to influence and even normalise women's struggles with household responsibilities in general, as societal expectation and assumption. Instead of living a life in a community of equals as promised by the Christian faith, women face a life of worry and anxiety, struggling for food and subsequent maternal health as "survival strategists".<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Gaitskel, *Housewife, Maids or Mothers*, 241.

<sup>65</sup>Gaitskel, *Power in Prayer and Service*, 255.

<sup>66</sup> Mead, "A Comment on the Role of Women", 3. Simon Maimela, "Seeking To Be a Christian in a Patriarchal Society", *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, 9(2), 27-42, November 1995, 28.

<sup>67</sup>Mead, "A Comment on the Role of Women", 9.

<sup>68</sup>Gaitskel, "Housewife, Maids or Mothers", 256.

<sup>69</sup>Maimela, "Seeking To Be a Christian", 27.

<sup>70</sup>Brigalia Bam, "Women and the Church in (South) Africa: Women are the Church (South) Africa" in Phiri, I.A. Nadar, S (ed) *On Being Church: Women's Voices and Visions*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 10.

In this way, missionary training created a ‘social location’ which reinforced prevailing socio-cultural norms and practices as MWPSU’s beliefs, desires, and actions. As Clifford suggests, such a context enables dominant voices, values and ideologies to reinforce experiences and thought patterns of subjugation. In this way, women’s actions were constituted and influenced by the meaning inherent in the Church teachings and practices, experienced in the weekly motherhood class. Despite envisaged Christian beneficial ideals, these women lost the status of worker and provider to that of “consumer and dependent”.<sup>71</sup> This entrenched the Western social assumption that women’s duty is to “satisfy men’s needs”, further affirmed by biblical interpretation and teachings that the “female role as that of a helpmate”.<sup>72</sup> In this way, the Methodist Christian teaching contributed towards women’s inability to achieve food autonomy, thus limiting the promotion of maternal health. This finds credence with Mead who points out that the “unquestioned erroneous beliefs about women from developed Western to developing societies” is the root cause of many negative effects development had on women’s life.<sup>73</sup>

### **2.3 MWPSU and the Subordination of Women**

According to Kanyoro, the Bible is a basis from which African Christians validate or do not validate their culture, and whose subjects depend on biblical interpreters and Christian teachings. This source further states that the status of women in the church is a microcosm of their social status.<sup>74</sup> Sprong articulates the subordination of women particularly in the MWPSU when the Circuit Superintendent who is normally a husband to the organisation’s President has the right to ratify even veto its decisions.<sup>75</sup> As shown above, missionary domestic teachings shaped and influenced the dependent and subordinate status of African married women. Even though marriage and childbearing is said to culturally mark the “upward social mobility and

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<sup>71</sup>Tamara Jacka, “Left Behind and Vulnerable? Conceptualizing Development and Older Women’s Agency in Rural China”, Australian National University, *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 38, No.(2), 2014, 189.

<sup>72</sup>Ruether, R.R. *Women-Church Theology and Practice*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers. 1993.95

<sup>73</sup>Mead, “A Comment on the Role of Women”, 3.

<sup>74</sup>Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, 2001, “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, In Njoroge N.J and Dube M.W. *Talitha Cum. Theologies of African Women*, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication. 2001), 164.

<sup>75</sup>Jenny L. Sprong, “*For Healing and Transformation*” A Feminist Ecclesiological Study on the Gap between Gender Policy and Practice in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, PhD diss., University of KwaZulu- Natal Pietermaritzburg, 2011, 50.

femininity”<sup>76</sup> of women, it is also found to expose women to poverty and oppressive environments. For instance, relating domestic production, reproduction and caring activities to women’s status, Christian teachings reinforced the subordinate status of women, gender inequality, women’s socio-economic dependence and limited women’s participation in family decision-making. As domestic responsibilities are unpaid and unrecognised, women were deprived of financial ambition, access to education and participation in economic opportunities, which perpetuate power differentials. Furthermore, women’s power to decide or influence the number and birth spacing of children was limited. According to Das Gupta, early marriage and childbearing limit future opportunities for women and children and it also impacts family health status.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, MWPSU teachings normalised the exclusion of women from institutions that make decisions and define power both for the MCSA and society. This attitude continues to shape the gendered perception of women and influences their sense of inferiority and subordinate place. Hence, Kanyoro suggests that women need to theologise their social, economic, religious and cultural realities so as to redeem that which is life-giving while denouncing all that is life diminishing.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, MWPSU training disadvantaged African women’s ability to make decisions, including their ability to access adequate food and nutrition, all of which have a bearing on women’s health and well-being.

## **2.4 MWPSU: A Space of Hope**

Women’s Manyano has survived various periods of struggle in South Africa, and has maintained a powerful position in black churches while strengthening women’s faith and sustaining their hope, particularly in rural areas where daily life is a struggle against poverty, hunger and disease.

Women’s organizations undoubtedly play very important roles in many programs of education and social development, health and nutrition, general welfare, family planning, and vocational training. For many women, these groups are a major factor in improving their situation in life. Formal women’s associations should certainly be better understood, better utilized, and more generously supported than they have been.... They often

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<sup>76</sup>“Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa: A Literature Review Examining Contributing Factors and Unique Interventions”, Ibis Reproduction Health, 25 February 2013, 3-4. [www.sexrightsafrika.net](http://www.sexrightsafrika.net) > 2016/11 > 201...accessed 10/10/2016.

<sup>77</sup>Das Gupta, M. 2013. “*Women’s Empowerment and Fertility: Policy Lessons*”, ( Population Division Expert Paper No.2013/2. University of Maryland USA, New York: United Nations, 2013), 6.

<sup>78</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 163.

represent the basis for women's power and authority in society where women have low status in families dominated by men....They need to be developed further to increase women's participation at all levels of social action.<sup>79</sup>

This statement affirms women's organizations as a space which provides hope and encouragement and within which women's individual and social status can be improved. In MWPSU meetings, members find space to be themselves, physically, emotionally and spiritually, and to "speak from deep within their religious, traditional and cultural realities".<sup>80</sup> In this way, MWPSU enables women to accept and appropriate themselves as the authentic and suitable participants in the image of God. Their femininity does not limit their capacity and ability to interpret scripture nor is their experience of God invalidated because of un-cleanliness codes<sup>81</sup> or cultural taboos.<sup>82</sup> As a result, Manyano meetings continue to provide an alternative community where all members equally share according to their gifts, while being nurtured and nurturing others through prayer and the Good News of salvation availed for all. It also affirms the hope that is found in Christ despite the failure of a fallen human nature, by providing an avenue in which women could seek solutions towards issues that affects women like food autonomy and maternal health.

Furthermore, Women's Manyano provides support for women's agency. The unity within women's organisations provides the support and courage to withstand some of the "androcentric attitude"<sup>83</sup>, while it also "broadened their scope beyond the clan".<sup>84</sup> Of significance is the numerical growth, as women constitute the majority of the church.<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, MWPSU's unrelenting service and commitment to the mission of God has been rightfully acknowledged as a "backbone of the entire church".<sup>86</sup> The organisation continues to

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79 Papanek, H. "Women in Cities: Problems and Perspectives" in Tinker, I and Bo Bramsen, M. (ed). *Women and World Development*, American Association for the Advancement of Science. (Washington D.C: Overseas. Development Council, 1976), 67-68.

<sup>80</sup>Bam, "Women and the Church", 11.

<sup>81</sup>Watson, N. *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>82</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 169.

<sup>83</sup>Beverley Haddad. "The Manyano Movement in South Africa: Site of Struggle, Survival, and Resistance *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*", *Journal of Religion & Spirituality* (2004) No. 61, (2004), 4.

<sup>84</sup>Gaitskel, "Power in Prayer and Service", 18.

<sup>85</sup>Bam, "Women and the Church", 12.

<sup>86</sup>Grace Mokitimi, "Women's Manyano" in Garrett, A.E.F, (ed) *South African Methodism Her Missionary Witness*, (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 1965), 90.

contribute to God's mission by adopting crèches, orphanages and hospices particularly among underserved societies. For instance, MWPSU recently responded to the national outcry and appeals for food and pain experienced in the recent Marikana massacre.<sup>87</sup> MWPSU has shown a commitment to support the ministry of love, restoration of human dignity, and justice for those who are marginalised by social and political powers.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the sisterhood that developed in MWPSU lent encouragement and contributed confidence when women suddenly found themselves heading households and fending for families alone during their husband's migration. In this way, MWPSU also challenged the traditional African worldview about women, family and social order and provided women a "subtle resistance to patriarchy, gender inequality and sexism embedded in the Church, culture and tradition".<sup>89</sup>

However, this newly established social order did not gain women the necessary and due respect as food producers or the Manyano organisation recognition as a vital organisation of the church beyond domesticated spirituality and fund raising. In fact, MWPSU's ability to inspire, guide and lead women to hold families together during various periods of turmoil in South Africa failed to motivate society and the Church to engage with women's experiences in socio-political, religious and economic affairs, particularly maternal issues. For example, male migration removed men from food gathering activities, reinforced women's daily concern with family maintenance, and entrenched a gendered responsibility for family food and nutrition. In this way, the role of women in the formation of a Christian family, holiness codes and faith in God sustained families and influenced society's economic, social, political and religious views. Even though the gospel affirms women's equality and respect, confining women to unpaid domestic responsibilities denied them access to economic and material resources necessary for achieving food autonomy and their capacity to promote maternal health. Hence, Bam says, women as the "backbone" need to take responsibility in the production of new and different theologies that will transform the Church and the social status of women.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Women's Manyano Limpopo District Convention 2014 visited the site of the Marikana massacre for prayer and distribution of food parcels to affected families. The MCSA is also involved in conflict resolution between mine bosses and the Workers Unions.

<sup>88</sup>MWPSU annual district convention reports throughout the 'connexion' reflect missionary work done through all the circuits.

<sup>89</sup>Haddad, "The Manyano Movement in South Africa", 7.

<sup>90</sup>Bam, "Women and the Church", 15.

However, the teachings and activities of MWPSU focus towards selfless service for church and community, often at the expense of the individual needs of women. For instance, when outreach projects address hunger and poverty for members of society, often donations are contributed even by women experiencing the same conditions. This is due to the tendency to be outward looking instead of being charitable to self because women often put their trust in God's providence. Hence, most of MWPSU's mission focuses away from women's issues like the achievement of food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health, and is rather on food parcels, adoption of NGO's and child early learning centres, among others. This finds resonance with Kanyoro's observation that some Christian teachings limits and narrows mission by treating people as if they are souls without bodies.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Bam suggests that women need to strive for the reality of abundant life as the reality of the gospel instead of mere survival.<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile, Papanek reckons when women's organizations are "developed properly" they have the potential to mobilize women's participation in the development process.<sup>93</sup> In this way, MWPSU could focus and support women's participation and response to current challenges, like lack of food autonomy and poor maternal health affecting Sub-Saharan countries. Moreover, African feminist theologians advocate for women to theologize their experiences in order to create new and relevant responses to current issues forging theologies of liberation in Africa.<sup>94</sup> In this way, MWM's participation in God's mission could avail "life and not death, healing and not diseases, freedom rather than suffering and God's kingdom to people."<sup>95</sup>

Missionary teachings and activities have given women the status of "angel" in the domestic sphere and "backbone of the circuit" within the church. This status mirrors the respect and dignity attributed to the enterprising woman of Proverbs 31. Although the feminist interpretation of the woman of Proverbs 31 is often given a negative connotation, its effect towards the affirmation of women's enterprising gifts and capabilities, decisiveness, and determination to stand out and claim her space against patriarchal limitations could be used to redeem the human

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<sup>91</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 160.

<sup>92</sup>Bam, "Women and the Church", 15.

<sup>93</sup>Papanek, *Women in Cities*, 68.

<sup>94</sup>Bam, "Women and the Church", 18.

<sup>95</sup>Sarajini Nadar. "On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions". In Phiri, I.A. Nadar, S (eds) *On Being Church: Women's Voices and Visions*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 19.

dignity of women. The determination of the unnamed woman of Proverbs 31 has ensured that women's "functionings" are recognised and her "capabilities" given the respect they deserve. Similarly, when MWPSU's capacity to participate in food production can be recognized, their agency towards achieving food autonomy could be enhanced, and their dignity restored towards their wellbeing and maternal health.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown the formation and history of the MWPSU and its spread to local contexts like Mashobye. I have explored how new life through missionary wives' training of African converts affected their socio-cultural context and empowered women personally, socially and spiritually. I have also shown how new ways of motherhood, preaching and expression of personal desires through prayer, built solidarity and sisterhood. Moreover, I have shown how the influence of the Victorian 'cult of womanhood' informed MWPSU Christian teachings and reinforced women's dependent, subordinate and inferior status. As this discriminated against women's ability to produce food, it diminished their achievement of the food autonomy essential for the promotion of maternal health. However, the unity within MWPSU was also shown to provide a place of hope and serve as a local agent of transformation that could empower women towards achieving food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health. The next chapter investigates the significance of food autonomy in relation to maternal health.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FOOD AUTONOMY FOR MATERNAL HEALTH A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the formation and history of MWPSU and reflected on how its teachings influenced women's experiences and affected their social landscape. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano ability to achieve food autonomy could lead to the promotion of maternal health. This chapter responds to objective one of the study, which is to investigate the significance of food autonomy for maternal health. In order to achieve its objective, first this chapter affirms food as a basic human right for all people. Second, while this chapter acknowledges the indicators to monitor and evaluate maternal health according to the World Health Organization (WHO), its aim is to investigate the significance and impact of food autonomy on maternal health. Third, the chapter explores factors that perpetuate the lack of food autonomy for MWM like patriarchy, church teachings, poverty, gender inequality and culture. The chapter concludes by affirming that women in particular have the right to achieve food autonomy so as to enjoy an inalienable right to maternal health.

#### 3.2 The Universal Declaration of the Right to Food

The right to food for individuals, societies and nations has concerned humanity for a long time. For instance, after World War II, 'The United Nations Charter for Human Rights'<sup>96</sup> recognized "inalienable human rights as its basis" and assumed an alignment towards God's food provision for humanity. Subsequently, in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Art. 25.1 states "Everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself (sic) and that of his family,

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<sup>96</sup>it is believed to be the foundation of international human rights law as it inspires a rich body of legally binding international human rights treaties and represents the universal recognition that basic rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent to all human beings, inalienable and equally applicable to everyone, and that everyone of us is born free and equal in dignity and rights. Whatever our nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status, the international community on December 10 1948 made a commitment to upholding dignity and justice for all of us. [www.un.org/universal-declaration.human](http://www.un.org/universal-declaration.human).accessed 20/02/2015.

including food, housing, clothing, medical care and necessary social services.”<sup>97</sup> By 1966, states agreed to two binding treaties: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) which further recognizes the “fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger” as a basis of all international human rights to food. Furthermore, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognized the “right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development and to take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and to provide in case of need material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.”<sup>98</sup> The 1974 World Food Conference (hereafter WFC) then introduced and defined food security in international and national terms as “the availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food stuffs... to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption... and to offset fluctuation in production and price”.<sup>99</sup> Between 1948 and 1989, the international human right to food was established for states, nations and individuals, to ensure that no individual, community or nation experienced hunger. Hence the 1996 World Food Summit adopted this definition for food security status relating it to health.

food security exists, at the individual, household, national, and economic levels when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preference for a healthy and active life.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, the South African Constitution Bill of Rights Section 26 and 27 entrenches the right to adequate food for all its citizens. As a commitment to entrench the right to food for all, South Africa was also part of the 189 nations who committed to the 2000 achievement of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDG’s) by 2015. Accordingly, the South African Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) vision aligns with the Food Agriculture

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<sup>97</sup>UN General Assembly Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which Art. 25.1 forms a part. [www.un.org > universal-declaration-hum...accessed 12/05/2015](http://www.un.org > universal-declaration-hum...).

<sup>98</sup>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), 1966.[www.ohchr.org>...> Professional Interest.accessed 12/05/2015](http://www.ohchr.org>...> Professional Interest.accessed 12/05/2015).

<sup>99</sup>Lehohla, P. GHS Series Volume IV Food Security and Agriculture 2002-2011 In-depth Analysis of the General Household Survey Data – Statistics South Africa, 2011, 2.<https://www.statssa.gov.za > publications.accessed 20/08/2015>.

<sup>100</sup>World Food Summit, 1996, Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, [www.fao.org > forestry.accessed 20/08/2015](http://www.fao.org > forestry.accessed 20/08/2015).

Organization (FAO) food security definition.<sup>101</sup> In this way, women's right to food and health has been universally and nationally entrenched in various laws and obligations. However, "historical socio-economic and racial inequalities of the past colonial and apartheid governments"<sup>102</sup> as well as unemployment perpetuate poverty and contribute towards prevailing food insecurity. Koch attributes the problem of food insecurity in South Africa to the colonial and Apartheid government systems, which entrenched a policy of separate development and denied the Black majority their right to food production as a basic human right and development, due to lack of land. South Africa's middle class status, 'national food security' and financial capacity towards its key priorities have not been able to ensure food security to about 56 percent of mostly Black society in rural areas, such as Mashobye in Limpopo province.<sup>103</sup> As a result, this study suggests that food autonomy could enable women and MWM in particular to make beneficial choices about the quality and quantity of their food and nutrition, particularly towards the promotion of maternal health. Essentially, MWM have the right to food, nutrition and health, and most women in Mashobye work hard to access food and nutrition in order to ensure individual and family health outcomes. However, women's efforts often fail to achieve the required outcomes due to "circumstances beyond their control".<sup>104</sup> Hence, understanding food autonomy and its relation to maternal health is essential to this study.

### 3.3 Understanding Food Autonomy

Food autonomy serves as a background to this study and affirms the UN Millennium Development Goals and the South African government commitment to achieve food security and achieve a ¾ maternal health target as required for MDG5 by 2015. Studies have shown that "hunger and poverty are not caused by lack of food but by food systems that manipulate production, distribution and capacity for small producers",<sup>105</sup> affecting particularly women and

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<sup>101</sup>Josee Koch. *The Food Security Policy Context in Southern Africa*, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (Brazil: UN Development Programme, 2011), 4. [www.ipc.undp.org](http://www.ipc.undp.org). accessed 10/10/2015.

<sup>102</sup>Koch, *The Food Security Policy Context in Southern Africa*, 2.

<sup>103</sup>De Cock et al., "*Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo*", 274.

<sup>104</sup>Ivan Manuel Abrahams, "Give us this day our daily bread", The Presiding Bishop's address to the 120<sup>th</sup> MCSA Conference, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, September 2009, (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House and Book Depot, 2010), 10.

<sup>105</sup>Elizabeth M. Young, *Food and Development*, (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 13, Tim, Lang and Michael, Heasman. *Food Wars The Global Battle for Mouths, Minds and Markets*, (London: Earthscan, 2004), 218.

children in rural areas in developing countries. The above argument suggests that victims of food insecurity are denied rights to make decisions on food production, distribution and governance, hence the need for food autonomy. Gould defines food autonomy as a people's or a community's ability to independently and fairly control both the quantity and the quality/appropriateness of their food as well as their collectively owned knowledge about food.<sup>106</sup>

This definition suggests that food autonomy enables individuals, communities and nations to manipulate the necessary resources in order to produce adequate food and nutrition for their individual and family needs according to their knowledge and in line with their culture and spirituality.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, food autonomy presupposes a state where people or communities enjoy a right to independent decision-making about the quality and quantity of their food. In addition, the necessary resources, including indigenous knowledge, views and beliefs about food systems and methods, are available to enable beneficial choices. Furthermore, people or community have power to sustain food production according to their culture. Advocates for food autonomy argue that its aim is to promote self-sufficiency through indigenous self-development within the traditionally appropriate food system and in relation to the environment.<sup>108</sup> As a result, food autonomy can help sustain indigenous knowledge about the land, food production methods, processing and storage, and thus reverse the condition of food insecurity and its adverse effect on health issues, particularly maternal health. In this study, food autonomy presupposes the freedom and independence for MWM to make beneficial and fair decisions about the quantity and quality of their food and nutrition as well as that of their significant others. While food autonomy is a relatively new concept, food security has been criticised, particularly for conditions of food insecurity in developing economies.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Kerin Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", Indigenous Research Center of the Americas, (Department of Native: American Studies: U.C. Davis, 2004), 2. [http://www.escholarship.org/help\\_copyright.html#reuse](http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright.html#reuse). accessed 22/10/2015. In this study, food autonomy emphasizes " women's freedom and right to personally, morally and legally make decisions about the quality, quantity and governance of their food".

<sup>107</sup>Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", 2.

<sup>108</sup>Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", 5.

<sup>109</sup>See Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy" and Marc Edelman, "Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue Forgotten Genealogies and Future Regulatory Challenges", (Program in Agrarian Studies, Yale University. International Conference Paper #72 14-15 September 2014).

### 3.3.1 The Food Security Problem

The 1996 World Food Conference's (WFC) definition of food security provides a holistic approach to food access, availability and sustainability, yet its response to the 2007-2008 food crises and implementation raised global concern.<sup>110</sup> According to Randolph and Hertel, the 2007-2008 food crises affected the global community by causing the fluctuation of production and prices. Consequently, several states entered an international agreement to make provision of food aid an obligation under international law, which resulted in the formation of the Food Aid Convention (FAC) to drive the food aid commitment.<sup>111</sup> As a result, provision for the right to food was removed from nations and individuals and allocated to international commercial bodies financed through the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank (WB). According to advocates for the right to food, food then became a "commodity to be used as a weapon in political and economic negotiations"<sup>112</sup> as well as a "tool of trade",<sup>113</sup> often resulting in the manipulation of food access by multinationals.

Similarly, in his exploration of the South African democratic government IFSS policy directives and priorities on food security, Koch points to the social food policies from colonial rule to the apartheid regime. According to Koch, while the colonial government had a paternalistic food relief programme, the National Party's apartheid government Separate Development policy set out to cut government aid to non-white people, including school feeding schemes. What made the plight of food relief for Africans more desperate was that these food relief cuts happened against the backdrop of brutal seizure of local land and violent resettlement schemes which forced Africans into crowded townships and later homelands. Amongst other things, this national policy framework caused widespread hunger as it denied the Black majority political rights and participation in the economic mainstream.<sup>114</sup> In the meantime, Koch observes that the Apartheid "economic agricultural production policy which pursued self-sufficiency was done at the

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<sup>110</sup>See Lang, T and Haesmann, M. (2004), Young, E. M. (2012), Edelman, M. (2013).

<sup>111</sup>Randolph, S and Hertel, S. *The Right to Food: A Global Overview The State of Economic and Social Human Rights: A Global Overview*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2012), 9. See also Food Aid Convention (FAC) 1999 Preamble, Objectives and Definitions, 43-47. [www.foodaidconvention.org>iga1995](http://www.foodaidconvention.org>iga1995). accessed 22/08/2015.

<sup>112</sup>Gould. "Deep Food Autonomy", 4.

<sup>113</sup>Don Buckingham, "Food Security, Law and Theology Biblical underpinning of the right to food", *A Discussion Paper. December 6, 2000 (Canadian Food grains Bank: A Christian response to hunger, 2000)*, 5. [www.foodgrainsbank.ca > uploads > fjr\\_f\\_biblical](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca > uploads > fjr_f_biblical). accessed 08/08/2015.

<sup>114</sup> Koch, *The Food Security Policy Context in Southern Africa*, 4- 6.

exclusion of consumers”,<sup>115</sup> resulting in total welfare loss for the country as a whole and rural communities, particularly women and children. Because South Africa also participates in the global market, cash crops often take precedence over local food production, contributing to food shortage that could make the country’s food production vulnerable to global price fluctuations, and the nation, particularly rural areas like Mashobye, vulnerable to food insecurity.

As a result, the poverty experienced in rural areas can be attributed to economic manipulation that advantages the few elite at the expense of the poor. As Mead suggests, having been carried out alongside modernisation, this exclusion emphasized male-dominated scientific agricultural production while neglecting the field of nutrition and food processing which forms women’s area of responsibility.<sup>116</sup> As a result, women in particular were removed from participating and influencing food production, allocation and distribution and relegated to a dependent lower consumer status which denied them the right to achieve food autonomy. Accordingly, Young reckons that the ability for some people to command food reflects their political, economic, social and military inherited positions within the international system and its national and sub-national elements.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the concept of food security above, and the international, regional and national community’s commitment to food security, food insecurity persists both globally and particularly in Sub Saharan Africa and South Africa. While the “world is said to produce enough food” and South Africa is classified as a “middle class and food secure country at national level”, the level of food insecurity is shown to have risen. This resonates with the FAO report that 805 million people experience chronic hunger globally and 791 million of those live in developing countries.<sup>118</sup> While this translates to 1 in 8 people in Sub Saharan Africa, it has been shown to be 1 in 4 people in South Africa.<sup>119</sup> One of the reasons often cited for global food insecurity is that a few multinationals control and influence the global food system, promoting particularly cash crops.<sup>120</sup> In such a food system, food production, distribution and consumption is no longer

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<sup>115</sup>Koch, *The Food Security Policy Context in Southern Africa*, 4.

<sup>116</sup>Mead, “A Comment on the Role of Women”, 10.

<sup>117</sup>Young, *Food and Development*, 22.

<sup>118</sup>FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) 2014*, 34.

<sup>119</sup>FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) 2014*, 34.

<sup>120</sup>De Cock et al., “Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo”, 277.

based on equality, socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture, and an economy that prioritise the welfare of people.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, the injustice created by such a system is said to divide the community between the rich and poor, reinforcing inequality and denying the poor resources and means towards the achievement of food autonomy. In such cases, women's dependency increases and their vulnerability to food insecurity leads to nutritional deprivation for women, children and the elderly. Instead of living life in community and being nurtured while nurturing others and sustainable wellbeing for all, the rich limits the welfare of the poor. This is despite a World Bank report that reflect that "30% of all workers globally are employed in the agricultural industry and of those 60% make up the labour force of Sub Saharan Africa",<sup>122</sup> while statistics South Africa reports that "61% of women are involved in agriculture".<sup>123</sup> Hence, Mead argues that removing aspects of food production like local allocation, preservation and consumption from the influence of women contributes to the neglect and loss of its main means of freeing people from hunger.<sup>124</sup> Actually, food security has been blamed for the global food imbalance and hunger, particularly its effect on developing countries.<sup>125</sup> As a result, Young concludes that "adequate food and hunger can be present in the same place".<sup>126</sup>

According to research done in Thulamela Municipality, "53% of households in rural Limpopo are severely food insecure and only 15% are food secure".<sup>127</sup> Thulamela municipality in Limpopo Province of South Africa is largely rural, with only 4.72% of land arable, and 1.1% an urban area, of which Mashobye village forms part. The population consists of 54% women, 45% men, and 51.3% under 20.<sup>128</sup> As shown in chapter one, Mashobye is one of the rural villages that make up Thulamela municipality of Vhembe district in the north of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Limpopo Province is classified among the poorest provinces, with the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. As a result, Mashobye women experience hunger, disease and poverty, which points to the effects of lack of food and nutrition. Hence women in rural areas are often

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<sup>121</sup>World Vision, Theological Foundations on Food Livelihood Security, World Vision, 2013. [www.wvi.org/siter/default/files/F...](http://www.wvi.org/siter/default/files/F...) accessed 22/08/2016.

<sup>122</sup> World Bank's Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Hunger: A Report to the Development Committee (English), March 31 1995. 8. [worldbank.org/1995/03/w...](http://worldbank.org/1995/03/w...) accessed 17/11/2015

<sup>123</sup>Pali Lehohla, GHS Series Volume IV, 7.

<sup>124</sup>Mead, "A Comment on the Role of Women", 10.

<sup>125</sup>Young, *Food and Development*, 14.

<sup>126</sup> Young, *Food and Development*, 21.

<sup>127</sup>De Cock et al., "Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo", 274.

<sup>128</sup>Thulamela Statistics South Africa. 2007, 34. [www.statssa.gov.za > id=thulamela-muni...](http://www.statssa.gov.za/id=thulamela-muni...) accessed 22/08/2015.

forced to substitute nutritional food items with cheap food items of low nutritional value. This is in line with a study conducted by Oni, Maliwichi and Obadire, which found that rural communities in developing countries of Sub Saharan Africa lack access to basic food intake to provide them with energy and nutrients for full productive lives, partly because of lack of job opportunities and poor access to social services.<sup>129</sup> As a result, Buffels reminds Christians and churches to take the side of the poor, claim solidarity with them in their struggle, thereby liberating the oppressed from misery and marginality, and bringing down the powerful from their thrones.<sup>130</sup> In this way, the church as the consciousness for the society could hold the South African democratic government accountable to its commitment to the “eradication of poverty”<sup>131</sup> and the achievement of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDG’s) by 2015.<sup>132</sup> Relevant to this study, is South African government commitment to MDG1 and MDG5, to eradicate poverty and achieve  $\frac{3}{4}$  maternal mortality ratio by 2015, respectively.

### 3.4 Understanding Maternal Health

The high maternal mortality ratio has conscientized the world regarding the life of women and children, and various studies recommend different ways to address the problem. In agreement, I propose that maternal health can be achieved when women’s ability to achieve food autonomy is guaranteed. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity”.<sup>133</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) defines maternal health as the “health of a woman

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<sup>129</sup>Oni, S. A. Maliwichi L. L. Obadire. O. S, “Socio-economic factors affecting smallholder farming and household food security: A case of Thulamela local municipality in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa”, *African Journal of Agricultural Research* Vol. 5(17), 2010, 2290.

<sup>130</sup>Olehile Buffel, “Preferential option for the poor in the current context of poverty in South Africa: doing liberation theology in the footsteps of Simon Maimela”, Department of Practical Theology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa. n.d, n.p. uir.unisa.ac.za > bitstream > handle > Buf...accessed 10/04/2016.

<sup>131</sup>Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and South African Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) vision aligns with the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO) food security definition. See Magombeyi, M. S., Taigbenu, A. E. and Barron, J. Rural poverty and Food insecurity mapping at district level for improved agricultural water management in the Limpopo River Basin. Colombo, Sri Lanka: CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF). 54 (CPWF Research for Development (R4D) Series 6), 2013. <http://hdl.handle.net/10568/33843>. accessed 10/10/2015.

<sup>132</sup>Koch, “*The Food Security Policy Context*”, 4.

<sup>133</sup>Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948. The definition has not been amended since 1948. [www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html](http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html). Accessed 17 August 2015.

during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period”.<sup>134</sup> Maternal health has been incorporated into the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDG’s) as Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG5) – Improve Maternal Health. The United Nations (UN) measures maternal health by two indicators, MDG 5a and MDG 5b, and sets a target date for their achievement between 1990 and 2015. MDG5a is measured by two indicators: the maternal mortality ratio<sup>135</sup> (MMR) and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel. It targets a three-quarter reduction in MMR as well as the achievement of universal access to reproductive health by 2015. MDG5b is measured by four indicators: contraceptive prevalence rate; adolescent birth rate; antenatal care coverage; and unmet need for family planning.

### **3.4.1 The Impact of Food Autonomy on Maternal Health**

Good nutrition is shown to be the source of energy to live an active life and the first defence against diseases. The right to food is universal and good nutrition is essential for all, yet nutritional deficiency is found to affect women in more ways than the rest of society. Based on Figure 1 below, nutrition affects the physiological individual life of a woman, as well as during pregnancy (affecting the foetus and unborn child), the postpartum period (as providing food for others),<sup>136</sup> and as carer and nurturer (domestic production). As Rotimi and Ola says “whatever was the father of a disease, an ill-diet was the mother”.<sup>137</sup>

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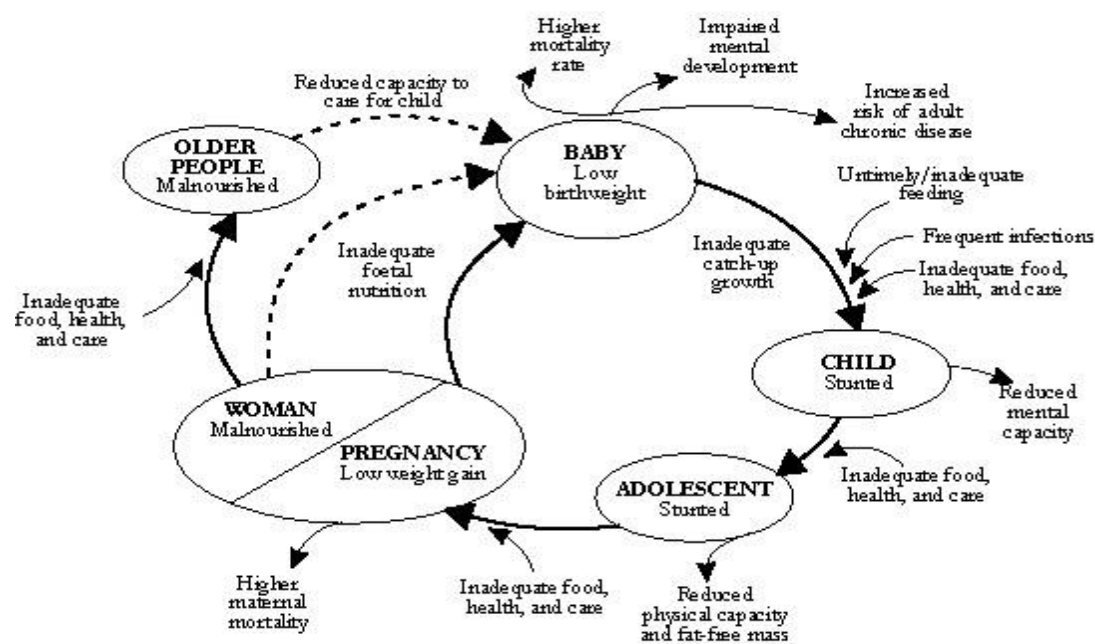
<sup>134</sup>L.S Ratcliffe et al. “Improved Maternal Health since the ICDP 20 Years of Progress (ICDP) (International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014”, ICDP *Expert Meeting on Women’s Health- Rights, Empowerment and Social Determinants* 30<sup>th</sup> September- 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014, Mexico Background Paper, #4).

<sup>135</sup>MMR measures the rate of the death of mothers for every 100 000 live births- 38 deaths for every 100 000 live births.

<sup>136</sup>Penny Van Esterik, “Right to food, Right to feed, Right to be fed. The intersection of Women’s Right and the right to food”, *Agriculture and Human Values*; June 1999. 16 (2); ProQuest Agricultural Journal Department of Anthropology, (Canada. Netherland: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 225.

<sup>137</sup>George Herbert in 1660 as quoted by Rotimi, F.T and Ola, D.J. “Strategies for Food Security and Health Improvement in Sub Sharan Africa” *World Journal of Agricultural Science* 3(6): 808-814, 2007 ISSN 1817-3047 =- IDOSI, Publication 2007 (2007), 809.

Figure 1 Nutrition throughout the Lifecycle<sup>138</sup>



Source: ACC/SCN and IFPRI (2000).

Food and nutrition affect people, particularly women's health, throughout the different stages of life and as such women have more nutritional needs than men. According to Figure 1, inadequate food and nutrition at any stage of a woman's life makes her vulnerable to a vicious cycle of malnutrition,<sup>139</sup> with devastating implications for food insecurity and poverty. First, inadequate food and nutrition result in insufficient calories and micronutrient content which affects women's energy levels, effective bodily functions, absorption, and the development of the unborn child if the woman is pregnant.<sup>140</sup> Second, women have a societal responsibility to household activities like reproductive and productive work, childbirth and childrearing despite the poverty level of families in most rural Sub Saharan African countries. Third, inadequate intrauterine nutrition poses a health challenge to the foetus and the pregnant woman in terms of stunting, wasting, and even death. Studies show how nutrition affects women's health, and advance various reasons

<sup>138</sup>Figure 1 is adopted from UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: Scope, Trends, Causes and Consequences Dimensions of the Nutrition Problem, This is to show the effect of food and nutrition on the woman's lifecycle, 2012, 19. <ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao>. Accessed 15/05/2015.

<sup>139</sup>Malnutrition is a broad term that refers to all forms of poor nutrition. Malnutrition is caused by a complex array of factors including dietary inadequacy (deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in macronutrients –carbohydrates, protein, fats – and micronutrients), infections and socio-cultural factors. Malnutrition includes under-nutrition as well as overweight and obesity (Shekar M, 2009; UNSCN, 2010; SUN, 2010), as quoted by Tirado, M.C.2012. In this study, malnutrition refers to under-nutrition.

<sup>140</sup> UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 16.

why many women choose to work in food related sectors. Despite this, FAO reports that 1 billion people consume inadequate nutrition. It results particularly in low iron intake, Zinc and Vitamin A deficiency, contributing to a likelihood of stunting, premature delivery, and even death during labour. This source further says that nutrition-deficient food affects half of all pregnant women in 56% of all developing countries.<sup>141</sup> In fact, WHO sums up this situation by stating, “800 women die daily from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth but also that 99% of maternal deaths occur in developing countries with maternal mortality highest amongst women living in rural areas”.<sup>142</sup> Consequently, Van Esterick notes that “food is the mainstay of health”.<sup>143</sup> In fact, South Africa’s maternal mortality ratio stands at “269 in 100 000 live births, in comparison to MDG5 rate of 38 deaths in 100 000”,<sup>144</sup> almost ten times above the WHO acceptable rate.

Similarly, Akinyele, Ezekannagha and Obayelu reckon that infancy, adolescence and pregnancy are the three most “critical nutritional timings in a human life cycle”.<sup>145</sup> Since the first nutrition a child will receive is from her mother during pregnancy, inadequate intra-uterine nutrition, status and health of a mother during pregnancy and lactation will affect the nutrition and health status of her child. In such situations, both the “mother and the child risk complicated birth outcomes and poor child development, like poor physical and cognitive development, resulting in lack of opportunities for individual and family”.<sup>146</sup> This is supported by WHO, reporting that “1.5 million children suffer malnutrition daily”.<sup>147</sup> According to FAO, the problem of protein, vitamin and micronutrient deficiency contributed to 178 million stunted preschool children in developing countries. This source further indicates that South Africa is one of the 20 countries which contribute to 80% of the world’s stunted pre-schoolers.<sup>148</sup> Hence, Ramachadran relate the mother’s under-nourishment to stunting and maternal mortality, as the mother’s nutrition

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<sup>141</sup> UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 15.

<sup>142</sup> WHO Fact Sheet 2014. [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/) accessed 10/10/2015.

<sup>143</sup> Van Esterick, “The Right to food”, 228.

<sup>144</sup> Worku, Millennium Development Goals, 75.

<sup>145</sup> Akinyele Isaac Olaoluwa, Ezekannagha Oluchi Juliet and Obayelu Abiodun Elijah, “Socio-demographic Changes and Potential Impact on Nutrition in Africa, Challenges for nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa” Background documents for the SUNRAY regional workshops (2012), 63. [www.sunrayafrica.co.za](http://www.sunrayafrica.co.za) accessed 10/07/2015.

<sup>146</sup> Buckingham, “Food Security, Law and Theology”, 4.

<sup>147</sup> WHO Fact Sheet 2014.

<sup>148</sup> UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 17-18.

deficiency is handed down as a “terrifying inheritance”<sup>149</sup> to the unborn child. As Figure 1 shows, if a child born of an undernourished mother is a girl, she will affect her generation of an undernourished, poor physically and cognitively developed lineage, creating a vicious circle of malnutrition, stunting, underdevelopment, food insecurity and poverty. Van Asterik argues that “depriving women the “right to feed” is a gross violation of their human right to food and health”.<sup>150</sup> However, improved family nutrition is said to “address issues that leads to teenage pregnancy”,<sup>151</sup> which negatively affects 21.1% of rural Blacks and 13.7% of urban Blacks, a problem which is also seen as a contributing factor to poor maternal health, economic dependence, limited decision-making power and limited job opportunities.<sup>152</sup> As Rotimi and Ola suggest, food can reduce nutritional diseases that translate into hunger, disease and poverty.<sup>153</sup>

Socially, most women in rural Sub Saharan Africa are expected to perform unpaid household duties like cleaning, cooking, fetching water and collecting firewood even when they are pregnant. As such, these women require sustained energy and endurance for daily household responsibilities. Otherwise, inadequate calorie, vitamin and micronutrient intake is said to result in low energy levels and increased vulnerability to ill-health, because in the case of food insufficiency, women “consume less than the necessary nutrition requirement due to intra-household food distribution”.<sup>154</sup> This is because women prioritise feeding their husbands and children, risking inadequate nutritional security and increased poor maternal health. Consequently, Van Asterik observes that “eliminating all forms of discrimination against women requires meeting women’s need for food”.<sup>155</sup>

As shown above, nutrition affects the human life cycle. While adequate nutrition contributes to women’s good health, malnutrition is associated with suffering, illness, even death.<sup>156</sup> However, Gould suggests that food autonomy could enable agency to determine adequate food, nutrition and appropriate caloric intake. First, food autonomy is believed to avail choices about adequate

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<sup>149</sup>Ramachadran, Nira, “*Women and Food Security in Asia*”, (Paper No. 2006/131, 13).

<sup>150</sup>Van Esterik, “*Right to Food*”, 8.

<sup>151</sup>Akinyele, Ezakannga and Obayelu, Socio Demographic Changes, 55.

<sup>152</sup>Teenage Pregnancy South Africa, 17.

<sup>153</sup>Rotimi and Ola, “*Strategies for Food Security*”, 808.

<sup>154</sup>Neetu Choudhary and D, Parthasarathy, “*Gender, Work and Household Food Security*”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (Feb. 10-16, 2007), Published by: Economic and Political Weekly, 2014, 523.

<sup>155</sup> Van Esterik, “*Right to Food*”, 225.

<sup>156</sup>Rotimi and Ola, “*Strategies for Food Security*”, 809.

food and nutrition, and to provide the body with necessary calories, micronutrients and vitamins. Second, adequate nutrition promotes women's body function and minimizes problems related to maternal health, including childbirth and childrearing. Third, women's "social and economic status can be improved",<sup>157</sup> towards "enhanced dignity and wellbeing".<sup>158</sup> According to Gould, food autonomy can strengthen family ties in relation to space, identities and roles in reciprocal and interrelated circles of caring and being cared for, nurturing and being nurtured in a synchronized rituality with others and nature.<sup>159</sup> In a way, every meal affirms God's restoration of life and demonstrates equal dignity and value irrespective of gender, background and rank. Similarly, Gould recognizes the role of adequate food and nutrition in human development as it nourishes the brain and enables it to focus and absorb better.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, food autonomy has been shown to nurture beyond biological needs to the physiological and social, and also to harmonise communal existence between humanity and all creation in expressing gratitude to God. Accordingly, Rotimi and Ola conclude that food is the mainstay of life and that physical, mental and social wellbeing relate to the quality of life of an individual and their ability to meet their responsibilities.<sup>161</sup> However, women's ability to achieve food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health has been limited by various factors and practices.

### **3.5 Factors Contributing to Lack of Food Autonomy amongst Women**

The causes of lack of food autonomy are many and varied. Most of the factors contribute to women's poverty, hunger and diseases, resulting in women's vulnerability particularly to poor maternal health. However, this study will be limited to patriarchy, Church teachings, poverty, gender inequality, and culture.

#### **3.5.1 Patriarchy and MWM Lack of Food Autonomy**

According to Rakoczy, patriarchy is based on the Latin for 'father' – 'Pater' meaning rule by a father or fathers. It validates the superiority of men and the inferiority of women biologically, intellectually, anthropologically, and socially. This also means that all females are inherently of a

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<sup>157</sup> Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 228.

<sup>158</sup> Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 189.

<sup>159</sup> Gould, "Deep Food autonomy", 4.

<sup>160</sup> Gould, "Deep Food autonomy", 19.

<sup>161</sup> Rotimi and Ola, "Strategies for Food Security", 809.

lesser value than any male human being.<sup>162</sup> Rakoczy traces the hierarchical social relation of patriarchy to the Greek philosopher Aristotle who argued that “it was natural for the superior to govern the inferior, justifying that men are to govern women at all times and in all ways”.<sup>163</sup> Hence, the vulnerability of women is often attributed to their lack of power over material and economic resources under the control of their husbands or male relatives. As a result, the manifestation of patriarchy in various ideologies, institutions, systems and structures contributes to lack of food autonomy in Sub Saharan Africa and particularly in South Africa.

In addition, Clifford states that patriarchal structures, culture, society and religious bodies, including the Christian church, prioritize men while relegating the status of women and children to one of inferiority.<sup>164</sup> As South Africa is rated as the “third most unequal societies in the world”,<sup>165</sup> with men occupying the top powerful positions and women and children the bottom and low social status, women’s ability to achieve food autonomy in relation to maternal health can be said to be disadvantaged socially, economically and religiously.

Studies have shown that in traditional society, women and men shared in the “burden and benefit of productive work”<sup>166</sup> and “subsistence activities like food production, conservation and distribution”.<sup>167</sup> Maimela acknowledges women’s autonomous status in the tribal agricultural period and the power and esteem they had due to their capacity to give birth and produce food to sustain the community just as the earth.<sup>168</sup> Maimela further says, to entrench male superiority, men denigrated female sexuality to create a “basis of socio-cultural and religious tradition which justified the treatment of women as unclean, inferior, undeserving”,<sup>169</sup> and their need to be controlled. As a result, women’s removal from food production dispossessed them of the land, restricted them to their homes and thus denied them the right to determine their own food and nutritional security. In this way, women lost the right to land as a resource, resulting in a serious

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<sup>162</sup> Susan Rakoczy, *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 2004), 10.

<sup>163</sup> Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 11.

<sup>164</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 18.

<sup>165</sup> De Cock et al. “Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo”, 271.

<sup>166</sup> Irene Tinker, “Introduction on the seminar on Women and World Development”. In Tinker, I and Bo Bramsen, M. (ed) *Women and World Development*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, (*Washington D.C: Overseas Development Council, 1976*), 3.

<sup>167</sup> Mead, “A Comment on the Role of Women”, 9.

<sup>168</sup> Maimela, “Seeking to be Christian”, 27.

<sup>169</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 32.

deprivation of their right to food. This fuelled women's vulnerability to poverty and inability to achieve food autonomy, contributing to poor maternal health and committing families to food and nutrition insecurity. According to feminist theologians, female sexuality continues to be used to justify female inferiority and deny women opportunities for self-development, thereby perpetuating hunger, poverty and disease.

Even though "70 percent of women in Sub Saharan Africa are said to be involved in some sort of agricultural production, yet they are shown to struggle daily with household responsibilities relating to food and nutrition".<sup>170</sup> This is because instead of envisioning an inclusive community of women and men participating in God's love for his creation, the economic patriarchal ideology promoted discrimination against women's productive capacity.<sup>171</sup> In fact, Clifford says that mainstream patriarchal ideologies contribute to women's vulnerability because powerful voices tend to condition women's experiences of subjugation "as if it is the way things are and are meant to be".<sup>172</sup> Accordingly, studies relate the "commodification of food to the removal of food production system from communities, societies and nations",<sup>173</sup> and particularly "deprivation of women's access to food and nutrition".<sup>174</sup> Therefore, Mead concludes that patriarchy is primarily responsible for women's loss of participation in food production and subsequent influence on food allocation and distribution. Moreover, feminist theologians blame patriarchy for the subordination, oppression and vulnerability of women and that patriarchal ideologies dominate and condition women's opinion, views and beliefs according to their particular "social location".<sup>175</sup>

### **3.5.1.1 Colonial influence**

Akyeampong and Fofack note that colonial policies and institutions were established to "expropriate, extract and export natural and human resources to benefit the expansion of manufacturing base in Europe".<sup>176</sup> In addition, Boikhutso says that in an effort to ensure domination, the colonization process restructured bureaucracy, linguistics and culture while the

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<sup>170</sup>Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security", 5383.

<sup>171</sup>Maimela, "Seeking to be Christian", 28.

<sup>172</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, pp36.

<sup>173</sup>Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", 18.

<sup>174</sup>Mead, "A Comment on the Role of Women", 11.

<sup>175</sup>Natalie Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>176</sup>Akyeampong, E and Fofack, H, "The Contribution of African Women", 18.

colonization ideology influenced practices and perceptions of indigenous knowledge in order to reflect Western customs and development as superior.<sup>177</sup> Alternatively, Tinker acknowledges a partnership that existed in traditional societies in which men and women shared the “burden and benefit of productive work”.<sup>178</sup> This was facilitated through tribal customs which allowed women farmers to have user’s rights to land and communities to have the customary communal land tenure rights.<sup>179</sup> According to Beneria and Sen, even a system of polygamy “enabled each wife control of cultivating their plots and influence over the harvest with subsequent access, allocation and distribution of food”.<sup>180</sup> In contrast, the “Colonial civil law and native courts undermined tribal customs by privatizing land to men and disturbed a communal food production partnership that existed between men and women”,<sup>181</sup> and disturbed “a sense of community”.<sup>182</sup> As a result, women could not benefit from agricultural training or skills in modern technology, which hindered their capacity to effectively produce food as well as establish an economic base to create income from surplus. Consequently, colonialism promoted racial, economic and gender inequality and influenced women’s dependent consumer status. This continues to “adversely affect rural subsistence food security”<sup>183</sup> by limiting women’s decision-making power and diminishing their ability to determine individual and family health outcomes. In fact, Sub Saharan Africa is said to be the only continent to have experienced negative economic growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>Doreen Nanky Boikhutso, *“Methods of Indigenous Knowledge Preservation in South Africa”*: Magister Technologiae Faculty of Economics and Finance, Tshwane University of Technology, 2012, 1.

<sup>178</sup>Irene Tinker, *“Introduction: The Seminar on Women”*, 3.

<sup>179</sup>Irene Tinker, “The Adverse Impact of Development on Women”, in Tinker, I and Bo Bramsen, M. (ed) *Women and World Development* American Association for the Advancement of Science, (Washington D.C: Overseas Development Council, 1976), 25.

<sup>180</sup>Loudes Beneria and Gita Sen, *“Accumulation, Reproduction and ‘Women’s Role in Economic Development’: Boserup Revisited”* *Sings*, Vol. 7, No. 2 Development and the Sexual Division of Labour (Winter 1981), University of Chicago, 1981, 280.

<sup>181</sup>Tinker, “The Adverse Impact of Development on Women”, 28.

<sup>182</sup>Akyeampong and Fofack, “The Contribution of African Women”, 26.

<sup>183</sup>Mead, “A Comment on the Role of Women”, 9.

<sup>184</sup>Tirado, M.C. Crahay, P. Cohen, M. Hunnes, D. Denton, F. Lartey, A. Challinor, A. “Climate Change and Nutrition in Africa”, (*Background documents for the SUNRAY regional workshops on Challenges for nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa*, 2012, 35). [www.sunrayafrica.co.za](http://www.sunrayafrica.co.za). accessed 10/07/2015.

### 3.5.1.2 Industrialization

The World Book Dictionary defines industrialization as “The development of large industries as an important feature in a country or economic system”.<sup>185</sup> Industrialization as a project of colonization has been blamed for replacing traditional egalitarian economic systems by “private property and ownership”.<sup>186</sup> According to Clifford, the focus of industrialization is economic benefit for a few male elite who control all means of production and define division of labour according to sex, race and space.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, Beneria and Sen suggest that industrialization allocated significance to work according to public or private space.<sup>188</sup> First, industrialization divided society hierarchically into the rich powerful few and the majority who are poor and struggle for survival. Second, patterns of African communal economic structures shifted to Western capitalistic profit-making and private space, reinforcing male and female role differentiation. Third, by classifying inside work as unproductive, industrialization denied women financial and material resources to achieve their “functionings”<sup>189</sup> that would enhance their “capabilities”<sup>190</sup> and agency towards well-being. Hence, male migration left women to struggle for subsistence food production with inefficient traditional methods of rural subsistence farming, resulting in insufficient yield. While industrialization removed men from “food gathering activities and women from food production”<sup>191</sup>, it did not “free women from maintenance responsibilities involving food”.<sup>192</sup> Instead, classifying household production and caring responsibilities as domestic chores with no financial remuneration discriminated against the female gender, excluding women from economic gain, literacy training, modern skills on food production and nutrition. Moreover, domesticating women limited their movement and hindered their capacity to access necessary information and socio-economic improvement, thereby enhancing women’s committal to inferior “dependent consumer status”.<sup>193</sup> Yet,

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<sup>185</sup> Clarence L. Barnhart and Robert K. Barnhart, *The World Book Dictionary*, (Toronto: World Book, Inc 1994), 1078.

<sup>186</sup> Maimela, “*Seeking to be Christian*”, 28.

<sup>187</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 24.

<sup>188</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 280.

<sup>189</sup> According to Jacka, functionings are “the ways of being and doing” that people have reason to value. Quoting Nussbaum and Sen, Jacka equates well-being with human flourishing and a life worthy of human dignity. This is because focusing on dignity will dictate policy choices that protect and support agency rather than choices that infantilize people and treat them as passive recipients of benefits. Tamara Jacka. 2014. 189.

<sup>190</sup> According to Jacka, capabilities refer to the potential and opportunities people have of achieving their functions. Jacka, *Left-Behind and Vulnerable*, 189.

<sup>191</sup> Mead, “A Comment on the Role of Women”, 9.

<sup>192</sup> Tinker, “Introduction: The Seminar on Women”, 3.

<sup>193</sup> Tinker, “Introduction: The Seminar on Women”, 9.

according to de Cock et al, food security in South Africa depends on “capacity to produce food and or buying power”,<sup>194</sup> so women in rural contexts like Mashobye are also forced to depend on social safety nets in order to feed their families.<sup>195</sup> In this way, industrialized job seclusion and stratification of society denied women socio-economic means and material resources to achieve food autonomy. Even though research shows that women comprise “70% of agricultural workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa, 80% food processing food storage and transport”,<sup>196</sup> “90% hoeing and weeding and 60% harvesting and marketing”,<sup>197</sup> women are shown to continuously struggle with “family nutrition, food processing, child bearing and child rearing”.<sup>198</sup> Accordingly, Ramachadran reckons that low social status means weaker control over household resources, tighter time constraints, less access to information and health services, poor maternal health and low self-esteem.<sup>199</sup> Hence, Walter et al says that “human dignity is violated when people are treated in a way that degrades them to the status of mere objects of power wielded by others or forced to live in poverty”.<sup>200</sup>

In fact, industrialization undermined rural communities like Mashobye women’s household production through subordinated agency and enforced a dependent state. Evidently, the exclusive allocation of economic benefit to the public space and male dominated work discriminated against women’s work in private spaces and domestic production. Yet, societal expectation and gendered roles for women give these women “household responsibilities include fetching water, collecting firewood, gathering and preparing family meals”,<sup>201</sup> while limiting time for relaxation and engagement in personal development. Furthermore, these prolonged household responsibilities demand more energy and expend micronutrients and vitamins, which render women’s bodies weak and vulnerable to poor health.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> De Cock et al. “Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo”, 271.

<sup>195</sup> Oni, Maliwichi and Obadire, “Socio-economic factors affecting Smallholders”, 2293.

<sup>196</sup> Walter F. Nowak et al. “Austrian Development Agency (ADA)”, (Information and Communication: Vienna, 2010), 14.

<sup>197</sup> Quisumbing, A.R et al., “Women: the Key to Food Security”, (Washington DC, Food Policy Report, the International Food Policy Research Institute, 1995, 2).

<sup>198</sup> Tinker, “Introduction: The Seminar on Women”, 5.

<sup>199</sup> Ramachadran, “Women and Food Security in Asia”, 12.

<sup>200</sup> Walter, et al., “Austrian Development Agency (ADA)”, 6.

<sup>201</sup> Tinker, “Introduction: The Seminar on Women”, 9.

<sup>202</sup> FAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 16.

Similarly, denying women participation in public space denies women's access to "outside knowledge"<sup>203</sup> and services, including sexual and reproductive health rights services, particularly family planning, antenatal and postnatal care. Studies have shown that limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights limits women's academic achievement and participation in waged remunerative work and future development of the family. Furthermore, high illiteracy and lack of economic achievement contribute to early marriage and sexual activity, which deny women independent and equal decision-making power. Moreover, the ability to access health services, available options, resources and information,<sup>204</sup> as well as adequate food and nutrition, is associated with literacy and freedom of movement. In fact, Das Gupta reckons, lack of education contributes to women's ignorance about reproductive health rights, beneficial productive work and personal development.<sup>205</sup> Similarly, poor rural development hinders access to socio-economic necessities like food, education and child care, including women's representation and interaction with the public world and "capacity to negotiate for fairness and justice".<sup>206</sup> As a result, industrialization denied communities like Mashobye mutual dependence, harmony, joy and well-being as well as a possible "foundation for an independent and culturally appropriate food system".<sup>207</sup> Similarly, industrialization reinforced the inferiority, subordinate and dependent status of women like those in Mashobye. Hence, Mashobye women struggle to provide adequate food and nutrition, often resulting in experiences of frustration, anxiety and worry. While Clifford recognizes the "negative contribution of the economic impact on women's oppression",<sup>208</sup> Tinker notes "a negative relationship between the nation's socio-economic development and the socio-economic and psychological development of women".<sup>209</sup> Therefore, industrialization denied rural women like those in Mashobye the ability to achieve food autonomy and maternal health.

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<sup>203</sup>Sandhaya Rani Mahapatro, "Utilization of Maternal Health and Child Health Care Services in India. Does Women's Autonomy Matter?" *Journal of Family Welfare* Vol. 58, No. 1. June 2012, 23.

<sup>204</sup> Oni, Maliwichi, and Obadire, "Socio-economic factors affecting Smallholders", 2294.

<sup>205</sup>Das Gupta, "Women's Empowerment and Fertility", 3.

<sup>206</sup> Walter, et al., "Austrian Development Agency", 2010, 11.

<sup>207</sup>Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", 4.

<sup>208</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 24

<sup>209</sup>Tinker, "Introduction: The Seminar on Women", 3.

### 3.5.1.3 History of Apartheid

Feminist theologians claim that “social location has a profound bearing on women’s experiences”<sup>210</sup> of oppression and suffering, particularly because of its “cultural conditioning of African women’s thinking”.<sup>211</sup> In addition, Koch suggests that the “invasive poverty prevalent among most black South Africans resulted from their forced resettlement to arid and parched homelands”, which was a way to reserve commercial farming land for White commercial farming. By denying Blacks the right to land, the Apartheid government undermined “food production for human consumption”,<sup>212</sup> ignored women’s definition of what constitutes farming patterns, prevented production of adequate food, and separated women from mainstream development and conventional economic criteria.<sup>213</sup> This created a social location in which communities’ and traditional livelihoods are displaced.<sup>214</sup> As a result, South Africa is rated amongst the “most unequal societies in the world”,<sup>215</sup> a status mostly traceable to the colonial government and Apartheid regime. As patriarchal institutions, these government’s food production systems reinforced African women’s lower status through “land privatization and property rights”,<sup>216</sup> land seizure,<sup>217</sup> capital accumulation,<sup>218</sup> and land accumulation,<sup>219</sup> promoting racial discrimination, class stratification and unequal gender relations.<sup>220</sup> Consequently, Apartheid benefited 55 000 Whites with ownership of 85% of the land, while 12 million Blacks inhabit only 17.1 million hectares of land – of which only 2.6 million hectares constitutes arable land.<sup>221</sup> Instead of inclining towards food models that commit not to “more food but less hungry people, not higher production but greater distribution”<sup>222</sup>, Apartheid, just as colonization, reinforced a “lens of tradition and culture”<sup>223</sup> through which women continued to be denied

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<sup>210</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 2002.35.

<sup>211</sup> Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 167-168.

<sup>212</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 281.

<sup>213</sup> Walter, et al., “Austrian Development Agency”, 13.

<sup>214</sup> Koch, *The Food Security Policy Context*, 2.

<sup>215</sup> N. De Cock et al. “Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo”, 271.

<sup>216</sup> Akyeamong and Fofack, “The Contribution of African Women”, 22.

<sup>217</sup> Zola Skweyiya. “Towards A Solution to the Land Question in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Problems and Models”, *Heonline 6S.Africa. Journal on Hum.Rts.195*, (1990), Land: Problems and Models, 1990, 197-199.

<sup>218</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 281.

<sup>219</sup> Skweyiya, “Towards A Solution to the Land”, 195-197.

<sup>220</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 288.

<sup>221</sup> UNFAO, *World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition*, 18.

<sup>222</sup> Steve de Gruchy, “*Biotechnology As ‘Cultural Invasion’: theological Reflection on Food Sovereignty and Community Building in Africa*”. University of Natal: School of Theology, *Scriptura 82* (2003), 92.

<sup>223</sup> Tororeiy, M. “Voices from the Periphery: being Church as Women in Kenya” in Phiri I.A.

equality and justice. This went hand in hand with cultural and traditional practices among rural communities which subordinated women to the same level as “minors, children, and servants even alongside men’s property”.<sup>224</sup> With limited capacity for independent decision making, women’s ability to achieve food autonomy remains limited while vulnerability to poor maternal health, including malnutrition, is increased.

Furthermore, Skweyiya observed that apartheid, just as colonialism, deprived rural agriculture economic status, including the capacity to export agricultural produce, despite it being a major supply of labour, particularly to women. Instead, forced relocation of Black communities to the 13% arid settlements resulted in food production challenges and influenced rural life away from subsistence production to become “enmeshed with the monetary sector through sale of labour and purchase of goods”.<sup>225</sup> Consequently, relocated communities, particularly women as subsistence food producers, lost control over natural resources and their local perception of livelihood security which is grounded on socio-cultural tradition and special relations to ancestral land, displacing their inherited way of life.<sup>226</sup> In this way, resettled communities were denied the joy of expressing their “most significant witness to creation care and a way of communicating their thoughts about land, water, animals and humans and God as provider of the many gifts that we consume daily”.<sup>227</sup> As a result, communities like MWM are forced to work for low wages or payment with benefits like “food, school fees and payment for other expenses”.<sup>228</sup> In this way, MWM voices as household subsistence food producers are marginalised and deprived of influence in household, social, political and economic policy and decision-making, towards achieving food autonomy. This further tends to distort the purpose of food as God’s gift to all creatures for life’s nurture, sharing and celebration in God’s eternal communion-building love.<sup>229</sup>

As a result of poor rural infrastructure, lack of access to financial resources and beneficial information, rural women like those in Mashobye, have limited access to development

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Nadar S, (ed) *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices And Visions*, (Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2005), 160.

<sup>224</sup>Maimela, “Seeking to be Christian”, 28.

<sup>225</sup>Skweyiya, “Towards A Solution to the Land”, 199.

<sup>226</sup>Walter *et al.* “Austrian Development Agency”, 12.

<sup>227</sup>Norman Wirzba, *Fiathful Eating*, Centre for Christian Ethics, 2012, 36.[www.baylor.edu > content > document.php](http://www.baylor.edu/content/document.php).accessed 10/02/2016.

<sup>228</sup>Oni, S.A, Maliwichi, L.L and Obadire, O.S, “Socio-economic Factors Affecting Smallholder”, 2291.

<sup>229</sup>Norman Wirzba, xiv.

programmes like the “current rural development programmes”.<sup>230</sup> Subsequently, women’s struggles with inefficient subsistence food production resulted in the deterioration of living standards due to the inability to achieve food autonomy. Accordingly, women are excluded from commercial agriculture and rather struggle with subsistence food production, with greater vulnerability to inadequate food and nutrition. In addition, research results indicate that women find themselves struggling with “socio-economic and material marginalization as well as a high unemployment rate. Furthermore, steep increases in food and fuel prices, energy tariffs and interest rates”<sup>231</sup> limit access to “adequate food and nutrition”,<sup>232</sup> reinforcing women’s vulnerability to poor maternal health, inferior status and “permanent dependency”.<sup>233</sup> Therefore, apartheid promoted racial and economic disparities to deny rural communities, like the Mashobye women, the ability to determine adequate food and nutrition that, according to FAO, have the “capacity to limit poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition”.<sup>234</sup> Similarly, Apartheid used the Bible as a “tool to legitimate its apartheid ideologies”.<sup>235</sup>

### 3.6 Church Teachings

Rakoczy argues that “women’s discrimination is rooted in the patriarchal Christian tradition”.<sup>236</sup> Masenya reiterates that the Bible has often been used as a “source of Christian instruction and tool of oppression, discrimination and subordination”.<sup>237</sup> As shown in chapter two, missionary teaching on the Christian family model defined the life of a mother through “domesticating and subordinating household activities”<sup>238</sup> while “downgrading its economic function”.<sup>239</sup> Thus, a Christian mother’s primary responsibility was to craft a healthy Christian household, while being

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<sup>230</sup>The South African democratic government Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) offers rural communities food production opportunities and income generation strategies focused on hunger and poverty alleviation.

<sup>231</sup>Koch, “The Food Security Policy Context”, 3.

<sup>232</sup>Olowu, “Gendered Aspects of Food Security”, 5383.

<sup>233</sup>Maimela, “Seeking to be Christian”, 28.

<sup>234</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 19.

<sup>235</sup>Farisani, Elelwani. B. “Histories of African Christianities: Interpreting the Bible in the Context of Apartheid and Beyond: An African Perspective”. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae, Ecc. Vol.40n.2* Pretoria Dec. 2014.

<sup>236</sup>Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 30.

<sup>237</sup>Madipone Masenya. “The Sword that Heals! The Bible and African Women in African-South African Pentecostal Churches” in Phiri, I.A. Nadar, S (ed) *On Being Church: Women’s Voices and Visions*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 51.

<sup>238</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 241.

<sup>239</sup>Tinker, “The Adverse Impact of Development on Women”, 22.

confined to the home became an “impediment to her independence”,<sup>240</sup> production and ability to achieve food autonomy. First, this model separated the home from the workplace and isolated women from agricultural production by confining them to domestic responsibilities. Second, housekeeping and childrearing became a mother’s sole fulltime unpaid job, without “incorporating fatherhood and household responsibilities in training Christian males”.<sup>241</sup> Third, imparted through Christian moral training, it became “enmeshed with African woman’s spirituality” to become a woman’s Christian duty.<sup>242</sup> According to Maimela, patriarchal societies co-opted religion in order to make the “exploitative, sexist domination work and respectable”.<sup>243</sup> Meanwhile, Kanyoro observes that in an “African thought system, culture and religion are not distinct from each other”.<sup>244</sup>

Evidently, it was the missionaries’ erroneous view that African women’s involvement in agricultural production was unfeminine and rendered them “beasts of burden”,<sup>245</sup> that disadvantaged women’s participation and control over food production. This, in turn, diminished their ability to determine, allocate and distribute adequate food and nutrition. In addition, missionary teaching and evangelism of African women on motherhood, Christian morals and values conditioned women’s realm to exclusive domesticity and subordination. Moreover, missionary teaching’s infiltration into rural communities divided the African communal household’s efforts, particularly with food production, allocation and distribution, which contributed to women’s vulnerability to food insecurity. As a result, in many rural communities of Sub Saharan Africa, women-headed households, in particular, experience food insecurity, primarily because of the patriarchal view of women as inferior and subsequent lack of access to economic and material resources. Hence, women find themselves suffering poor nutrition, partly due to their inability to achieve food autonomy.

Instead of inculcating a community which reflects honour and reverence for God’s providence to all of creation, missionary teachings disadvantaged MWM ability to produce their own food and

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<sup>240</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 243.

<sup>241</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 242.

<sup>242</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 242.

<sup>243</sup>Maimela, “Seeking to be Christian”, 29.

<sup>244</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 158.

<sup>245</sup>Gaitskel, “Power in Prayer and Service”, 7.

to generate income. Instead they consume limited and inadequate calories, micronutrients and vitamins, factors which contribute to malnutrition.<sup>246</sup> In this way, Kanyoro blames Christianity for the religious, social and cultural problems women face in Africa and defines the Church as one of the contexts that contribute to women's problems.<sup>247</sup> As shown in chapter two, the domestic ideology disadvantaged women's access to beneficial information and participation in public and social forums that influence decision-making involving food production, processing and maternal health services. In such situations, women are forced to "abdicate their responsibility to God",<sup>248</sup> which "entrenches sexual discrimination and maintains the patriarchal status quo",<sup>249</sup> and perpetuates food insecurity, hunger and disease. Accordingly, hunger persists particularly in rural areas of developing countries. In fact, FAO says that 820 million people consume diets which are micronutrient deficient and 60 percent of those people live in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) and Asia.<sup>250</sup> In addition, South Africa's national food security is failing most households, as rural areas experience food insecurity due to poor rural development, inequality in income and lack of asset ownership. This is supported by a study conducted in Thulamela local municipality, Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, where 63% of respondents had sufficient food, though not the food they wanted, 88% bought food they could afford, and 56% substituted expensive food with cheaper food which could be substandard or have low nutrition status.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, women-headed households are more affected by food insecurity than households headed by men.<sup>252</sup> According to Olowu, without the ability to produce their own food, women's function and roles of production, reproduction and caring as well as bargaining over household decisions cannot be achieved.<sup>253</sup> Hence, Bam reckons that liberation of women is only possible if women themselves take the lead.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>Nira Ramachadran, "Women and Food Security in Asia", 13.

<sup>247</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 158.

<sup>248</sup>Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Rituals in Africa" in Oduyoye, M.A. Kanyoro, M.R.A. (ed) *The Will To Arise Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, ( Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 10.

<sup>249</sup>Tinker, "Introduction on the seminar on Women", 9.

<sup>250</sup>UNFAO, *World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition*, 19.

<sup>251</sup>Oni, Maliwichi and Obadire, "Socio-economic Factors affecting Smallholders", 2295.

<sup>252</sup>De Cock et al., "Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo", 271.

<sup>253</sup>Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security", 5383.

<sup>254</sup>Bam, "Women and the Church", 15.

As a result, Kanyoro suggests theologising women's experiences between home and the Church<sup>255</sup> in order to conscientize women about oppressive teachings and subjugating experiences. Similarly, Clifford proposes probing oppressive causes<sup>256</sup> in a bid to seek empowering and life-giving alternatives. In this way, women, like those in the rural area of Mashobye, could "listen to and validate their experiences of lack of food autonomy in relation to maternal health in a way to find 'transformative praxis'".<sup>257</sup> Consequently, women could participate in celebrating their being made in the image of God, begin to take the lead in food production, and contribute towards transforming Mashobye's social structures, institutions and systems. Hence, partaking in the food autonomy project could enhance MWM's spirituality and contribute a "detailed and wide knowledge about source, life and death that supports and permeates our food knowledge".<sup>258</sup> As a result, MWM and Mashobye society could begin to see women's humanity being purposed as "persons-in-communion" rather than persons who serve to "complete the other".<sup>259</sup> Hence, Clifford reckons that the Bible and church teachings must be interpreted in a way that liberates women and men from the effects of patriarchy.<sup>260</sup> This source further proposes a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition in order to envision a deeper transformation and true reconstruction of both church structures and civil society.<sup>261</sup>

Meanwhile, studies also show that the problem facing women of the world about issues of food security<sup>262</sup> and maternal health<sup>263</sup> in particular cannot be solved without the involvement and contribution of women.

"Faith-based organizations (FBO) play a crucial role in increasing access to maternal and newborn health (MNH) services throughout the household-to-hospital continuum of care..... In Sub-Saharan Africa, faith based facilities provide up to 70% of the region's health care. In other parts of the world, FBOs manage 10-30% of national health sectors.

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<sup>255</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 167.

<sup>256</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>257</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36-37.

<sup>258</sup>Wirzba, *Faithful Eating*, 38.

<sup>259</sup>Oduyoye, "Women and Rituals in Africa", 23.

<sup>260</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>261</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 33.

<sup>262</sup>Quisumbing et al. "Women: The Key to Food Security", 10-12.

<sup>263</sup>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs The World's Women 2010 Trends and Statistics. United Nations Publication Sales No. E.10.XV11, ISBN 978-92-1-161539-5, 35.unstats.un.org > publications > SeriesK.accessed 20/03/2016.

It is estimated that more than 90% of these FBO facilities- and community-based programs offer MNH services.”<sup>264</sup>

Consequently, faith-based organizations are seen as suitable partners with the health sector in the “use of health promotion and disease prevention science... to build strong, healthy and productive communities”<sup>265</sup> because they are physically present within communities and both have offered selfless care to the most underserved, vulnerable and marginalized poor. Mashobye Methodist Women’s Manyano continue to teach Christian values and influence individual, family and community attitudes, behaviour and experience. Even though, MWPSU cannot be said to be a feminist organization, it has often been shown to represent the interests of women. So, with a nutrition and health specific agenda, the organization can mobilize its members towards the promotion and improvement of maternal health outcomes. As the organization’s programme includes a home visitation routine, the women empower each other by providing love, care, compassion and food. As a result, MWM could be foremost in holding women accountable as they have the ability to assess, and are accepted to encourage and advise individuals, households and communities in cooperation with health care centres, clinics or hospitals to help improve maternal health outcomes. Moreover, the MCSA vision of “A Christ Healed Africa for the Healing of Nations”<sup>266</sup> and the Mission Statement of “God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the gospel of healing and transformation”<sup>267</sup> encompasses a commitment which includes promoting women’s empowerment towards achieving food autonomy and maternal health.

### **3.7 Poverty and Lack of Food Autonomy**

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. According to the international Bill of Rights,

Poverty is a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an

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<sup>264</sup>Sarla Chand, and Jacqui Patterson, Faith-Based Models for Improving Maternal Health and Newborn Health. USAID, 2007, 4. [Usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnadm571](http://Usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadm571). accessed 17/06/2015.

<sup>265</sup> Levin, J. “Faith-Based Partnership for Population Health: Challenges, Initiatives, and Prospects”, (quoting former U.S. Surgeon General Dr David Satcher in *Public Health Report/ March-April 2014/ Volume 129, 127*).

<sup>266</sup>*MCSA Yearbook 2015, 2.*

<sup>267</sup>*MCSA Yearbook 2015, 2.*

adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.<sup>268</sup>

Accordingly, the complex nature of poverty is that it affects people differently in various social locations. This is despite CESCR's (Art 11 (2)) recognition of the fundamental right of individuals, communities or nations to be free from hunger.<sup>269</sup> Poverty contributes food insecurity, hunger and diseases which perpetuate invasive hunger, particularly in rural areas of developing countries despite the capacity of the world to produce enough food supplies with enough calories, micronutrients and vitamins necessary for an active and healthy lifestyle. In fact, FAO says that 820 million people consume diets which are micronutrient deficient and 60 percent of those live in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and Asia.<sup>270</sup> In addition, South Africa's national food security has not been able to address experiences of poverty in most rural households, which are said to experience food insecurity due to poor rural development, lack of income and asset ownership.<sup>271</sup> This is supported by the study conducted in Thulamela local municipality, Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, where 63% of respondents had sufficient food, though it is not the food they wanted, 88% bought food they could afford, 56% substituted expensive food with cheaper food which could be sub-standard or have low nutritional value.<sup>272</sup> In fact, FAO has shown that poverty contributes to hunger and malnutrition which affects the livelihood of 50% of smallholders, 20% of rural landless and 10% of pastoralists, fishers, foragers and 20% of urban dwellers.<sup>273</sup> Meanwhile, a study in Thulamela municipality reflects that 90% of smallholders are fulltime farmers, 29% have no alternative income, 60% produce food that is not enough to cover a year supply, 37% need water for livestock and farm, 29% need infrastructure, 18% lack access to markets and 66% are food insecure.<sup>274</sup> Moreover, studies show that women are overrepresented in poor households and women's headship is associated with poverty due to low income status and lack of resources that can help raise income.<sup>275</sup> As a result, Olowu says that without the ability to produce their own food, women's function and role of production, reproduction and caring as well as bargaining over household decisions cannot be

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<sup>268</sup>UNFAO, *World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition*, No.34, 10.

<sup>269</sup>UNFAO, *World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition*, No.34, 7.

<sup>270</sup>UNFAO, *World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition*, No.34, 14.

<sup>271</sup>De Cock et al. "Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo", 271.

<sup>272</sup>Oni, Maliwichi and Obadire, "Socio-economic Factors affecting Smallholders", 2295.

<sup>273</sup>UNFAO, *World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition*, No.34, 10.

<sup>274</sup>Oni, Maliwichi and Obadire, "Socio-economic Factors affecting Smallholders", 2291.

<sup>275</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: The Key to Food Security Food", 271.

achieved.<sup>276</sup> Hence, Abraham says poverty often “drives poor rural women to anxiety even desperation, to a point of anticipating killing their own children because conditions of hunger relegate their status to less than human”.<sup>277</sup> In fact, FAO reckons that poverty as deprivation constitutes a serious human rights violation because it denies rural communities like MWM the ability to make and implement decisions about food and nutrition, thereby contributing to malnutrition and hindering the achievement of maternal health.<sup>278</sup> Studies have shown that “malnutrition is a contributor and consequence of poverty”<sup>279</sup> and that “lack of primary social services cause poverty and food insecurity which contributes violation of basic human rights”.<sup>280</sup> Hence, poverty reduction is not simply to help the poor meet their daily needs, but to see them transformed by the power of God and empowered to be people of dignity and worth in society.<sup>281</sup>

Accordingly, Ramachadran says that when women lack sufficient purchasing power due to socioeconomic and cultural factors, they are forced into a subordinate position which negatively affects their individual development and that of the society.<sup>282</sup> Alternatively, Gould posits that food autonomy could enable access to adequate food and nutrition and ensure a healthy personal and family lifestyle, with a positive contribution to community and social development.<sup>283</sup>

### 3.8 Gender Inequality

Gender describes a set of cultural roles, defined by existing power relations and social practices; it constitutes the hierarchical principle of patriarchy.<sup>284</sup> The meaning of gender moves beyond the biological factors into what it means to be male and female. “The word ‘gender’ extends these physical attributes to create an ideological construct which is based on the way society understands biological differences between men and women. What we recognize as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ is socially and culturally constructed as

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<sup>276</sup>Olowu, “Gendered Aspects of Food Security”, 5383.

<sup>278</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, No.34,4.

<sup>279</sup>Akinyele, Ezekannagha and Obayelu, “Socio-demographic Changes”, 55.

<sup>280</sup> Randolph and Hertel, “The Right to Food”, 17.

<sup>281</sup>Sekhaulelo, Motshine A. “Reformed Churches in South Africa Strategies for Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas” Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa, in die Skriflig 48 (1), Art, # 1788, 10 pages, (2014), 6.

<sup>282</sup>Ramachadran, “Women and Food Security”, 4.

<sup>283</sup>Gould, “Deep Food Autonomy”, 19.

<sup>284</sup>Chakkalal P, *Discipleship a space for Women’s Leadership? Feminist Theological Critique*, (Mombai: Pauline Publication, 2004), 30.

our gender, which involves a whole constellation of roles, expectations, social and sexual behaviours”.<sup>285</sup>

Accordingly, Beneria and Sen reckon that gender as a social construct influences the relations between males and females, the division of labour, as well as access to economic benefits across time, countries, nations and households.<sup>286</sup> As a result, the activities performed by either males or females and the gendered roles attributed to the sexes contribute to the place societies assign to males and female and their subsequent political, social and economic importance. As a product of industrialization, gender in addition to sex and class contributed to the creation of a social hierarchy, which discriminated against women’s abilities in production, reproduction and caring.

Even at the most primitive stages of family autarky there is some division of labor within the family, the main criteria for the division being that of age and sex.... Both in primitive and in more developed communities, the traditional division of labor within the family is usually considered 'natural' in the sense of being obviously and originally imposed by the sex difference itself.<sup>287</sup>

While the above statement acknowledges the existence of gender roles in all societies, Akyeampong and Fofack note that in African agricultural societies, a person was valued for their productive capacity, and as such, women were valued as producers and reproducers.<sup>288</sup> Accordingly, Beneria and Sen acknowledge a less pronounced class differentiation and rather recognize the partnership between males and females in land cultivation for food production in African societies. However, colonization affirmed and normalized men’s quest for power while industrialization determined work accordingly and reinforced gender roles.<sup>289</sup>

Beneria and Sen argue that the industrialized economic production system and gendered division of labour contributed to male economic benefit and elitism<sup>290</sup> while denying women as primary food producers in rural areas of Sub Saharan Africa, access to financial resources, information and advice about credit, seed selection and fertilizers. As a result, women were denied training

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<sup>285</sup> Kretzschmar, L. “Gender, Women and Ethics” in Kretzschmar, L. & Hulley, L. (Eds.), *Questions About Life And Morality: Christian Ethics In South Africa Today*, (Pretoria: JI Van Schaik Publisher, 1998), 171.

<sup>286</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 280-281.

<sup>287</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 279.

<sup>288</sup> Akyeampong, E. Fofack, H. 2012, “The Contribution of African Women”, 12.

<sup>289</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 280.

<sup>290</sup> Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 281.

for efficient agricultural food production and subsequent subsistence production, according to gendered allocation of labour, to do unpaid domestic work.<sup>291</sup> Similarly, poor rural Tsonga families under-invest in women's education because women are culturally believed to be destined for marriage, which is said to "diminish women's ability to improved economic opportunities".<sup>292</sup> According to Mead, poor yield in subsistence food production has been promoted by exclusively male agricultural training, particularly in areas where men migrate for wage work.<sup>293</sup>

In this way, despite a gendered view of household production and caring activities being regarded as the province of women and women's inclination to spend their income on family food for improved family health and nutrition, women's capacity to achieve food autonomy is restricted. This intensifies the struggle rural women like those in Mashobye face in their daily household responsibilities when their ability to achieve food autonomy is diminished, as family livelihood is said to depend on "who earns the income".<sup>294</sup> Hence Olowu says, unless one understands the interaction between women's roles of production, reproduction and caring, the problem women face cannot be resolved.<sup>295</sup> In this way, denying MWM the ability to achieve food autonomy contributes a perversion of God's ordained equality of all human beings as it disadvantages women's participation in the fullness of life through diminished agency. In fact, MWM's struggles towards achieving food autonomy and subsequent poor maternal health can be "traced through gender analyses".<sup>296</sup> In addition to sex and class, gender further marginalised women to the status of servants and dependents in their homes by denying them development in agricultural production, earnings, and income generation, relegating the female gender to economic impoverishment and a lower class.

In addition, MWM's household food production activities like gathering wild vegetables, herbs, firewood, fetching water and cooking are discriminated against, unrecognized and undervalued as household chores without economic benefit. For instance, in female headed household women

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<sup>291</sup>Beneria and Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role", 281.

<sup>292</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: The Key to Food Security", 7.

<sup>293</sup>Mead, "A Comment on the Role of Women", 10.

<sup>294</sup>Beneria and Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role", 282.

<sup>295</sup>Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security", 5381.

<sup>296</sup>Kanyoro, "Engendered Communal Theology", 162.

are further disadvantaged as this discrimination enforces a ‘double day’ which restricts women’s capacity for personal development and job opportunities. Alternatively, Jacka suggests that recognizing the inherent dignity in all human beings dictates policy changes that protect and support agency. This source reckons that enhancing people’s agency creates the desirable conception of “personhood and mutual advantage” which enables “key institutions and structures to shift the distribution of assets, access and power” in an endeavour to transform patriarchal and gendered power relations.<sup>297</sup> In this way, women can achieve their “functioning”,<sup>298</sup> according to their “capabilities”,<sup>299</sup> towards the restoration of their dignity and well-being. This means that when MWM participate in food production as a valuable and necessary activity, their dignity is restored and they can determine the quality and quantity of their food and nutrition. Hence, Clifford says that social, economic, political and ecclesial institutions and structures are transformed, equality, justice, human dignity will be promoted and the proclaimed reign of God when Christ’s gospel of love becomes a reality.<sup>300</sup>

### 3.9 Culture

culture is a historical transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life .....A way of life of a social group, not of an individual as such.... Is learned.... It derives from the biological and historical components of human existence... it is structured.... It is divided into concepts... it is dynamic... it is the instrument whereby the individual adjusts to his total setting and gains the means for creative expression<sup>301</sup>

According to the above statement, culture is a lens through which individuals, communities and societies view their identity and way of life –it informs behaviour and determines social relations. Even though political systems like colonialism and capitalism are blamed for the oppression of the African people especially women, African Feminist theologians blame some of the culture for the societies’ low view of women. As a product of a patriarchal system, African

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<sup>297</sup>Jacka, *Left-Behind and Vulnerable*, 200.

<sup>298</sup>Jacka describes “functionings” as ways of “being and doing” which women have reason to value.

<sup>299</sup>Jacka describe “capabilities” as “potential and opportunities” women have for achieving “functionings”.

<sup>300</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

<sup>301</sup>Andrew John Arun, *“The Impact of Religious Conversion on Cultural Identity- Conversion Story of South African Anglican Indian Christians”*, (PhD diss., Pretoria: Unisa, 2007), 17-18.

culture views women mostly as “bearers of children”,<sup>302</sup> a “minor with only derivative status”<sup>303</sup> without “capacity to lead, own land or inherit property”,<sup>304</sup> and mere “instruments of men and culture in general”.<sup>305</sup>

Mashobye is a deeply cultural community, evident in women’s dress code of ‘motjeka’ with traditional jewellery and Tsonga music dominant over the airwaves from houses and car stereos. While men always dress in Western clothing, women express a feeling of nakedness without their traditional ‘motjeka’ which is mostly worn on top of Western clothing,<sup>306</sup> even for church services. This reflects MWM’s submissiveness to cultural expectations, showing both the community view of women as well as women’s view of themselves. In addition, it is common knowledge in Tsonga culture that grandmothers encourage their teenage granddaughters to have children so that they can see their great grandchildren before they die. Hence, prevalent teenage pregnancy in Mashobye community is a coerced “desire to prove fertility and womanhood”,<sup>307</sup> it exposes girls to maternal mortality and morbidity from an early age, as their bodies are still under developed. In this way, grandmothers do not envision lives for their grandchildren beyond child-bearing, motherhood and wifehood, which socialize girls to an inferior and dependent destiny determined by oppressive, subordinate circumstances of servitude and poverty. Even though marriage is often regarded as a natural destiny for women in the African worldview, it has been shown to reduce a girl’s status to that of an object of trade, leading to high illiteracy for most African women.<sup>308</sup> Accordingly, Das Gupta relates “early marriage, sexual activity and childbearing to a girl’s diminished prospects for schooling and future earnings”,<sup>309</sup> despite its value as “generation of human capital and future sustainability of society”.<sup>310</sup> As a result, the girl’s power to negotiate safe sex and family planning is limited while her subordinate status

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<sup>302</sup>Madipoane Masenya, “African Women Read the Bible” in Various Authors (ed). *Inculturation in the South African Context*, (Kenya: Paulines, 2000), 69.

<sup>303</sup>Maimela, “*Seeking to be Christian*”, 28.

<sup>304</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 164.

<sup>305</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 162.

<sup>306</sup> Elderly women dress daily in their traditional wear and younger women prefer these outfits for parties and gatherings where the community come together.

<sup>307</sup>Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa. 2013.4.

<sup>308</sup>Masenya, “African Women Read the Bible”, 70.

<sup>309</sup>Das Gupta, M. “Women’s Empowerment and Fertility: Policy Lessons” (Population Division Expert Paper No.2013/2. USA: University of Maryland, 2013, 4).

<sup>310</sup>Beneria and Sen, “Accumulation, Reproduction and Women’s Role”, 292.

undermines her well-being and human dignity.<sup>311</sup> In this way, girls learn to live for others and feel guilty when they have to undertake projects that promote their own interest, dignity and well-being. Tororeiy observes that the African socio-cultural expectation is for women to be “quiet and in insignificant roles”,<sup>312</sup> which contributes to women’s limited participation in dignity enhancing activities like achieving food autonomy towards improved maternal health. This is in line with Kanyoro’s comment that “women can be custodians and guardians of cultural practice and prescriptions that diminish women”,<sup>313</sup> and in this case, deny them the ability to achieve food autonomy, resulting in poor maternal health.

This limited view traps girls in a vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability, lack of food autonomy and a variety of health challenges common in rural areas like Mashobye. For instance, Mashobye women’s social profile reflects that most participants have low education, are employed in the informal sector or involved in informal business with low prospects for income generation. Similarly, the limited movement of women in patriarchal societies like Mashobye reflects cultural expectations that hinder interaction with the public world. In this way, MWM’s experiences are marginalized and excluded from community and national forums that can promote agency and personal development. Evidently, culture reinforces socio-economic disparities and gender inequality, which denies women access to enabling institutions and economic opportunities. As is a result, MWM’s limited access to health options restricts their ability to achieve food autonomy. Hence, Kanyoro argues that in such cases, “men own women and their productive power”.<sup>314</sup> This is supported by Clifford’s observation that “androcentric bias reveals itself in prevailing cultural attitudes that assign more significance to the dreams, hopes and values of men than to those of women”,<sup>315</sup> even ignoring women’s health and its capacity to contribute to a healthy and prosperous family, society and nation. This source further reckons that such androcentric socio-cultural expectations reinforce the “socialization of women to an inferior and subordinate status”.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>311</sup>Fulata M. Moyo, “When the Telling Itself is a Taboo The Phoebe Practice”. In Phiri, I.A. Nadar, S. *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 186-189.

<sup>312</sup>Tororeiy, “Voices from the Periphery”, 162.

<sup>313</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 159.

<sup>314</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 173.

<sup>315</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 20.

<sup>316</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

### 3.10 Theological Reflection on a Women's Right to Food and Health

While the international community and national governments legally oblige the right to food for all individuals, the Christian faith requires we acknowledge food as God's gift and that we live this out in thanksgiving, ensuring that even the poor, widows and orphans have food. The discussion above reflects how women's rights to food have been denied, discriminated against and restricted by patriarchal, socio-economic, political and religio-cultural structures, institutions and practices. Yet, meals as a central organiser and ritual of family life, and food work, can help women enact their place in the world, influence others and define themselves.<sup>317</sup> For instance, Van Esterik argues that the individual's right to food takes place within the context of the household, prepared by a woman and that it reflects cultural appropriateness and human values. As such, women's knowledge of food and nutrition prevents starvation at individual and household level. As a result, in most parts of the world, a woman's sense of self is based on her ability to feed her family and her sense of power is lost when she is unable to accomplish this social role and responsibility.<sup>318</sup> Van Esterik concludes that food deprivation and hunger, as a form of violence and discrimination against women could be eliminated by "meeting women's need for food".<sup>319</sup> Moreover, the "current and past nutritional state of a woman is an important determinant of the ease with which she will conceive, carry an infant to term and its survival",<sup>320</sup> as well as the survival of the woman. In this way, lack of food autonomy and poor health contribute to violating women's participation in the divine image of God, human dignity and right to justice. Inevitably, food gives women identity and vocation and enables participation in forms of life and frameworks of meaning that have roots and orientation in God's caring way towards creation.<sup>321</sup> Similarly, cultivation inculcates a special sensitivity towards participation in the "growth of life and also its death".<sup>322</sup> Hence, Clifford observes that the biblical teaching of God's love for humanity and life in its fullness must include transforming oppressive structures and institutions in order to enhance the humanity and dignity of women as the authentic image of

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<sup>317</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 226.

<sup>318</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 229

<sup>319</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 225.

<sup>320</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 228.

<sup>321</sup>Wirzba, "Faithfull Eating", xviii.

<sup>322</sup>Wirzba, "Faithfull Eating", ix.

God.<sup>323</sup> This would affirm the inherent unity and oneness of a “living world where one is part of nature, with everyone being important in its re-creation”.<sup>324</sup>

### 3.10.1 Food as God’s Providence

According to Sekhaulelo, stewardship calls the Christian community to be responsible for God’s gifts and ensure justice to our neighbours by taking practical steps in eliminating hunger and suffering.<sup>325</sup> In addition, Wirzba writes that food provides the means for human survival and care. As one of God’s basic and abiding means of expressing divine provision and care, “participating in a meal is to participate in divine communication”.<sup>326</sup> In light of this, Buckingham asserts that “food and the way it is produced and used must be done with gratitude to God who is the owner, controller and source of all earthly and human resources”.<sup>327</sup> The author further sees God as the “Parent” of all creation, providing food for sustaining life, particularly as a means of forging Christian relations. This includes feeding the hungry, widows, orphans and aliens because God’s judgement will include how we treat the poor and hungry.<sup>328</sup> So enabling women to achieve food autonomy would eliminate hunger and poverty prevalent in rural areas like Mashobye. It could restore communities, ruled by a prerogative for love, peace, justice and dignity, and enable Mashobye women to strive for God’s kingdom.<sup>329</sup>

### 3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a literature review and shown how food autonomy relates to the promotion of maternal health. The chapter also reflected on how patriarchy and androcentric ideologies limit the achievement of food autonomy and hinder the promotion of maternal health. Furthermore, reflecting on women’s theological right to food affirms that God restores human

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<sup>323</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

<sup>324</sup>Gould, “Deep Food Autonomy”, 4.

<sup>325</sup>Sekhaulelo, “Reformed Churches in South Africa”, 4.

<sup>326</sup>Norman Wirzba. *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. Duke Divinity School. (New York: Cambridge University Press), xii. [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org). accessed 25/02/2016.

<sup>327</sup>Buckingham, *Food Security, Law and Theology*, 4.

<sup>328</sup>Buckingham, *Food Security, Law and Theology*, 7.

<sup>329</sup>Wirzba, “Faithful Eating”, 38.

dignity including that of women. Moreover, this chapter affirms that the “achievement of food autonomy” is imperative for maternal health throughout a woman’s life; from inter-uterine feeding and throughout her life cycle, the full development and human dignity of a woman depends on adequacy of food and nutrition. As will be shown in chapter five, MWM’s experiences confirm that effective participation in food production enables food autonomy in terms of food allocation, distribution, utilization and a sustainable lifestyle. Therefore, this study recommends the “ability to achieve food autonomy” be added as an additional indicator in measuring MDG5b.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyse the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano concerning food autonomy in relation to maternal health. This chapter discusses the methodology used for the study. It presents and articulates the research design, how the sample was chosen, research instruments, data collection methods and procedures, data analysis, and deals with ethical issues such as permission, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Furthermore, it shows how Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology as a framework has enabled the study to analyze the experiences of MWM and help identify structures, institutions, practices and factors that hinder achievement of food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health. The chapter also articulates how the Capability Approach for development and well-being enables the study to identify ways to enhance MWM's agency, and promote human dignity and well-being.

#### 4.2 Research Design

This is an empirical study which has employed both a literature review and qualitative research methods. According to Harwell, qualitative research is a naturalistic approach which focuses on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants – that is, qualitative research explores meaning, purpose, or reality.<sup>330</sup> The qualitative research method allowed this study to gather the necessary data on MWM's experiences and perceptions of their context. This data was then analysed in order to draw conclusions from the findings of the study. According to Ulin, Robinson and Tolley, qualitative research is a system of discovery which values a natural setting because in this context, the researcher can better understand the lived experiences, perspective, and actions of participants.<sup>331</sup> Doing research in Mashobye among women participants afforded me the opportunity to feel involved in the research as I learned from

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<sup>330</sup>Michael R. Harwell, *Research Design in Qualitative/Quantitative/Mixed Methods*, (University of Minnesota, 2011), 148.

<sup>331</sup>Priscilla R. Ulim, Elizabeth T Robinson, and Elizabeth E. Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health A Field Guide for Applied Research*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 22.

both the participants and their social location. As Roberts says, qualitative research is interested in the meaning people attach to the activities and events in their world with no attempt to manipulate the environment and openness to whatever emerges.<sup>332</sup> As this study sought to analyse the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano about food autonomy and its relation to maternal health, qualitative research methods were relevant to the study.

Durrheim, argues that qualitative research permits a rich and detailed observation of a few cases, and allows the researcher to build up an understanding of phenomena through observing instances of the phenomena as they emerge in specific contexts.<sup>333</sup> In addition, Harvell says that qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world which enables qualitative researchers to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, with few boundaries, resulting in a flexible and open research process.<sup>334</sup> The experiences of MWM have been affected by their social setting, culture and gender, as will be discussed further in chapter five. Since the study sought to analyse the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano concerning food autonomy and its relation to maternal health in Mashobye, the qualitative research method was found to be the relevant choice.

As Harvell says, qualitative research methods collect data face to face through interacting with selected persons in selected settings in an effort to describe and analyse people's individual and collective social action, belief, thoughts and perceptions. It provides information on the human side of an issue.<sup>335</sup> The detailed information and description by participants enabled me to understand food autonomy and its effect on maternal health outcomes according to MWM experiences. Hence, qualitative research in this study contributed to showing how food autonomy can affect maternal health. As a result, Ulin, Robinson, Tolley says that qualitative research is a systematic discovery which aims to generate knowledge of social events and processes by

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<sup>332</sup> Carol M. Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*, (California: Corwin Press, 2004), 111.

<sup>333</sup> Kevin Durrheim, "Research Design" in Martin Terre Blanche, Kevin Durrheim, K and Desmond Painter, (eds) *Research In Practice Applied Methods For The Social Sciences*, (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (PTY) Ltd, 1999), 52.

<sup>334</sup> Harvell, *Research Design in Qualitative/Quantitative/Mixed Methods*, 148.

<sup>335</sup> Harvell, *Research Design in Qualitative/Quantitative/Mixed Methods*, 149.

understanding what they mean to people, exploring and documenting how people interact with each other and how they interpret and interact with the world around them.<sup>336</sup>

### 4.3 Population and Sample

According to Roberts, sampling is a process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group or population from which they were selected.<sup>337</sup> As Dawson reiterates, MWM provided a “select portion of a population I as a researcher believed to provide insights into the perceptions and views of the wider research population”.<sup>338</sup> The study was conducted in Mashobye village, Limpopo District, South Africa. The sample for this study was chosen from Mashobye Methodist Women’s Manyano, which is made up of the organisation’s members from Mashobye, Bevhula, Makhubela and Ngomughomu villages who often meet in Mashobye Methodist Church as the main society. A sample of twelve participants was chosen from Mashobye Women’s Manyano as representatives of the MWM population because they are from the same social location and faith-based community. Mashobye Methodist Women’s Manyano is an affiliate of a ‘Connexional’ Methodist Women’s Manyano Prayer and Service Union in Letaba circuit, Limpopo district, South Africa.

A purposive sampling procedure (heterogenous sample) has been chosen because it allows a deliberate selection of participants.<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, purposive sampling is a procedure used when the researcher wishes to describe, explain and predict rather than generalise the results. Participants were selected with the help of a key informant who is a chairperson of MWM. According to Roberts, a key informant is someone who has information about the people and area and is willing to share the information.<sup>340</sup> Using purposive sampling, a sample size is not determined from the beginning of the study. Rather, as Dawson suggests, the interview process continues until a “saturation point” is reached, when the researcher thinks that everything is complete and that there is no longer any new information to be obtained by continuing.<sup>341</sup> Hence,

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<sup>336</sup> Ulim, Robinson, and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 24.

<sup>337</sup> Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 134.

<sup>338</sup> Catherine Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods User Friendly Manuals for Mastering Research Techniques and Projects Third Edition*, (United Kingdom: How To Content, 2007), 50.

<sup>339</sup> Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 52.

<sup>340</sup> Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 135.

<sup>341</sup> Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 55.

I continued inviting participants for interviews until a total of twelve were interviewed as representative of the Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano population. In this study, a heterogeneous procedure was chosen because it enables a "deliberate strategy to select people who are alike in some relevant details".<sup>342</sup>

A sample of participants was purposefully chosen from Mashobye Methodist Manyano. They included women of reproductive age, those heading households, and even those who are caring for children and teenagers, making Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano an appropriate choice. In addition, Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano are from the same social location and faith-based community. The study sample was made up of three leaders of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano and nine ordinary members. The leaders were selected due to their experience and leadership status, because they could provide valuable information on the procedures and why things happen the way they do. The ordinary members, most of whom are young, were chosen because of their involvement in the organization, their childrearing responsibilities and their views on food autonomy and its relationship to maternal health. Most participants had a low education status; for instance, the Manyano executive had a lower primary education of grade four, six participants studied up to grade eight, two participants passed grade twelve and one participant has gone back to school to do grade ten at age twenty-five after a break of two years due to childbirth. Nine participants are heads of households – three are widowed and six are not married, two participants are married and their husbands are unemployed, while a further two participants' husbands are retired and one participant is currently separated from her husband and had to return to Mashobye as she lost the privilege of a common accommodation and source of income. Two of the participants are in formal employment, two are in temporary employment, two are involved in informal firewood sale, three receive social pension, two are unemployed and one is a student.

Most interviews were conducted in the participants' homes because participants expressed a need to watch over their houses and children, reflecting participants' limited mobility, gendered household role and state of poverty. Even though participants did their best to offer their time uninterrupted, often children would come seeking their mother's attention. The interview had to pause for the participants to attend to the child as this presented the reality of the participants'

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<sup>342</sup> Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 55.

household responsibility. Only one discussion group was conducted in the church building. Furthermore, three interview dates had to be cancelled despite prior appointments due to traditional and cultural obligations involving funerals and a community meeting called by the local chief. At one point the local chief's time of burial was changed from twelve midnight to four o'clock in the morning and most participants expressed an obligation to culturally observe this ceremony even though they would not be attending the funeral. At another time, it involved the passing of a community elder who was over hundred years old and participants felt they would be paying their last respects by dedicating time to this occasion. As a result, MWM empirical research provided a thick description of the impact of culture, tradition and social location on the experiences, views and conduct of participants.

#### **4.4 Data Collection Method**

This study used two data collection instruments, namely, in-depth, one-on-one, unstructured interviews and a focus group. The sample was made up of twelve participants from Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano. Three participants were selected from Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano leadership for one-on-one unstructured interviews. A further three participants were selected from ordinary members for a one-on-one unstructured interview. Three focus groups (DG1-3) were conducted consisting of DG1 – four older participants, DG2 – one Manyano leader and three ordinary members, DG3 – four ordinary participants. Focus group 1 (DG1) was conducted at a church building and two other focus group discussions were conducted at two different venues.

According to Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, an in-depth, one-on-one interview is also called “conversation with a purpose”.<sup>343</sup> It allowed participants to talk freely about their lives, which enabled a “generation of empirical data”<sup>344</sup> relevant to the study. A one-on-one unstructured interview enabled the researcher to ask “open-ended” questions about food autonomy in relation to maternal health without seeking to influence the outcome. In this study, I listened attentively to participant's response as they freely articulated their experiences and views using their own words, according to their own meaning. The researcher asked open-ended questions to encourage

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<sup>343</sup>Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 82.

<sup>344</sup> Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 82.

participants to interpret questions themselves and speak clearly but casually, as no one answer was shown to be more desirable than the other.<sup>345</sup> The researcher followed up with probing questions in cases where she needed clarity or more information from the participant. I met participants at various convenient venues to conduct the interview.<sup>346</sup>

Furthermore, the study also conducted a focus group discussion which was composed of people who shared similar characteristics related to the topic. All Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano live in the same social location and have similar experiences according to culture, religion and gender. According to Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, the use of group interaction produces data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.<sup>347</sup> As qualitative questions are informal, non-judgemental and open, they created a comfortable setting and enabled participants to provide a variety of responses from the same meeting. According to Krefting, group discussion could "conscientize participants about the views and perceptions of others on the subject".<sup>348</sup> According to Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, "a group of people committed to the issue will probably enjoy an opportunity to express their opinion, hear other people's views, and challenge one another".<sup>349</sup> A discussion on food autonomy and its relation to maternal health stimulated interest as an issue of concern for MWM and motivated participants to express their views and share their experiences while listening to other's views. Ulim, Robinson and Tolley observe that as MWM "wrestle with questions and debate among themselves, participants shed light on their common perspective revealing clues to the context and social environment".<sup>350</sup>

The interviews were conducted in Setswana and Xitsonga with the help of an interpreter as most participants are only conversant in Xitsonga.

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<sup>345</sup> Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 82.

<sup>346</sup> Harwell, *Research Design in Qualitative/Quantitative/Mixed Methods*, 148

<sup>347</sup> Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 89.

<sup>348</sup> Krefting, L. 1991. "Rigor in Qualitative Research: The Assessment of Trustworthiness". *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 1991, March, Vol. 45, (no.3), 217.

<sup>349</sup> Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 44-45.

<sup>350</sup> Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 44-45.

#### 4.4.1 Data Collection Procedure

According to Roberts, “data collection procedure describes in detail all the steps taken to conduct the study and the order in which they occurred”.<sup>351</sup> I began data collection in April 2015 and completed on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2015. The selection of participants and occasional clarification on unfamiliar issues of culture was done through the help of two key informants. One of the key informants was the MWM Chairperson and the other one the research interpreter. The latter does not live in Mashobye but she was born within a Xitsonga context. According to Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, “key informants are insiders with special knowledge, status, or communication skills, who are willing to share what they know with the researcher”, they “sometimes have a different relationship to the researcher, providing information, introductions and interpretations... as well as access to observations that an outsider would not normally have”.<sup>352</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 2015, a focus group discussion of Mashobye Methodist Women’s Manyano was held in Mashobye Methodist Church building. Two of the subsequent focus groups discussions were held in the homes of participants. The venues for focus group discussions were selected in such a way that it minimised disturbances. The frequent challenge was that due to the length of the discussions, occasional noise would be heard from children playing close to the door or a child seeking her mother’s attention – Mashobye women take care of their own children. Participants brought their children and left them outside with an older child as a minder.

All one-on-one interviews were held in participants’ homes because they also had to mind the children. For both the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, each of the participants received a cell-phone call from me two weeks in advance asking them to participate in the focus group discussion. Three of the participants who do not have a telephone or cell-phone were contacted through the help of a key informant. Three days before the day of the focus group or one-on-one in-depth interview, I would call participants to confirm the appointment. Between May and July, I had to cancel three interviews and one focus group discussion due to funerals and local community meetings called by the local Chief. In Mashobye, the culture around funerals is that the whole day is dedicated to the funeral or being with the bereaved family. On a particular occasion, the funeral for the Chief was to be held earlier in the day, but at the last minute the time of the funeral was altered which shifted the time of the focus

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<sup>351</sup>Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 141.

<sup>352</sup>Ulim, Robinson and Tolley, *Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 78.

group discussion to the evening. By the 21<sup>st</sup> November, I had interviewed twelve participants as part of a focus group or individual one-on-one interview. Robert says that “data collection always takes longer than one realizes because it takes time to schedule interviews, field test, travel and follow up on respondents”.<sup>353</sup>

#### **4.5 Research Ethics**

Permission was sought and granted by the Bishop of the Limpopo District and Superintendent of Letaba Circuit as “gatekeepers”<sup>354</sup> of MWM society before the research began.

Informed consent ensures respect for participants during research. A written form describing the research for participants to sign and indicate their consent was provided and signed by participants accordingly. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences, and that participation was voluntary.<sup>355</sup>

Participants were assured that their identity would be protected by the use of “numbers instead of their names”,<sup>356</sup> for example, “Participant 1”.

Participants were given the assurance that confidentiality would be kept –they would be protected from other persons in the setting and among the general reading public.<sup>357</sup> Data records will be kept in a safe place for five years and shredded or incinerated for disposal according to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal data protection rules.

I did an audio recording of the discussions – both focus group discussions and individual one-on-one interviews– in order to “enhance dependability”.<sup>358</sup> Transcripts of recorded interviews were done for each individual one-on-one interview and four focus groups.

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<sup>353</sup>Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 142.

<sup>354</sup>Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 153.

<sup>355</sup>Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 156.

<sup>356</sup>Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 155.

<sup>357</sup>Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 155

<sup>358</sup>Krefting, “Rigor in Qualitative Research”, 220.

## 4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done thematically, that is, emerging themes from the data were grouped together for analysis.

Thereafter, I listened to every recorded interview and transcribed the conversation word by word. I then reviewed all the data more than twice before developing initial categories, themes and patterns. All the themes that emerged were then given initial coding.

After emerging themes were listed (according to patterns of responses) in order to identify a connection between them. For instance, as responses were sorted and grouped according to the research questions, all the responses that fitted a specific research question were identified and placed with the corresponding research question. Themes that emerged about food autonomy and its relation to maternal health were put together, first according to Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano experiences regarding food autonomy in relation to maternal health, and second, on how the MWM experiences affect their capacity to access maternal health. A third theme concerned the role of food autonomy in promoting maternal health, and the fourth was about ways that could enhance MWM food autonomy in the promotion of maternal health. This understanding formed a comprehensive picture of MWM collective experience. This meant that I had to find out how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together. This was done through sorting direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas that automatically enabled the expansion, contrast, or change of themes as I analysed the interview transcripts. These then helped develop a "master coding list".<sup>359</sup> The aim was to end up with key themes that described the essence of the study.

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<sup>359</sup>Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 142.

Thereafter I used the master coding list to code each participant's and focus group interview script. In this way, it was easy to analyse each response to the research questions, which resulted in categories, patterns and themes for the research questions. The final stage was to review all the transcripts to check that the findings and the themes and patterns were consistent with the data.

The findings were then compared using the literature review so as to assert where these findings were supported or not supported by the literature.<sup>360</sup>

#### 4.6.1 Researching MWM Experiences

In conjunction with the qualitative research method, I employed a Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology as a framework of analysis and interpretation of the experiences of MWM. Like other Christian feminist theologies, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology values women's experiences as vitally important. As Clifford says, "human experience is particular and always embodied experience".<sup>361</sup> In addition, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology posits that women's experiences, just like MWM experiences of food autonomy and its relation to maternal health, have previously been ignored and often "believed to be included in men's experiences thus pushing women's experiences to the periphery".<sup>362</sup> By drawing MWM voices into discussions of food autonomy and its relation to maternal health through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology helped me understand MWM experiences of food autonomy. As MWM expressed their experiences, views and beliefs, they revealed their "conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, their sense of self and their ways of understanding their relations to the world".<sup>363</sup> Moreover, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology gave a voice to the marginalised or silenced voices of MWM, making their world to come alive. In this way, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology encouraged MWM to "listen and validate their experiences and probe its causes".<sup>364</sup> Moreover, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology helped conscientize MWM about the effect of food autonomy on maternal health and thus the impact of economic disadvantage, gender

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<sup>360</sup>Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 145.

<sup>361</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>362</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>363</sup>Donna Teevan, "Challenges to the Role of Theological Anthropology in Feminist Theology", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 64, (2003), 588.

<sup>364</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

inequality and social location.<sup>365</sup> First, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology helped me to recognize that my experience as a researcher is different to that of participants and as such kept me conscious of the valuable contribution of participants' experiences. Second, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology helped me develop a critical ear to identify how social location has influenced MWM's experiences. Third, as Clifford says, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology encourages people, particularly MWM, to "probe the causes of their struggles".<sup>366</sup> In this way, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology laid a foundation for transformative action, to facilitate MWM's achievement of food autonomy in an effort to promote maternal health.

Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology pays attention to whether the Bible and church teachings contribute to the liberation or diminishment of women. As MWM probed causes of their struggles, they concluded that MWPSU can forge a connection and play an important role in uniting women's effort and views by facilitating discussions on strategic planning, with participants even contributing financially, towards a start-up fund for food production. Even though participants expressed a concern that MWM has limited capacity to liberate them from food insecurity, they expressed faith in MWPSU as a community in connection "to contribute by helping to kick start a food production project which we will continue to sustain".<sup>367</sup> As a result, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions availed an opportunity to conscientize women of the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, and to probe causes of their material circumstances. Hence, even in their suffering, MWM continue to draw inspiration from the church teachings like MCSA's "connexion and preferential option for the poor".<sup>368</sup> Furthermore, MWM expressed faith in God to whom they continue to pray for a solution and end to hunger and poverty because "God has faithfully sustained us until now".<sup>369</sup> On the other hand, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology enabled me to understand the implication of certain church activities like food donations and outreach programmes as providing temporary solutions that often perpetuate vulnerability and create passive dependence on God and others hindering the fullness of life.

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<sup>365</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>366</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>367</sup> Most participants believed that Manyanos from outside Mashobye could help with resources to kick start a food production project because all Mashobye women have is their hands and they are willing to work towards the alleviation of hunger and poverty.

<sup>368</sup> This was J.Wesley's doctrine which gave priority to the plight of the poor, sick and marginalized of society.

<sup>369</sup> This view emerged from a discussion group of MWM leaders.

Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology seeks to “narrow the gap between the language of liberation and the reality”.<sup>370</sup> As MWM expressed and listened to their experiences, an awareness of possibilities for food production previously not verbalised was revealed and shared. MWM sharing of stories revealed a rich, courageous and determined spirituality refreshed towards achieving food autonomy in order to promote maternal health. In addition, MWM stories revealed women’s consciousness and attentiveness to the oppressive nature of hunger and poverty and offered possible solutions. Therefore, Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology facilitated a renewed determination and passion for participants to use available resources, like a secured Church yard and water from the Church borehole to start a food production project. As of now, participants have contributed towards the purchase of seeds and the soil will be turned soon for the first crop cultivation from the Church yard. Moreover, MWM expressed their willingness to help empower other women and men who suffer from hunger and poverty, in order to promote healthy families in a just, equal and peaceful community. This could result in the establishment of a community of love, with a common vision of sharing and distributing available food equally according to need, just like in the early church (Acts 6:1-7). As a result, the study helped conscientize MWM about systems, institutions, factors and practices that have a limiting influence over their ability to achieve food autonomy and its effects on maternal health.

Furthermore, in making recommendations, the study used the “capability approach” as articulated by Jacka in order to facilitate a transformative view of Mashobye Women through enhancement of their agency and promotion of their well-being. According to Jacka, the capability approach provides a framework for conceptualizing, evaluating and assessing individuals’ well-being, social arrangements and policies relating to well-being and development particularly for “left-behind and vulnerable” groups.<sup>371</sup> This approach suggests that individual well-being is based on the achievement of “functioning’s”<sup>372</sup> that women have reason to value, and their capability to achieve them. Once women can act upon choices of their “identified or chosen goals”, their “agency”<sup>373</sup> is enhanced and their “well-being”<sup>374</sup> is promoted. Moreover,

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<sup>370</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 37.

<sup>371</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 189.

<sup>372</sup>Jacka refers to these as ‘Ways of being and doings’ that women has reason to value and her capabilities (potential and opportunities) women has for achieving them- See Jacka, Left-Behind and Vulnerable, 189.

<sup>373</sup>Jacka defines ‘agency’ as ‘The ability and power to identify and choose goals and capacity to act upon those choices. See Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 189.

<sup>374</sup>Jacka relates well-being to ‘A life worthy of human dignity’ See Jacka, Left-Behind and Vulnerable, 189.

equal access to resources, opportunities and social services improve living standards when income and buying power, particularly for rural women, is assured. Therefore, the capability approach enabled me to identify “functioning’s” which Mashobye Women found reason to value, and facilitated listening to their views on possible solutions to achieve them. In addition, the capability approach enabled me to recognize how a transformed view of “personhood and mutual advantage” would enable key institutions and structures to shift the distribution of assets, access and power in order to transform power relations<sup>375</sup> and enhance Mashobye Women’s agency in the promotion of their well-being and maternal health in particular.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter covered the following topics: research design, sample, data collection method, data collection procedure, data analysis, and ethical issues such as permission, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and audio recording. This chapter also articulated Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology as a study framework that facilitated interviews and discussion groups in conjunction with the capability approach which affirms that human dignity, gender equity and agency for all people promote well-being and maternal health for MWM in particular. The next chapter will discuss the data presentation and analysis of MWM experiences of food autonomy in relation to maternal health.

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<sup>375</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 199.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the methodology of the study. This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data collected on MWM's experiences of food autonomy and its effect on maternal health. In this chapter, data obtained from fieldwork was analysed thematically in line with the objectives of the study. Both interviews and focus group discussions generated a number of themes. However, only themes related to this study will be discussed in this dissertation. Among the themes that emerged from the fieldwork are food production, capacity for independent decision making, lack of resources, women's health, the role of food, reproductive health rights and the role of MWPSU's teachings. The field data revealed that food autonomy can be achieved through food production, capacity to make personal decisions and the availability of resources. In this study, MWPSU was shown to have an important role in enabling women's achievement of food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health.

#### **5.2 Research Process and Data Collection**

This is an empirical study which used a qualitative approach. The fieldwork was done in Mashobye among Mashobye Methodist Women Manyano members. The history of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano was discussed in chapter two under the history of the Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union as its affiliate. I conducted the interviews myself in Mashobye in Xitsonga, a language which participants in both in-depth interviews and discussion groups could understand and felt comfortable to speak. I conducted both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in Xitsonga with the help of an interpreter because I am not conversant in Xitsonga, which is the only language some of the participants understand. The participants gave answers based on their experiences, understanding and views about the role of MWPSU in MWM's achievement of food autonomy in relation to maternal health. Six open-ended questions helped to prompt relevant information for data collection. The questions were written in English and translated into Xitsonga.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with six participants selected because of their age, membership in Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano, and their household responsibilities. Twelve participants were selected from Mashobye Methodist Women Manyano members and were divided into three discussion groups of four participants each. The sample size was selected because it represents a number that would enable the discussion to offer a variety of views but small enough for each participant to feel free to offer her views.

The purposive heterogeneous sampling procedure was chosen because it is a deliberate strategy to "select people who are alike in some relevant details",<sup>376</sup> which I believed "would provide insights into the perceptions and views of the wider research population".<sup>377</sup>

The method used for both in-depth interviews and discussion groups was the qualitative approach. This is a naturalistic approach which focuses on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants in order to explore meaning, purpose, or reality.<sup>378</sup> Roberts says a qualitative researcher is interested in the meaning people attach to the activities and events in their world without attempting to manipulate the environment, and is open to whatever emerges.<sup>379</sup> Ulin, Robinson and Tolley also affirm qualitative research as a system of discovery which values a natural setting where the researcher can better understand people's lived experience in the natural context and its influence on perspective, experience and actions of participants.<sup>380</sup> This methodology was useful for this research since the aim of this study was to discover and understand the experiences, perspectives and thoughts of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano regarding food autonomy in relation to maternal health.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals at different times and in different places. I personally booked the appointment and participants chose the venue as well as the date and time of the interview to fit into their schedules. Only the interview with the Chairperson of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano was held at the church building and the rest of the interviews were conducted in participant's homes.

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<sup>376</sup> Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 55.

<sup>377</sup> Dawson, *A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 50.

<sup>378</sup> Harwell, *Research Design in Qualitative/Quantitative/Mixed Methods*, 148.

<sup>379</sup> Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey*, 111.

<sup>380</sup> Ulin, *Robinson and Tolley, Qualitative Method in Public Health*, 22.

One meeting for the leader's group discussion was held in the church building while the other two were held in participant's homes. Group discussions were made up of three groups of four participants each: group one was composed of the leadership of the organisation, group two was composed of one leader and three ordinary members and these were heads of households, group three was composed of four ordinary members with one in formal employment, one in formal business and two unemployed. All participants are members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa aged between 25-68 years. The discussions were enriched by the experiences, beliefs and thoughts participants contributed. I facilitated the discussions to ensure that all participants contributed to the discussions.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and made a voluntary decision to participate. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study anytime they felt it necessary. Confidentiality was also discussed with participants – that their identity and the information they provided would be protected. It was agreed that participants would be identified by number, for example, (P1) for participant one instead of their real names. So participants in this study were identified as P1 to P6. The discussion groups were identified as (DG1) for discussion group one, and so discussion groups were DG1 to DG3. The research used both audio recordings and written answers to record data collected during in-depth interviews and discussion groups. These were analysed to identify themes that emerged from the interviews.

The Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology framework was used in this study as a framework to analyse and interpret the data as it emerged from MWM experiences. Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology is a framework that seeks to listen to the experiences of women and seek a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition while also envisioning a deeper transformation and true reconstruction of church structures and civil society.<sup>381</sup> The ideologies set out by this framework enabled me to listen, analyse and interpret the experiences of MWM and food autonomy in relation to maternal health.

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<sup>381</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 33.

### 5.3 Presentation of Research Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate and understand how Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano's experiences of food autonomy can contribute towards the promotion of maternal health. Based on the data from the fieldwork, the themes will be presented in line with the objectives of the dissertation. First, I discuss the significance of food autonomy for maternal health; second, MWM's experiences concerning food autonomy in relation to maternal health; third, the contribution of MWPSU teaching and activities towards food autonomy and maternal health; and fourth, discussion on how the findings of the study could contribute towards a theology of food autonomy among MWPSU. This study argues that there is a need for MWM to achieve food autonomy so that they can enjoy their human right to "adequate food, to be fed and to feed others",<sup>382</sup> and in the process promote maternal health and subsequent human dignity. This can be achieved through cultivating food gardens to empower its members with food production initiatives as they theologize women's experiences about food autonomy and maternal health. This is based on the teachings and activities of MWPSU which are observed by all its affiliates like MWM in local societies. As it was shown in chapter two and in this chapter, the current MWPSU teachings and activities are outward looking towards selfless service to the church and communities, which often overlook the primary needs of its members, like food autonomy and maternal health. Therefore, this chapter proposes that MWPSU teachings and activities be refocused towards a model that will empower its members and also be inclusive of women's ability to achieve food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health.

Data collected from participants was analysed in comparison with the literature. The analysis of the responses will be discussed according to the objectives of the study. Below are MWM's responses divided under three sections according to the objectives of the study. First, the significance of food autonomy for maternal health was analysed. Second, MWM's experiences about food autonomy and its relation to maternal health were analysed. Third, the extent to which MWPSU teachings and activities contributed towards MWM's achievement of food autonomy for maternal health was discussed. The fourth objective, analysis of how the findings of the study can be used to promote a theology of food autonomy is presented in chapter six.

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<sup>382</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 225.

A total of twelve participants were selected for this study from Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano in Mashobye village. The participants were selected from among members of reproductive age, those heading households, and those who are caring for children and teenagers, and because they are from the same location and faith based community. All participants acknowledged food as a necessary component of their daily work, due to socio-cultural expectations and women's view of what constitutes their household responsibilities. Hence their determination for access and avail adequate food and nutrition is one way that affirms "their dignity and a sign of living life to the full"<sup>383</sup>. As Olowu suggests, the capacity to resolve the problem women are facing in Sub Saharan Africa relates to the understanding of the relationship between women's production, reproduction and caring responsibilities.<sup>384</sup> This is also highlighted by Gould who asserts that food autonomy is an imperative for people and communities in order to access adequate calories, micronutrients, vitamins and freedom from colonial bondage.<sup>385</sup>

### **5.3.1 MWM Socio-Economic Profile**

Out of twelve participants interviewed, four women are married, three are widowed, four are single and one is separated from her husband. As I gathered from the participant's stories, all women interviewed are involved in caring for and nurturing children and significant others. Mashobye women's social profile, indicates that some of them are pensioners and widows in their old age, yet women in Mashobye work very hard with very limited resources to provide food and nutrition to their families. This is because household production and caring is socially accepted as women's responsibility. As will be shown later in this chapter, lack of economic and material resources like finance, agricultural equipment, water, skills and secured gardens among others contribute to MWM's anxiety, worry and depression, which negatively affects maternal health. This profile reflects the challenges Mashobye women experience in a rural, poor setting without many employment opportunities, economic options and adequate social services. According to WHO, a high unemployment rate, inadequate social welfare and malnutrition

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<sup>383</sup>John 10:10

<sup>384</sup>Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security", 5379.

<sup>385</sup>Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", 4-5.

contribute to household food poverty which is particularly common in female-headed households.<sup>386</sup>

In relation to food production, out of the twelve participants interviewed, four women are involved with backyard food gardens, two are in formal employment, one had gone back to school, three are in informal small business and two are unemployed. The one with a backyard garden also does beading as a supplementary income generating activity. The economic profile of MWM affirms participants' beliefs that lack of food autonomy is also influenced by social location. Accordingly, poverty creates a state of vulnerability as it is seen to deny women, particularly rural women like those in Mashobye, access to basic necessities like food, health and education. In addition, the state of poverty prevalent in rural areas reinforces lack of opportunities and resources for rural women, committing them to economic dependency and inferior social status. As Clifford says, women's inferior social status contributes to poor self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness.<sup>387</sup> Meanwhile, Blumberg says that economic power is the most important influence on women's equality with men and is enhanced when women have equal opportunity to participate in food production.<sup>388</sup> In this way, MWM's economic profile reflects how social location often contributes to the low status of women, particularly when their ability to participate in food production is limited. For this reason, participants express frustration and stress because of being confined to a state of vulnerability without production and economic options to lift themselves out of poverty.

As a result, most participants expressed a desire to work for themselves, particularly by cultivating food gardens in order to produce their own food with a possibility of surplus for sale so that they can use the generated funds to improve their economic situation. Some of the younger women within the group believed that if they were living in urban areas or even closer to cities they could access job opportunities, infrastructure, basic services and their economic situation would be different. This is because urban areas are more developed, with industrialization, proximity of markets and opportunities for employment as domestic servants, and even the advantage of venturing into small business. In fact, rural societies have been shown

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<sup>386</sup>UNFAO, World Food Security and Malnutrition, 24.

<sup>387</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

<sup>388</sup>Rae Lesser, Blumberg, "Fairy Tales and Facts: Economy, Family, Fertility and the Female" in Irene Tinker and Michelle Bo Bramsen, *Women and World Development*. American Association for the Advancement of Science, (Washington D.C: Overseas Development Council, 1976), 20.

to suffer from hunger and poverty, affecting mostly women-headed households due to unequal rural-urban distribution of production resources and modern development or industrialization.<sup>389</sup> However, research has revealed various small scale economic activities MWM are engaged in as an attempt to ensure food security for their families. Of the four women engaged in backyard food production, two sell part of the vegetables at harvest and one also makes and sells beading work. The women involved in informal small business sell firewood, and do domestic work like washing clothes, cooking and cleaning for others to earn wages. Some participants even buy vegetables and fruits to sell on weekends; one sells live chickens when people place orders. This helped me realize the passion, compassion, and commitment individual women in Mashobye have towards achieving food autonomy. Moreover, the amount of courage and determination shown could be recognised as the skill these women have developed to gain financial freedom in an effort to provide food security for their households. This study suggests that if this passion can be united and harnessed towards a food garden, MWM could be enabled toward achieving food autonomy. Hence one of the objectives for this study was to investigate the extent to which the MWPSU teachings have contributed towards MWM ability to achieve food autonomy. This question will be answered in the sections that follow.

### **5.3.2 Responses from Manyano Women leadership and MWM Ordinary Members**

As MWM executive members articulated their opinion on their understanding of food autonomy and how it relates to maternal health, it became clear that according to their opinion, food autonomy can only be achieved if Mashobye women are able to produce their own food. The women leaders argued that without capacity to produce food, women would experience hunger, disease and poverty. This is because hunger manifests in physical and psychological dimensions which increase women's vulnerability to malnutrition and lack of energy to engage in active work. Furthermore, the leaders cited invasive poverty, the scarcity of water due to erratic rainfall and government dry taps, lack of employment and financial resources as limiting to food production. Moreover, participants indicated that the Manyano meeting has helped sustain faith, and they have been praying that God will avail some help for them to overcome hunger and poverty.

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<sup>389</sup>Tinker, "Introduction: Seminar on Women in Development", 6.

Most participants from among the ordinary MWM members also revealed that food provision forms an important component of their daily responsibility. Some of the reasons women raised were that, first, food is essential for women's personal nutritional needs and energy requirements. In addition, food requirements during pregnancy affect the unborn child, so lack of food production causes worry, frustration and stress. Second, without food, women will not be able to meet their daily societal responsibilities for feeding the family. Third, some women are heads of households, so lack of food is life threatening for the woman and her entire family. Most ordinary members expressed a belief that food autonomy can be achieved through food production. These women also showed passion and determination in providing food, mostly through their own individual efforts, like chopping firewood to sell and cleaning for others, because even for those who are married, their husbands are not employed. Most women have to wake up before everybody in the home to make food, prepare children for school and clean the house. Afterwards, they go out to their respective informal jobs and business, and later return home to prepare dinner, often having to first collect firewood, water, and wild vegetables from the fallow. The research results have helped me to discover the struggle MWM are facing in providing adequate food and nutrition for their individual needs and that of their families. These women are still young and believe MWPSU could facilitate discussions, lobby for support to help them start a food garden.

#### **5.4 The Significance of Food Autonomy for Maternal Health**

The research findings in this section respond to objective one which is to investigate the significance of food autonomy for maternal health. The findings reveal that Mashobye women have special needs for food, not only for a woman herself but for her family and the unborn child when she is pregnant. So, food contributes to women's health and wellbeing physiologically, spiritually and biologically. Almost all the participants highlighted the ability to access food and nutrition as necessary for maternal health.

##### **5.4.1 The Role of Food Autonomy for Maternal Health**

Most participants were of the opinion that food autonomy will empower their choices about a variety of food, generate income to maintain sustainability, and improve social status.

Participants cited a belief that the inability to make choices causes lack of food autonomy, leading to poverty.

*We women can have freedom to choose what we want to eat and feed our children only when we can plant our own food. If you do not plant your own food, you will suffer and be poor and if you have food in your garden you will give your children food when they are hungry.*<sup>390</sup>

All twelve women emphasized that food production will enable them to choose the quantity and quality of the food they need. This agrees with most studies that show that food insecurity is caused by lack of access to food. As it is, only four women from the MWM leadership were actually producing or attempting to produce food from their own gardens. Three of the women are currently harvesting various food like maize and a variety of vegetables like pumpkins, merogo (including different types of spinach), cabbage, carrots and beetroot for family consumption. The other woman's garden did not yield a good harvest because of water shortage. Unlike others who have multiple water containers, she relies on getting water directly from the government tap to irrigate the garden, but the taps have stayed dry for long periods and her plants just died. In such cases, women find themselves at a point of despair, worry and anxiety because of social expectations of women as providers of daily meals.

*I would like to start a food garden and produce crops to sell but it is difficult.*<sup>391</sup>

As a result, the ability to produce their own food enables choices for women and opportunities to venture into income generation activities. According to this response, food production also helps women to improve their condition of poverty as it enables access to markets in order to purchase or to sell produce. However, lack of food production limits the possibility for improved financial capacity and increases experiences relating to stress and lack of sleep because women do not know how they will feed their children.

*Sometimes when we are hungry we will go to 'Matshonisa'<sup>392</sup> to borrow money to buy food from shops but when pension comes, Matshonisa takes the whole money and we are left with nothing. It increases poverty in the family.*<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>390</sup>Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

<sup>391</sup>Response from participant (P5), in-depth interview held on 12/09/2015.

In such cases, Mashobye women are forced to borrow money from ‘Matshonisa’ even when they know it would increase their state of poverty. Providing for individual and family needs is very important to women because of the importance of food to the well-being of families, but also due to the gendered and societal expectation. Women expressed emotional and spiritual depression in the face of failure to provide adequately for individual and family nutrition.

*It pains me and causes me uneasiness when children cry for what they need because I cannot offer them good food and a better life because I don't know what to do. Sometimes I cannot sleep at night and I fear that it might even make my life short.*<sup>394</sup>

This response reflects the desperate situation MWM often find themselves facing with many other responsibilities competing for women’s time and the lack of necessary resources inhibiting their ability to achieve food autonomy. For example, most of these women are heads of families who are also caring for orphans of extended families, some of whom are still very young and need delicate care. Another worrying factor is when women fail to offer their children a better life because they do not have food. This concurs with Gould who says food promotes the ability to learn and give workers energy to work.<sup>395</sup> When women fail to educate their children because of hunger, it commits the family to a vicious cycle of poverty. As I observed, even when women came for interviews, most of them brought children along. This is because of societal expectations associating caring responsibilities with women but also due to lack of financial resources to send children to early learning centres. Household production, reproduction and childcare in particular take a lot of MWM’s time, energy and attention. As such, Mashobye women expressed the need for food autonomy as both a solution to the challenges they are facing on a daily basis with their own food, and the nutritional needs of their families. According to my observation, participants showed more concern about what and how they will feed children and significant others than their individual nutritional needs. MWM form part of the rural communities whose condition in the developing world and Sub Saharan Africa in particular is “endemic to hunger, poverty and diseases particularly maternal health”.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> A name used for micro-lenders who loan money to poor people who do not qualify with the commercial banks. They charge exorbitant interest of up to 30% per month.

<sup>393</sup> Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

<sup>394</sup> Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 12/09/2015.

<sup>395</sup> Gould, “Deep Food Autonomy”, 13.

<sup>396</sup> UNFAO, World Food Security and Malnutrition, 16.

Food autonomy affirms Mashobye women's humanity as it enables them to access adequate food and nutrition as individuals and providers of families, and contributes to the economic growth of society. In this way, food autonomy facilitates Mashobye women's human right to adequate food and nutrition and freedom from hunger in a sustainable manner as entrenched both in the 1948 United Nations Charter for Human Rights Act, Art 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the South African Constitution.<sup>397</sup> This Act affirms the right to adequate food and freedom from hunger for all people in a sustainable manner. However, MWM's food insecurity situation reveals that these rights could not ensure women and their families' sustainable access to adequate food and nutrition, at all the times. Therefore, participants voiced their consciousness of their need for food and that food autonomy could be a way of ensuring sustainable access to adequate food and nutrition. Accordingly, Gould says when food autonomy is in the hands of indigenous communities, they can determine the quality and quantity of food based on appropriate calorie intake necessary for energy requirements and physical activity.<sup>398</sup> In this way, food autonomy can minimize commodification of food by commercial food systems through enabling rural women, like those in Mashobye, to produce their own food. Moreover, food would be used for its "primary purpose of feeding people".<sup>399</sup> According to the WHO definition of maternal health in chapter three, MWM's experiences suggest that the achievement of MDG 5a and 5b could be influenced by women's ability to achieve food autonomy. Moreover, most participants believe that food autonomy can be achieved through food production.

#### **5.4.2 Food Production**

Most participants highlighted food production as a way of ensuring access to adequate quality and quantity of food and nutrition. The women expressed a belief that it is when they are able to produce their own food that they will have the capacity to make necessary choices that will promote maternal health. In fact, almost all women cited food production as a determinant of food autonomy, and food autonomy as a factor in promoting maternal health. Most participants

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<sup>397</sup>South African Constitution, Section 27 (1), forms the basis for the South African national food security strategy as spelled out in the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) of 2002. It spells out the "right to have access to ... sufficient food and water".

<sup>398</sup>Gould, "Deep Food Autonomy", 5.

<sup>399</sup>Mead, "Comment on the Role of Women", 10.

have a strong conviction that food production will enable them to access a variety of foods with adequate nutrition, to contribute towards good health outcomes.

*We can have food all the time only if we produce our own food/planting, if not we can't, because we are poor, if you can't find food we suffer more and become poor more and even become sick.<sup>400</sup>*

On the other hand, when women do not have access to food or their consumption levels are low, they lack the necessary energy and they cannot meet the required socio-cultural expectation of household production, reproduction and care that ensures family health and wellbeing. In this way, MWM's response also shows that food contributes to a healthy body, supports women's agency and asserts their human dignity and respect. MWM also say that consuming a variety of food helps them to gain confidence because they look and feel healthy rather than always feeling tired and lazy.

*Food makes me feel like I am full of life and proud to achieve nutrition for the family. I feel I am independent...Without a healthy body; one cannot go out looking for a job because one always feels tired without the necessary energy. Food strengthens the body.<sup>401</sup>*

This response also indicates that food contributes to the psychological wellbeing of Mashobye women. As Mashobye women's energy levels are renewed and the body feels healthy, they gain the courage, confidence and strength to enter the economic market in search of employment. Mobility out of the domestic sphere has the potential to enable participation in the public forum and expose MWM to beneficial environments, access to health services and information otherwise absent inside the home. In this way, food could further contribute to the economic status and restoration of women's human dignity while indirectly enhancing family wellbeing, dignity and human flourishing. This is because women are known to nurture and provide care by providing for the needs and nutritional security of the family.

*When I can contribute to the good healthy life of my family, I feel capable as a human being. I feel respected and recognised to have the ability to help myself and progress in life.<sup>402</sup>*

*If you have food, it means one has something of her own.<sup>403</sup>*

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<sup>400</sup>Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

<sup>401</sup>Response from participant (P6), in-depth interview held on 13/09/2015.

<sup>402</sup>Response from participant (P4), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

<sup>403</sup>Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

In light of the above statement, I deduce that food autonomy enhances these women's sense of pride and social value as they are able to effectively perform their productive and caring duties, particularly in ensuring family food and nutrition. All participants are involved with "food work in their homes where the right to food for their individual and families' needs are realized".<sup>404</sup> Hence Jacka notes that recognizing the value of care work restores women's agency, self-esteem and sense of self efficacy, which can improve women's status and empower them to stand up for themselves.<sup>405</sup> As a result, food autonomy can enhance women's decision-making capacity and gender equality, enabling women to "enact their place in the world, influence others and define themselves".<sup>406</sup> This has been reflected throughout history as women work in food related industries like production, processing, and preparing. According to MWM's experience, food autonomy can promote a sense of self-worth that can form an ideal towards addressing food issues particularly involving maternal health. Hence, Van Esterik advocates for "eliminating all forms of discrimination against women by meeting women's requirement for food".<sup>407</sup>

This response supposes that one of the reasons women experience malnutrition is the social and cultural view that women have sole and exclusive responsibility for feeding their children and families. This oppressive view obliges women to reserve food for the family during periods of food insufficiency or when there is a shortage of money for buying enough food. In such cases, women end up eating less food while their responsibilities expend more energy and compromise their health due to insufficient micronutrients and vitamin intake. This situation drives Mashobye women to undertake desperate measures to get money in order to access food for individual and family needs.

*because social pension does not cover family food requirement until the next payout, we buy food on credit and we owe money to local shops and our bank cards stay with Matshonisa, just so we can feed the family, even if we know that it will bring more poverty to the house.*<sup>408</sup>

This response reflects that the devastating effect of lack of food production, insufficient purchasing power coupled with women's responsibility towards family food and nutrition have

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<sup>404</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to food", 228.

<sup>405</sup>Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 198.

<sup>406</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 225.

<sup>407</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to food", 228.

<sup>408</sup>Response from discussion group (DG 1), held on 25/04/2015.

negative health implications. As these loans require women to reveal their bank pin code to ‘Matshonisa’; it is an invasion of privacy and a further blow to self-esteem.

### 5.4.3 The Role of Food

Participants emphasized that, for the body to have energy and for the maintenance of good health, it is important to consume adequate food and nutrition. They said:

*We know that food builds a person’s body, making the body strong, keeping it healthy – but without food you can’t live well.*<sup>409</sup>

*I feel well because I have eaten, I feel full and satisfied. After being full, what would I feel? I feel right and my body feels well and good. I can move the cupboard, weed the garden and do a lot –because I am full hey.*<sup>410</sup>

All twelve participants indicated that food is a source of energy, health and wellbeing. Women said that for them to perform their daily household responsibilities, they needed energy that is only available through eating food. Some of the responsibilities emerged from the research showed why Mashobye women require high levels of energy. For instance, participants indicated that their day starts early before others are awake, to prepare food for children before they go to school. Afterwards they have to clean the household and prepare food for other members of the family. These activities are possible when water is available, firewood is sufficient for cooking and the staple food accompaniment ‘morogo’ is available. Otherwise, this requires women to travel and queue at community taps, walk long distances to gather firewood and wild vegetables from the field or neighbouring fallow areas. This is because household reproduction is socially, culturally and according to gender regarded the sole responsibility of women. Failure to perform these responsibilities exposes the family to hunger and women abuse, leading to domestic violence from their partners who will regard them as failing in their domestic responsibilities. This resonates with what Choudhary and Parthasarathy says that women require energy, patience and endurance to sustain repetitive, monotonous household work necessary for daily household reproduction.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>409</sup>Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 24/05/2015.

<sup>410</sup>Response from participant (P4), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

<sup>411</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, “Gender, Work and Household Food Security”, 526.

*Food helps, because women care for families, they need energy to work or do anything. Food give women the energy to do the things they have to do, they need to be healthy to do their work. Without food they cannot do things for themselves.*<sup>412</sup>

*If I have food to eat, I am full and I have energy to do something, but without food I get tired and lazy and I cannot work because I feel weak.*<sup>413</sup>

The above quotations affirm that consuming the correct combination of protein, micronutrients and minerals will ensure that the body has adequate health and energy for active work. For instance, most participants indicated that they become weak when they have not eaten food and they reiterated that food give them energy and strength to perform their daily household activities.

#### **5.4.4 Women's Health**

In discussing the effects of food insecurity on maternal health, one participant also responded by saying:

*Without food my body cannot be well like a woman's body but if my life is good without sickness I will have energy and my body can function well, the way a woman's body should do.*<sup>414</sup>

In fact, MWM's experience is that lack of adequate food and nutrition has the potential to affect women biologically as well the survival of her unborn child. As a mother's access to adequate nutrition is responsible for the survival of the unborn child, vulnerability to under-nutrition has devastating repercussions when women's dietary needs are not met, particularly during pregnancy.

*When I do not have enough food to eat, the child that is growing inside of me will also not receive enough nutrition, can even be born with sickness and will pass from this world.*<sup>415</sup>

These responses indicate that adequate food and nutrition is imperative for maternal health because it is necessary for intra-uterine feeding. These responses concur with Gould's argument that "the right kind of food is imperative to support learning (properly nourished brains focus and

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<sup>412</sup>Response from participant (P6), in-depth interview held on 13/09/2015.

<sup>413</sup>Response from participant (P5), in-depth interview held on 12/09/2015.

<sup>414</sup>Response from participant (P6), in-depth interview held on 13/09/2015.

<sup>415</sup>Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 12/09/2015.

absorb better), a healthy work-force, affirm pride in identity, recognition of indigenous knowledge, ecological knowledge and connection all reinforcing culture and quality of life”.<sup>416</sup>

According to MWM’s experiences and opinion about food autonomy, if one cannot produce their own food, they will experience “hunger and poverty”,<sup>417</sup> “their bodies cannot function well physically”<sup>418</sup> and “biologically”.<sup>419</sup> As a result, Mashobye women become anxious and worried; “Sometimes, I cannot even sleep at night and I worry that it can even shorten one’s life”.<sup>420</sup> As shown above, a variety of factors and circumstances pose a challenge to MWM’s primary daily food production, with adverse effects on individual health and wellbeing as well as that of the family.<sup>421</sup>

Despite, the huge responsibility of caring for their individual needs and those of their families, insufficient social safety nets, unreliable sources of income, scarce job opportunities and poor access to food and nutrition often force women to concentrate more on feeding children and family to the detriment of their own health. As such, Mashobye women emphasize their need to achieve food autonomy, particularly as they reckon food can combat under-nutrition and also enable the body to recover from sickness. This is because women are still responsible for family food production and caring at all times. In most cases, where food is not sufficient, women consume less than the necessary nutritional requirements.

*I worry more about giving food for my children as I get stressed when they cry because there is no food and I cannot give them the things they need for school.*<sup>422</sup>

*Even a person’s body shows, there is a difference because a person’s body changes. It shrinks and become too weak especially when eating only one kind of food even if its ‘morogo’, especially here in villages because people know each other.*<sup>423</sup>

*My life cannot improve without food or anything for myself, one need to get enough food with nutrition to help build one’s body after I am sick. It is difficult especially if I don’t have a way to get food.*<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>416</sup>Gould, “Deep food Autonomy”, 20.

<sup>417</sup>Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

<sup>418</sup>Response from participant (P6), in-depth interview held on 13/09/2015.

<sup>419</sup>Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 12/09/2015.

<sup>420</sup>Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

<sup>421</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, “Gender, Work and Household Food Security”, 531.

<sup>422</sup>Response from participant (P6), in-depth interview held on 13/09/2015.

<sup>423</sup>Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

Studies have shown that women's consumption of inadequate food and nutrition and the low Body Mass Index hereafter (BMI) among "5-20% of African women reflect chronic hunger which is said to pave a way for maternal mortality and morbidity".<sup>425</sup> This leads to experiences of shame, stigma and marginalization and reinforces women's low social status, especially because of feelings of inefficiency in achieving their "functionings".<sup>426</sup> can cause maternal depression. Hence, MWM regard the significance of food autonomy as the ability to manipulate resources in order to access adequate food and nutrition. Van Esterik emphasizes women's right to food not because they are "food for others", but for their own individual nutritional needs, health, wellbeing and human rights.<sup>427</sup>

## **5.5 MWM's experiences: Limitation to Food Autonomy**

These research findings respond to objective two, which is to analyse the experiences of MWM in relation to food autonomy and how it affects maternal health. While the findings according to MWM's experiences affirm their capacity to make decisions to enable the achievement of food autonomy, these women identified lack of resources as the main reason that negatively impacts women's capacity to make decisions and limit MWM's ability to achieve food autonomy.

### **5.5.1 Capacity to Make Decisions**

As already shown, Mashobye women's households require the right to access the necessary quality and quantity of adequate food and nutrition. Hence MWM relate consumption of the right food and nutrition to women's ability to make independent decisions, as the following responses indicate.

*I feel I have life and I am in control when I have eaten; I can do my work well and give my children the food that makes them grow well.*<sup>428</sup>

*I mean, when a woman is independent, she stands her position as a woman and contributes as a woman independent by herself to do her own will, make her own decisions and be strong. She has confidence to solve problems and she is not*

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<sup>424</sup>Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

<sup>425</sup>Akinyele, Ezekannagha and Obayelu, "Socio-demographic Changes", 58.

<sup>426</sup>Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 189.

<sup>427</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 227.

<sup>428</sup>Response from discussion group(DG2),held on 20/11/2015.

*overwhelmed by women's problems she is a woman. If a woman cannot be independent, it means she has problems and it will limit her progress.*<sup>429</sup>

According to these responses, the ability to make and implement personal decisions was highlighted as an important contributing factor to access and distribution of food for the achievement of nutrition outcomes. As most participants are heads of households, household responsibilities lie on their shoulders and they spend most of their time on food related activities, often on their own. First, women were of the opinion that the right to decision making affects their capacity to make choices about the appropriateness of their food and nutrition. Second, the capacity to make independent decisions enables women to exercise freedom of movement, which avails enabling opportunities and access to necessary information. Third, women value the opportunity to make decisions that include income generation. According to the above responses, food autonomy gives women the capacity to make independent decisions which gives them a sense of achievement, self-worth and dignity for achieving their social responsibility. This means having both good nutrition and income enables agency and enhances dignity. Therefore, Ramachadran is correct in saying that “women’s capacity to influence household dynamics impacts food security, production, earning, purchasing, preparing and finally food consumption”<sup>430</sup> and utilization. Moreover, Mead notes that women need to be concerned with what role they can have in shaping decisions that affect women, men and children and emphasizes that everyone loses when women, either professionally or experientially trained, are barred from participating meaningfully in the decision making process.<sup>431</sup>

### **5.5.2 Lack of Resources**

Evidently, MWM’s attempt to achieve food autonomy is an enormous task as it entails access and provision of food, to meet the needs of individuals and vulnerable others, including children and family. Hence, MWM cite the lack of financial and economic resources as a limitation that obstructs their ability to achieve food autonomy. This is exacerbated by the need for MWM to “forego wages”<sup>432</sup> by working close to home as unpaid domestic work, as casual labour on neighbouring farms with poor wages and working conditions, or in informal small businesses and unreliable backyard food production in order to care for family property as well as

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<sup>429</sup>Response from participant (P4), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

<sup>430</sup>Ramachadran, “Women and Food Security in South Asia”, 18.

<sup>431</sup>Mead, “Comment on the Role of Women”, 11.

<sup>432</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, “Gender, Work and Household Food Security”, 524.

vulnerable others. Without economic and material resources, MWM's achievement of "functionings"<sup>433</sup> is limited as their "capabilities" are restricted. Recognising this, Ramachadran, notes that women's role in food production and provision demands strategies for sustainable food security that will enable them to access productive resources and address insufficient purchasing power.<sup>434</sup>

### 5.5.2.1 Income and employment

*Money is linked to jobs and because we are unemployed, we do not have money and we cannot buy food. With money I can have the freedom to buy the food I want and the things I need for my children. But also we can buy seeds to plant so that we have food and we can sell the other remaining food to make more money and live happy lives.*<sup>435</sup>

Participants in this discussion group linked food production with income generation from surplus. This concurs with a study conducted by De Cock et al. that food security in South Africa is achieved by food production or purchasing power.<sup>436</sup> As shown in chapter three, Mashobye forms part of Thulamela local municipality, which experiences food insecurity. This situation is serious throughout Sub Saharan Africa, as captured by FAO's report that 60 percent of the world's population who consume diets which are micronutrient deficient live in Sub Saharan Africa and Asia.<sup>437</sup> Moreover, women's health is further compromised because they eat less food during times of food shortage in order to feed their families.<sup>438</sup>

While hunger can affect women physically, inability to provide for one's family traumatizes and creates deep psychological wounds. Hence Van Esterik equates women's lack of ability to "feed and be fed to direct food deprivation, torture and violence against women".<sup>439</sup>

*There are not many options here in Mashobye, you can see this place, there is a lot of poverty and suffering. Yes, no jobs as you can see, if there were projects otherwise jobs*

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<sup>433</sup> Jacka asserts that recognising and acknowledging "functionings" will result in a view of personhood as deserving of human dignity rather than being a vulnerable recipient of other's compassion. This will cause a transformation and enable financial, political and social institutions, structures and systems to resource women's agency towards well-being and human flourishing. For more on this see Jacka, 2014, 189-198.

<sup>434</sup> Ramachadran, "Women and Food Security in South Asia", 16.

<sup>435</sup> Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 12/09/2015.

<sup>436</sup> De Cock et al., "Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo", 275.

<sup>437</sup> UNFAO, World Food Security and Malnutrition, 14.

<sup>438</sup> Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

<sup>439</sup> Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 229.

*would be available, ...look at this place, there are no jobs, unlike those who are in the city, they have options.*<sup>440</sup>

Similarly, MWM attribute the inability to access adequate food and nutrition to a lack of income due to prevalent rural unemployment. According to Akyeamong and Fofack, the colonial system of government prevented rural development, to sustain the exodus of male labour to industrial markets, and as a result deepened rural poverty.<sup>441</sup> In this way, stereotyped household responsibility still limits rural women to low wages or unemployment, which hinders their “ability to produce food and household purchasing power”.<sup>442</sup> As seen in chapter two, stereotypes like domestic confinement denied or limited women’s access to education, agricultural skills training and employment while enforcing their inferior, dependent status in marriage. According to Das Guptas, early marriage, sexual activity and childbearing disadvantages women’s development and participation in the economic sphere, thus limiting earning and employment opportunities.<sup>443</sup> The situation of women in Mashobye is made worse by underdeveloped infrastructure and inadequate health facilities and services.

*We know that doing family planning is a woman’s right and that when life is good we can have children or limit having children if we cannot afford additional children. Our right is that as women we must afford to care for our children and family. In this village, family planning is available twice a month through a mobile clinic. It is not enough and it is difficult to access because it (mobile clinic) is about seven kilometres away and everybody knows everybody.*<sup>444</sup>

MWM’s understanding of sexual and reproductive health rights seems limited mainly to contraception prevalence. However, the achievement of MDG5-improve maternal health targets awareness and accessibility of MDG 5a and 5b to all the specific women of reproductive age because it reduces the risk of “unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion and maternal deaths”.<sup>445</sup> This disadvantage is said to result in the death of 800 women daily due to childbirth related complications.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

<sup>441</sup> Akyeamong and Fofack, “The contribution of African women”, 23.

<sup>442</sup> Combating Malnutrition in South Africa, 15.

<sup>443</sup> Das Gupta, “Women’s Empowerment and Fertility”, 2.

<sup>444</sup> Response from discussion group (DG2), held on 20/11/2015.

<sup>445</sup> UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2015. Time for Global Action for People and Planet. 41. [www.un.org/2015\\_MDG\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/2015_MDG_Report.pdf). accessed 17/08/2016.

<sup>446</sup> UN Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015, 39.

Furthermore, insufficient health facilities and services have negative health implications for MWM and pose a health risk. This is particularly so in cases where a woman is pregnant, because adequate visits and attention by trained personnel are important to ensure timely intervention. MWM's response reflects the adverse effect of poor nutrition on the woman but also on the intrauterine feeding of the unborn child because the development of the child is dependent on its mother's health. According to FAO, inadequate nutrition results in a low iron intake, with a likelihood that a woman will "deliver prematurely or die during labour".<sup>447</sup> On the other hand, "Vitamin A deficiency could result in a woman's death or Mother to Child Transmission hereafter (MTCT) in the case of a mother's HIV/AIDS infection".<sup>448</sup> In addition, women who experience Zinc deficiency are at risk of stunting a lower height than expected for age.<sup>449</sup> According to FAO, the problem of protein and micronutrient deficiency contributes to wasting for 55 million pre-schoolers, while 178 million stunted pre-schoolers are in developing countries. In fact, South Africa is said to be one of the 20 countries which contributes to 80% of the world's stunted pre-schoolers.<sup>450</sup> Based on the poor state of food production in Mashobye, lack of food autonomy contributes towards malnutrition, posing a big health challenge for households, particularly women and children in most rural areas of Sub Saharan Africa. Indeed Mashobye women face a high risk of death or altered life because of poor infrastructure and insufficient health facilities and services. Food autonomy is hindered particularly by rural under development through lack of income and employment. As Mashobye women's responses suggest, poor nutrition and insufficient health facilities contribute towards increased poverty.

In fact deprivation of adequate food and nutrition is a contradiction to God's divine plan of equality in God's image<sup>451</sup> as an expression and the promotion of love, peace and human dignity in a family, community and society.<sup>452</sup> "I have nothing and I cannot do anything in this place, it is better for those who live next to cities where they have better chances because there are different options". Even for the interview appointments for this study, participants, including those who are married or in heterogeneous relationships, brought their children along and instructed them to

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<sup>447</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition,16.

<sup>448</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 16.

<sup>449</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition,16.

<sup>450</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition,17-18.

<sup>451</sup>Abraham, "Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread", 8-9.

<sup>452</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: The Key to Food Security", 19.

play outside because Mashobye women cannot afford child minders. This is perpetuated by the patriarchal male domination of women, socio-cultural and gendered view that women are responsible for childrearing. Furthermore, it interferes with God's plan of creating a family with two parents for the joint responsibility of raising and providing for their family. As Quisumbing says, "domestic responsibility limits women's movement".<sup>453</sup>

Even though women in Mashobye are hard-working, they lack beneficial information like knowledge of the South African government's rural development Integrated Food Security Strategy<sup>454</sup> (IFSS) which is meant to offer rural communities, particularly women and youth, skills, employment and income to redress their food insecurity status. IFSS is the South African democratic government's initiative consisting of six pillars aimed at overcoming poverty and increasing income and job opportunities in rural areas. In particular, the objective of Pillar 1 is to overcome rural food insecurity by increasing participation of the food insecure in productive agriculture. The objective of Pillar 2 is to increase income and job opportunities by helping vulnerable people to access credit, skill training and infrastructure for livelihood diversification.<sup>455</sup> Accordingly, De Cock et al, findings report that "women headed households are more affected by food insecurity than households headed by men"<sup>456</sup> due to lack of information, inequality in income and lack of asset ownership. Hence, FAO advocates for empowering rural communities, particularly women, to produce their own food for subsistence or income generation.<sup>457</sup> In this way, MWM's status can be raised as a "powerful force to improve health, longevity, mental, physical capacity and productivity as it improves women's nutritional status to significantly benefit individuals and children".<sup>458</sup> This will break a vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, debilitating malnutrition and related diseases.

#### **5.5.2.2 Shortage of water**

Water is a source of life but Mashobye community experiences low water levels due to poor rainfall and dysfunctional government taps. In such instances, Mashobye women face a serious

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<sup>453</sup>Quisumbing et al. Women: The Key to Food Security, 5.

<sup>454</sup>This is the South African government's strategy under the Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Development and Public Works focused on improving rural food insecurity.

<sup>455</sup>Koch, The food Security Policy Context, 6.

<sup>456</sup>De Cock et al., "Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo", 275.

<sup>457</sup>UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition, 24.

<sup>458</sup>Ramachadran, Women and Food Security in South Asia, 13.

challenge to food autonomy and maternal health because food production requires water, just as hygienic and sanitary outcomes depends on its availability. This fact is also substantiated by the following quotation “no creature on earth can survive without water” because “water comprises 75% of the human body, second in importance only to oxygen”.<sup>459</sup>

*Yes, in order to avail food we wake up to clean the house, cook for the family and bath the children for school. Then we can even do washing for others, clean their homes and yards, go and gather firewood so that we can generate income to buy food.*<sup>460</sup>

For instance, the preparation and processing of food requires women to wash their hands throughout food preparation and distribution. Moreover, the culture of eating in the Tsonga tradition is eating food by hand; hence water provision forms an important part of serving food before and after a meal. So cleanliness and hygiene involving the use of water is observed, taught and practiced by all family members. The water shortage and its importance is evidenced by MWM waking up early, around 05h00, to queue at community taps for up to six hours in order to fetch water. MWM endure the struggle for water because the role of food preparation and provision rests on their shoulders even when their husbands are unemployed. As a result, women quietly undertake the responsibility to provide safe water for drinking, cooking, and bathing the children, including washing clothes and cleaning the house. This is summed up in the following statement.

*Men do not help with women’s responsibilities in the house, and there is no rain in this place; if we cannot get water even if we buy it how shall we live? Because we need water especially for cooking, without water we cannot even cook what more about planting a food garden.*<sup>461</sup>

Studies have shown that food is the most important determinant of nutrition status, yet poor access to water and sanitation exposes families to the risk of germs causing dehydration, diarrhoea and malnutrition as well as poor micronutrient absorption and wasting.<sup>462</sup> Yet this response reflects Mashobye women’s struggle with water scarcity and their attempts to ensure family health and nutrition security. This further indicates subtle gendered conditioning and

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<sup>459</sup>Mobie, Titus R and Masango, Maake “Privatization of Water System: Crime against Humanity” *HTS Theological Studies* 65 (1), Art. #325 DOI: 10. 4102/hts.v65il.325, 2009, 2.

<sup>460</sup> Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 12/09/2015

<sup>461</sup> Response from a participant (P3), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

<sup>462</sup>Tirado et al., “Climate Change and Nutrition in Africa”, 34.

women's view of the responsibility towards household responsibilities, because the struggle for water availability could unite men and women in order to ensure family health outcomes. In addition, the negative effect of climate change hampers Mashobye women's responsibility for subsistence food production. In times of poor rainfall, as it is prevalent in Mashobye, women wait in hope, anticipating rain and looking forward to growing crops. This also reflects MWM's awareness of the value of water for sanitary purposes because, "Diarrhoea and dehydration has been said to deplete women's energy which can adequately be resolved through a sanitary environment".<sup>463</sup>

*When it's time for water from the rain or water is available in government taps, we plant vegetables; it's just that we struggle with water shortage. It is a big problem and you cannot have food like that".<sup>464</sup>*

Mashobye is a dry area with arid soil and erratic rainfall, a place where the community was forcefully relocated from Louis Trichardt in 1985. The following citation reveal the participant's nostalgic memories:

*...we could cultivate merogo and various other foods and produce our own food, the only problem is that we don't have water but when it rains seeds can grow. At times even merogo in the field that is always available from nature would grow well when it is raining.<sup>465</sup>*

*We would plant cabbage, tamaties and vegetables in our own backyard, problem is water 'hawa home mati'(emphasizing that water doesn't come out)... we struggle to plant and we experience hunger.<sup>466</sup>*

Even though MWM face water scarcity, their household feeding responsibilities remain a motivation for food cultivation. The desperate need for water evident in these responses is made worse by poor service delivery. MWM were hopeful that community taps would provide water and help alleviate hunger and poverty because the women are passionate about cultivating their own food. It appears as if women are losing hope because water that is supposed to give life to the whole creation humans, animals and plants is often never available.

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<sup>463</sup>Tirado et al., "Climate Change and Nutrition in Africa", 34.

<sup>464</sup> Response from participant (P3), in-depth interview 04/06/2015

<sup>465</sup> Response from participant (P1), in-depth interview held on 20/11/2015.

<sup>466</sup> Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 25/04/2015.

### 5.5.2.3 Inability to Utilize Land

According to Olowu, land is one of the most valuable wealth creating and livelihood sustaining assets in rural Africa and the “single most important source of security against poverty”.<sup>467</sup> In addition, Skweyiya says that “land is a factor of production, store of value and wealth, status symbol as well as source of political and social influence”.<sup>468</sup> Yet this study has shown that out of twelve participants, eight are heads of households who have access to family backyards but still struggle with access to adequate food and nutrition. In this way, MWM’s inability to achieve food autonomy results from inefficient use of family land and contributes towards poor maternal health. The following statement succinctly puts it across.

*We have our own land (backyard) and we have full control over that land but we do not have money for seeds and also to erect a fence in order to keep animals from destroying plants.*<sup>469</sup>

*One can hoe and weed the land as hired labour in order to get money for food.*<sup>470</sup>

This was gathered from women’s stories as they shared with me their experiences of the dire food situation which forces women older than sixty-five years to do manual labour because cultivation fails to yield good results. As “the rains are no longer predictable”,<sup>471</sup> and government water provision is erratic, climate change challenges continue to render MWM’s land infertile, while increasing their inability to achieve food autonomy and their vulnerability to poor nutrition and poor maternal health. Even though most participants are passionate about food production, lack of access to modern agricultural technology, equipment and selected seeds prove to be a hindrance. As a result, only three MWM whose backyards are secured continue cultivation, while women resort to casual labour or depend on social pensions, child grants and family remittances. This is despite the MCSA’s acknowledgement of having a role in addressing poverty and its commitment to be in solidarity with the poor.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>467</sup>Olowu, “Gendered Aspects of Food Security”, 5384.

<sup>468</sup>Skweyiya, “Towards a Solution to the Land”, 196.

<sup>469</sup> Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 12/09/2015.

<sup>470</sup> Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

<sup>471</sup> Response from discussion group (DG1), held 25/04/2015.

<sup>472</sup>*Laws and Discipline*, 211.

Yet rural under-development limits access to critical assets like education, technological skills and capacity to understand technical information, all of which continue to diminish Mashobye women's efforts to provide food and nutrition. Based on MWM's passionate efforts to feed their families, it is plausible to conclude that if MWM were afforded education, training, options of modern machines, scientific agriculture and access to credit, food production would increase.<sup>473</sup>

## 5.6 The Contributions of MWPSU Teachings

The findings under this topic respond to objective three which is to establish the extent to which MWPSU teachings have contributed to food autonomy in relation to maternal health. The research findings affirm the effectiveness of MWPSU's unifying teachings and activities towards service to the church and community. However, the findings reveal that MWM is appealing for empowering alternatives in response to their experience of lack of food autonomy.

As shown in chapter two, MWPSU succeeded in organising African women into the most united body. It has helped to cultivate and develop a sense of unity and self-worth, and a positive effect on the life of their families and society. In addition to spiritual nurturing, MWPSU empowered women in the domestic sphere, according to the Victorian ideology. Furthermore, the organisation developed a united sisterhood that supported and gave courage to each other even after their husband's migration.<sup>474</sup> It is this spirit of sisterhood and being each other's keeper that has continued to strengthen and keep Manyano women united. It offers to the church a unique resource of women's experience that is missing from the ecclesial agenda. The same spirit can be harnessed to enable MWM achieve food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health. Therefore, MWPSU affords the MCSA a valuable space and resource for empowering women about nutritional and health issues thus providing holistic nurturing of body, soul and spirit. This is confirmed by the following statement:

*Manyano helped me a lot, without it we would not have survived... It is just that if MMWPSU cannot help us produce our own food, nothing can help us if we don't stand up for ourselves.*<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>473</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: The Key to Food Security", 7.

<sup>474</sup>Gaitskell, "Power in Prayer and Service", 15.

<sup>475</sup>Response from participant (P1), in-depth interview held 20/11/2015.

*Manyano can help us kick-start an income generating project and we will sustain it.*<sup>476</sup>

Both responses reveal the trust women have in MWPSU to help promote Mashobye women's achievement of food autonomy. Some of the suggestions are that MWPSU facilitate strategic discussions on food production ideas, contribute to a common purse towards the purchase of seeds, and provide access to necessary information. Mashobye women are still expressing faith that the organisation can empower them beyond spiritual needs, and towards the achievement of food autonomy in promoting maternal health. In fact, these responses from the leader acknowledge the effectiveness of MWPSU teachings and activities. Spiritual empowerment, weekly prayer meetings, pastoral visitation and outreach projects continue as women live out their faith according to the will of God. However, the model that is still used to direct the teachings and activities of MWPSU shows great similarity with the Victorian model used during missionary training. This Victorian missionary training model proved relevant for training women for their role of motherhood and wifehood. In this light, DG3 responses are also appealing for MWPSU to develop a holistic model that will empower women to respond to challenges of lack of food autonomy and poor maternal health. Accordingly, MWPSU mission happens in a country where the Apartheid government's forced removals and community resettlement were used as tools of oppression to deny Africans the right to food and participation in the economic mainstream.<sup>477</sup> Therefore, MWM is appealing to MWPSU to restore women's ability to produce food as a way of achieving food autonomy towards the promotion of maternal health.

From its inception, John Wesley believed Methodism was raised by God to reform the church and nation by spreading Scriptural holiness throughout the land. One of the strong doctrinal emphases of the MCSA is "Christian Perfection" which is based on the "love for God with all one's heart, mind and soul and the love for neighbour as we love ourselves".<sup>478</sup> Furthermore, one of John Wesley's imperatives was the "preferential option for the poor"<sup>479</sup> which the MCSA still

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<sup>476</sup>Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 21/11/2015.

<sup>477</sup>Koch, *The food Security Policy Context*, 2.

<sup>478</sup>Foster, D. "Prophetic Witness and Social Action as Holiness in the Methodist Church Southern Africa", (Lecture notes at John Wesley College, Pretoria, 2).

<sup>479</sup>*Laws & Discipline*, 238.

believes holds a strong calling and motivation to redress poverty and social inequalities. In addition, the MCSA endorsed the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, acknowledging that “women are frequently victims of violence and of misinformation by media and anti-justice structures”,<sup>480</sup> amongst other things. Hence, the achievement of food autonomy can help transform MWM’s dependent, subordinate and vulnerable status particularly prevalent in the rural social location, to equal participation with men, in the image of God. The following statement affirms these views:

*Even though the Organization is too small, almost not there, Manyano can unite women to join hands, help us to share ideas to start something together to create income and support each other to reduce this suffering from hunger.*<sup>481</sup>

As shown in chapter two, missionary training empowered African women not only spiritually but also for their new role of motherhood and wifehood. Hence, Mokitimi exclaimed at the MWPSU’s acceptance as an official organisation of the MCSA, “The emancipation of women is one of the glorious fruits of the gospel, their recognition of being of equal value before God, with the men folk, is the direct fruit of the redeeming grace of God”.<sup>482</sup> This faith continues to sustain hope that God has not forgotten about MWM, hence the continued prayer meetings and robbing<sup>483</sup> of additional members. Russell rightfully says that women keep coming to church because they have hope in the redemption possible only through Jesus Christ.<sup>484</sup> Furthermore, Russell affirms John Wesley’s “connexionalism” in a sense of a life giving organisation in which all individuals, organisations and units are linked to nurture and be nurtured so as to ensure a life sustaining relationship.<sup>485</sup>

*I would like other Manyanos to be aware that there are women struggling and suffering and that they need help.*<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>480</sup>Laws & Discipline, 233.

<sup>481</sup>Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

<sup>482</sup>Mokitimi, “Women’s Manyano”, 90.

<sup>483</sup> The act of clothing new members with MWPSU uniform as a sign of welcoming them into the organisation. This is performed during a church service led by the President of the organization.

<sup>484</sup>Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 22.

<sup>485</sup>Russell, *Church in the Round*, 22.

<sup>486</sup>Response from participant (P4), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

In this way, MWM's appeal to the "connexional" MWPSU to advocate for women to be liberated from the oppression of hunger and diseases according to identified reasons, suggested possible solutions. According to MWM, their lack of food autonomy can be improved when MWPSU facilitate discussion, and unite women to help kick start a food garden for subsistence agriculture. They appeal that the "works of mercy" MWM is rendering to the local community not be separated from the needs of members so that abundant life can be achieved within the church and the community. In this way, MWM's achievement of food autonomy would avail the MCSA words to address women's issues like access to food, nutrition and maternal health, beyond its walls.<sup>487</sup> Moreover, the Church as the bearer of the Good News of liberation can provide care and champion the cause of justice for the poor and underserved.

Therefore, MWPSU as a faith-based organization present an ideal position to address and enable the achievement of food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health. In this way, it affirms MCSA's conviction that society as local agents of transformation do mission to reflect the love of God within and beyond the church. Most participants have indicated that MWM's "facilitation", "advice", or financial contribution could "improve our lives to live better and empower us to stand on our own".<sup>488</sup>

Moreover, the condition of poverty, malnutrition and maternal mortality prevalent in most rural areas of Sub Saharan Africa, and Mashobye in particular, can be transformed when MWPSU is able to "construct a guiding vision for women's liberation"<sup>489</sup> from lack of food autonomy which hinders maternal health. Moreover, MWM responses also reveal Mashobye women's dependent and vulnerable status because of their lack of food production, even though they have access to family backyards. According to Clifford, oppressed people tend to have a low self-esteem and tend to accept oppressive patriarchal conditioning as if it is the way things are meant to be.<sup>490</sup> Hence, Clifford says that transformation results from conscientizing the poor, and women in

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<sup>487</sup>de Gruchy, "Biotechnology as Cultural Invasion", 83.

<sup>488</sup>Response from participant (P6), in-depth interview held on 12/09/2015.

<sup>489</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 37.

<sup>490</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 28.

particular, about dominant and oppressive views, systems and structures, when the gap between the language of liberation and reality is closed.<sup>491</sup>

### **5.6.1 MWPSU Focused Teaching and Activities**

MWPSU's role in spiritual nurturing and uniting its members has been acknowledged by all participants. However, MWM is appealing for empowerment beyond the spiritual and service to the church and community, rather to address issues of food autonomy and maternal health. As I gather from the responses, in pursuing selfless service, the need to empower women to respond to current issues and daily challenges, like food autonomy and maternal health, got lost. According to my analysis, the Victorian domestic model empowered women for the challenges of its time. However, MWPSU has not managed to find a model that is relevant to respond to current challenges like the achievement of food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health.

*We have never been shown how to grow a food garden with little water, the water problem must be fixed, it is only rain water that we trust to help us grow our food because we don't have water, we cannot eat. I think that can help increase our effort to have enough food.*<sup>492</sup>

According to this response, MWPSU's teachings and activities do not include training women on how to grow a food garden even though household production, reproduction and caring are gendered and socially the responsibility for women. Yet, MWPSU teachings include weekly prayer meetings, pastoral visitations, fundraising and outreach projects throughout the connexion, both in rural and urban areas as reflected in the rules of the Constitution. In addition, MWPSU has affiliated membership throughout Southern Africa, a region that has a high level of poverty, particularly in rural areas. This response reflects an appeal for MWPSU to refocus its teachings and activities towards a holistic approach that will address the challenges of food autonomy and maternal health facing its members. As shown in chapter two, the teachings and activities of missionary women within the Victorian model empowered women to respond to their new role as Christian women. However, the current model used by MWPSU has moved away from empowering women for their household responsibilities and maternal health, issues currently challenging the welfare and well-being of women. According to the responses of participants and the MWPSU Constitution, the rules of the organisation focus on empowering women for service to the church and community. Evidently, the circuit reports to the MWPSU

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<sup>491</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36-37.

<sup>492</sup>Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.

annual district convention have to report on mission activities undertaken throughout the year. These reports include prayer meetings, pastoral visitations and community outreach projects based on hunger and poverty alleviation for the community. However, according to the MWM economic status reflected above, MWM members are also poor. This means that Mashobye women as members in good standing within the MWPSU have to overlook their state of poverty to feed others. Poverty is said to be a deprivation and a violation of people's right to food.<sup>493</sup> While MWPSU teachings and activities do not empower women towards achieving food autonomy and maternal health, its requirement for selfless service contributes to women's individual and family food insecurity. Therefore, Mashobye women's responses above are appealing for teachings and activities that are transformative towards a holistic empowerment model that will address the challenges currently facing the MWPSU members.

Studies have shown that the empowerment of women through skills training, material and economic resources and enabling access to necessary information will reduce poverty, improve nutrition and reduce diseases. In addition, MWM's passion and motivation to produce food is particularly motivated by its "gendered role" and "social obligation" for food provision and distribution. It is also a way of enabling achievement of "functionings" towards enhanced agency and well-being.<sup>494</sup>

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented research findings based on MWM's experiences of food autonomy in relation to maternal health. The findings were presented and analysed according to the objectives of the study and the common themes that were identified. Three objectives are presented in this chapter, namely, the significance of food autonomy for maternal health, MWM's experiences of food autonomy and how it affects maternal health, and the extent to which MWPSU teachings contributed towards food autonomy in relation to maternal health. The fourth objective, how the findings of this study can contribute to MWPSU theology in the MCSA is addressed in chapter six. The findings correspond with the literature review and affirm the Reconstructionist Christian

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<sup>493</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 225.

<sup>494</sup>Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 189.

Feminist Theology as a framework chosen for this study and its view that lived human experience is embedded in a social context. The aim of using a Christian feminist theological analysis was to conscientize MWM of the need to transcend discriminating and oppressive conditions prevalent in their local context, in order to achieve food autonomy and to promote maternal health. According to the research results, MWM's experiences reveal that food autonomy can contribute towards the promotion of maternal health. They identify MWPSU as a transformation agent capable of facilitating strategic discussions and ideas that will enhance the ability to achieve food autonomy and positively influence women's food and nutrition status for improved maternal health outcomes.

## CHAPTER SIX

### TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF FOOD AUTONOMY IN RELATION TO MATERNAL HEALTH

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings of the study thematically and in line with the objectives of the study. A number of themes emerged from the collected data, and some of the themes that emerged were analysed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I intend to further analyse the themes that stood out as significant to the role of the MCSA in relation to the MWPSU's response to food autonomy. In my analysis, I also challenge the MWPSU to revisit its teachings and activities on women to see whether their theologies could contribute to food autonomy. This analysis leads to recommendations for teachings of the Manyano women's group to be revised to take into consideration a theology of food autonomy in relation to maternal health. The themes addressed are: the theology of restoration; food parcels or empowerment for food autonomy, a need for nutritional value for mothers and children; a theology of preferential option for the poor; the gift of experience and a need for transformation.

#### 6.2 The Theology of Restoration

Throughout the study, in both the literature review and from the research findings, patriarchy has been shown to be one of the issues that limit, hinder and diminish MWM's ability to achieve food autonomy and maternal health. In most African societies and South Africa in particular, the problems relating to food production are gendered, hence power relations disadvantage women.

Beneria and Sen argue that economic agriculture disadvantaged women by creating class distinctions and emphasising gender. This source cautions against economic patriarchal systems because they "generate and intensify inequalities using existing gender hierarchies to place women in subordinate positions at each level of interaction between class and gender".<sup>495</sup> The findings of the study resonate with these views as they have exposed gendered inequalities in agricultural production. The disadvantages women experience in food production could be traced to patriarchal ideologies that subordinate women to inferior positions. The contribution of the

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<sup>495</sup>Beneria and Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role", 290.

church, gender, and key economic institutions needs to be addressed on topics relating to food autonomy and maternal health. Research results have shown women's participation in food production, or their desire to do so, and the shift in family headship. Despite maintenance responsibilities confronting most women as heads of households, the traditional and cultural ideology relating to women prevails. This is partly because production space is still a contested arena in relation to women and men's productivity. In the case of women achieving food autonomy, it means that Mashobye women's independence will threaten the traditional order. Studies have shown that unless prevailing gender inequalities in food production are addressed, women will continue to struggle with household production, reproduction and care.<sup>496</sup> Hence, the research finds women's perceived societal responsibility towards household responsibilities to be as if the "roles of men and women have been fixed either by the Creator or culture".<sup>497</sup>

Similarly, the other point that needs to be addressed is MWPSU's power. The power of MWPSU to condition the experiences of women emerged as one factor that was concealed in church teachings and activities. Poling says:

Power is often understood as one way of having effect on others. But power is actually organised by the relational web which we are a part. Our ability to act in effective ways depends on our connections with other persons, and with the institutions and ideas that form the basis of our experience... power is relational; the web of relationship determines the nature of power.<sup>498</sup>

This study identified power that has both personal and social dimensions. At personal level, missionary women actualized their power over African women, and discriminated against women's participation in food production. In this way, missionary women used their privileged position as teachers and interpreters of biblical teachings to control and remove women from food production.

The social power inequalities also justified the removal of women from participating in food production and related activities. Social power in this instance includes cultural and traditional factors and practices that are often blamed for the oppression of women. Furthermore, institutional power as it emanates from the church and society also normalised the removal of

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<sup>496</sup>See Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security", 5384. Beneria and Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role", 287, and Quisimbing et al., "Women: The Key to Food Security", 7.

<sup>497</sup>Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, 29.

<sup>498</sup>Poling, N. *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Challenge*, (Abingdon: Nashville Press, 1991), 29.

women from food production. Therefore, the best way to empower MWM towards achieving food autonomy for maternal health is to “conscientize” women about oppressive institutions, structures and ideologies through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.<sup>499</sup>

### **6.2.1 Food Parcels or Empowerment for Food Autonomy**

One of the themes that emerged during field research was the need for women to be empowered to produce their own food in order to attain food autonomy. From both the literature review and responses from participants in this study, food production was seen as one of the ways that could help promote maternal health for MWM. In this study, food production was described as having the resources needed for women to grow their own food. Most of the participants in this study stated the need to be independent from dependency on government for food. The women indicated that if the MWPSU could support them with a project to start their own gardens, they would gratefully embrace the initiative. The enthusiasm displayed by this group showed that while they viewed food production as God’s gift, they were also ready to prove the fact that God would wish for them to have the required resources to attain this gift. In this way, they could enrich their maternal health. This is because these women viewed household food production, reproduction and caring as the primary responsibilities for a woman.

### **6.2.2 Need for Nutritional Value for Mothers and Children**

A study conducted by Rotimi and Ola reckons that the lack of adequate diet directly causes disease or contributes to one’s susceptibility to diseases, especially for women and children.<sup>500</sup> The South African Input Paper for Health Roadmap on Combating Malnutrition suggests that maintaining adequate food consumption and nutrition levels is important to provide the body with protein, micronutrients and vitamins in order to combat malnutrition.<sup>501</sup> In addition, this source further says 32% of the global burden of diseases could be eradicated by eliminating malnutrition, including micronutrients deficiency. Furthermore, FAO findings on the effect of nutrition throughout a woman’s lifecycle, as shown in chapter three, reflects the significance of adequate nutrition towards combating malnutrition.<sup>502</sup> This affirms the 1996 World Food Conference definition of food security that links access to adequate food with

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<sup>499</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

<sup>500</sup>Rotimi and Ola, “Strategies for Food Security”, 808.

<sup>501</sup>“Combating Malnutrition in South Africa”, 4.

<sup>502</sup>See Figure 1 in chapter three and the discussion on the relationship of nutrition on a woman’s lifecycle.

health. Similarly, the responses from MWM revealed that food is essential to health and that if women do not have access to adequate food on a daily basis, they cannot perform their daily responsibilities. Most participants expressed tiredness, laziness to work, even feeling sick, because they have had no food to restore their energy.

This is because household roles are gendered not only according to societies' expectations but also as perceived by women themselves. So provision of family meals, including foraging, overall hygiene for the home, provision of water and firewood are all competing for women's attention. All these activities require women to be able to access food in order to replenish energy, often without financial means. Alternatively, if MWPSU teachings and activities involved women's participation in food production, women's ability to achieve food autonomy could be reinforced.

In her article, Van Esterik argues that the past and present nutritional status of women determines the ease with which she would conceive and carry the foetus to term, the likelihood of infant survival, postpartum good health, and the capacity to breastfeed successfully.<sup>503</sup> This means that just as food and nutrition is important for women's individual health, it is also important for her biological health, which includes the health of her unborn child. So when a women experiences lack of food autonomy and is unable to determine the quality and quantity of her food and nutrition, her right to health is violated. Some of MWM's responses also relate nutrition with health; *"if one does not have sufficient food during pregnancy, the foetus cannot get enough nutrition and it may be born with sicknesses"*.<sup>504</sup> This response echoes Mashobye women's concerns, not only about the health of a child but also about the possibility of an added responsibility of caring for a stunted or mentally underdeveloped child. In addition, the effect of food autonomy on maternal health could also be related to the findings of the South African input paper on combating malnutrition and the role of nutrition on pregnant and lactating women. The findings were that nutritional intervention is important for the control of tuberculosis (TB) but also that good nutrition offers people the ability to resist and mitigate

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<sup>503</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 228.

<sup>504</sup>Response from discussion group (DG3), held on the 20/11/2015.

infection as well as enhance the efficacy of medical intervention.<sup>505</sup> Moreover, women's right to food and nutrition affects production and sustenance of human capital, while "malnutrition is an impediment to productivity, economic growth and poverty eradication".<sup>506</sup>

Maimela affirms the equal role of women and men in agricultural production, which gave women equal power and status as men in agricultural subsistence economies.<sup>507</sup> Similarly, the passion I observed around discussions on food autonomy during both the in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups discussions proved that Mashobye women were passionate about household food production. The excitement of envisioning the possibility of cultivating food gardens as Mashobye Women's Manyano brought suggestions, such as the need to contribute some money towards buying seeds in order to begin a vegetable garden as Manyano women. Even though this was not the suggestion of all members, the few that brought this suggestion affirmed that having their own gardens as Manyano women was the best way to attain food autonomy and hence promote maternal health. Food autonomy for these women would mean addressing the issue of food insecurity they have been experiencing over a long period of time, the result of being removed from the food production project due to various factors such as the socio-economic perception of agriculture, lack of land and other resources that would enable these women to own their own gardens. Mead states that the removal of women from participation in food production contributed to reduced agricultural production, particularly in communities still practicing subsistence livelihood.<sup>508</sup> As such, the Mashobye community could be said to be one of the affected communities.

Apart from the factors stated above contributing to the removal of women from food production, the teachings of the missionaries on women's roles as Christian women had an effect on how the women perceived food autonomy. Following the history of MWPSU, one is able to see traces of how women were moved away from the agricultural context to a more Victorian setting that taught them western values of being a good housewife. Through this framework, women stayed home and only focused on domestic affairs that were seen as women's duties. It is this "good

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<sup>505</sup>"Combating Malnutrition in South Africa", 20.

<sup>506</sup>"Combating Malnutrition in South Africa", 4.

<sup>507</sup>Maimela, "*Seeking To Be a Christian*", 28.

<sup>508</sup>Mead, "Comment on the Role of Women", 11.

housewife” concept that was adopted by most of the women’s groups such as the MWPSU, and was later included in their syllabus as teachings of the church. Hence the teachings that are offered by the Manyano movement to its members, despite being important, do not address the need for women to develop their own gardens as a form of sustainability. The MCSA has a great commitment to poverty eradication and the empowerment of women, hence this could include women’s rights to food production, something that can be done through the promotion of household gardens in areas such as the Mashobye community where the issue of food security is of great significance. Hence, MWM’s appeal includes a need for teachings on food autonomy. MWPSU need to be embraced as part of the response for the MCSA in alleviating poverty among its members. Therefore instead of the MWPSU groups distributing food parcels donated by commercial markets, they can empower their members with skills on how to grow their own food and provide a lasting solution to food insecurity. In this way, they can offer the food insecure women a lifetime solution rather than temporarily satisfying their hunger through food baskets. In addition, lack of job and economic opportunities, as well as underdevelopment in the Mashobye rural setting, exposes Mashobye women to poverty and hunger. In such situations, Jacka suggests that women’s valuable contribution of services such as household responsibilities needs advocacy for recognition by political, socio-economic and religio-cultural institutions and structures for provision of key resources in order to enhance women’s agency.<sup>509</sup> Therefore, MWPSU could act as a key resource to raise awareness and represent women’s interest in socio-economic and political forums. As Jacka says, “poor women think of themselves as having rights only when powerful institutions treat them as if they do”.<sup>510</sup> Hence the need to restore the dignity these women needs by using theological resources.

### **6.3 A Theology of ‘Preferential Option for the Poor’**

The L&D suggest that the inherent equality of all human beings in the image of God commits the MCSA to uphold and promote the equality of males and females. Accordingly, the MCSA encourages its organisations, units and orders to focus their mission towards poverty alleviation which oppresses mostly women and children. In addition, the church commits to promoting

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<sup>509</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 198.

<sup>510</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 198.

awareness on reproductive health rights policy towards conscientizing women about their rights over their bodies, and as a way of enabling women's participation in self development activities. Coupled with these commitments, the doctrine of "preferential option for the poor" still holds very strong for the people called Methodists. For instance, almost all organisations of the MCSA have some form of outreach project directed towards poverty alleviation, particularly feeding the poor. This applies mainly to MCSA uniformed organisations like MWPSU, of which MWM forms a part, Young Men's Guild, and Local Preachers Association. This forms part of these organisation's mission focus in local societies and particularly during district annual conventions. The District MWPSU requires all its affiliate circuits to provide detailed reports on various projects undertaken during the year in response to the organisation's effect and relevance in local communities. One of the profound projects annually reported are outreach projects to local communities within the circuit. Subsequently, the annual convention also has an outreach project in which groceries and food stuffs are donated to the family or families identified by the hosting circuit. In this way, the MWPSU convention provides hunger relief to identified family/families and effectively reflects the commitment to alleviate hunger and suffering as the mission of the MCSA in particular. This kind of service could be utilized by the MWPSU to educate the communities on food production as a way of providing care for the poor. In this way the church becomes the local agent for transformation.

As a result, outreach projects in the form of food and clothing donations have almost become the food theology of the MCSA uniformed organisations, particularly MWPSU. This proves to be a noble act which is much appreciated by needy families across time, particularly in rural communities. However, some of the negative effects include the following. First, the relief of hunger is temporary because it lasts as long as the food parcel. Second, it creates and even perpetuates dependence as it fails to empower the poor to transform their situation of poverty, food insecurity and hunger. Third, it reflects the mission of God as a temporary solution to the problems of the world. A critical analysis of food donations or outreach requires an assessment of the conditioning aspect of the activity. As Mashobye is rural, poor and socially underserved, even the circuit that I serve undertakes quarterly outreach to distribute food, clothing and children's toys. Gaitskel reckons that the "domestic ideology" rendered women the status of an

“angel” in their homes, giving women a special place of “dominance”.<sup>511</sup> Based on the Victorian ideology of the “cult of Womanhood”, it impresses an imperialistic power relation. Just as missionary women imposed the domestication of women, created a permanently dependent and vulnerable state for Africans, as they became vulnerable to food insecurity, food outreach packages commit recipients of mercy to live in expectancy of handouts, which commits them to permanent vulnerability to food insecurity. In this way, MWM’s state of dependence, subjugation and inferiority is perpetuated by an embedded belief which diminishes their capacity to develop as women, and particularly their ability to achieve food autonomy. In such cases, Jacka says such vulnerable communities are regarded as “social burdens for paternalistic welfare rather than those who need resources for well-being”.<sup>512</sup>

Similarly, MWM reiterated their dependence on God because God has proved faithful in listening and has answered many of their prayers. According to these women, God will one day send rain, and even wild vegetables and nutritious roots lying dormant in the fallow will sprout for consumption. This dependence on God’s provision seemed to justify and even condone complacency towards intentional information seeking in an attempt to solve the prevalent food insecurity. The excitement of the possibility to produce food shown in the interviews compared to a sense of faithful expectation on God’s providence reflected an ambivalence of remaining poor in the midst of plenty (even if plenty means access to empowering information). So MWM’s dependence on God’s providence reflects a mind-set that MWPSU could liberate through focused teachings and activities that empower women towards achieving food autonomy in relation to maternal health. Hence, Clifford suggests the need to “develop strategies for transformative and liberating action or praxis”.<sup>513</sup> According to MWM’s research findings, only food production could provide a sustainable solution to food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health. Mashobye women were of the opinion that their agency could be enhanced if they were united and a food production strategy sought. These women believed that their ability to determine the quality and quantity of their own and family nutrition would empower them, mostly to participate in intra-household even social decision making, particularly on food and nutrition related issues. This is supported by Olowu who suggests that empowering women by

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<sup>511</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 241.

<sup>512</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 198.

<sup>513</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 35.

eradicating socio-cultural, economic and gender inequalities will transform women's food insecurity status in Sub Saharan Africa and help solve problems women face in relation to food production, reproduction and caring.<sup>514</sup> According to my interpretation, MWM's ability to participate or influence food and nutrition security issues gives women "a sense of self and a restoration of their source of power when they are able to feed their families".<sup>515</sup> The disempowering experiences of unexpressed fear and anxiety in a desperate food insecure status seemed to lift merely at the visualization of a possibility to participate in food production. So MWM's ability to influence household livelihood, public policy and opinion would "help women enact their place in the world, influence others and define themselves".<sup>516</sup> As a result, women become part of an egalitarian community based on respect, equality, human dignity and love, which reflects the oneness ordained by God for all his creation. In this community, the commission of God in the beginning for both male and female to multiply and be fruitful find significance.<sup>517</sup> As Jacka suggests, when human personhood is recognised, all "institutions, structures and factors equally align to avail necessary resources"<sup>518</sup> towards the restoration of the image of God inherent in all human beings.

#### **6.4 The Gift of Experiences**

Analysing MWM's experiences revealed an intimate relationship of love, passion and commitment to sacrificial service towards families, church and society. This service, which is rendered in meekness, is often regarded as inferior and cause for discrimination, yet contributes towards the success of world economies, sustains societies with human capital and provides care and warmth. Even though women render these services as their "societal responsibility and as exhorted by the church in imitation of Christ",<sup>519</sup> women's experiences have been marginalised and rendered insignificant. As a result, women accept and endure the struggle to provide food and nutrition because it is part of their unrewarded domestic chores. This renders their position of powerlessness as natural, even as God-given, while discriminating against women's

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<sup>514</sup>Olowu, "Gendered Aspects of Food Security", 5379.

<sup>515</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 225.

<sup>516</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 229.

<sup>517</sup>Gen 1: 26-27.

<sup>518</sup>Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 198.

<sup>519</sup>Tororeiy, "Voices from the Periphery", 164.

experience. In this way, household responsibilities oppress and even diminish women's human dignity and sense of self-worth. Hence, part of the aim of this study was to give voice to the experiences of Mashobye women and "bring women's experiences into dialogue with feminist reading of the Bible and Christian text"<sup>520</sup> so as to theologise and relate them to their homes and Church.<sup>521</sup> In this way, world, regional and national organisations, civil society and the MCSA could learn from women's "particular experiences".<sup>522</sup> For instance, the question could be asked as to how MWM's experiences of food autonomy and its relation to maternal health contribute to MCSA's mission. The answer could be found in MWM's understanding of food autonomy as the freedom to produce, allocate and distribute food and nutrition, which enables independent decision making and enhances agency towards the promotion of dignity and well-being, not only for women, but men and children. With this understanding, the MCSA could formulate a relevant mission policy and appropriate MWPSU responses to local community needs. Similarly, international, regional and national governments and bodies could formulate appropriate definitions with relevant frameworks for development initiatives and health issues, particularly food autonomy, for the promotion of maternal health. Hence, Kanyoro argues that the experiences of women provide the church with a unique gift which the church is still to recognize.<sup>523</sup>

Furthermore, MWM's experience of service and selflessness was another problem identified as a possible contributor that could also hinder maternal health. For instance, all MWPSU members are obliged to pay an affiliation fee determined according to membership, which puts a financial burden on poor women. A critical look at this policy can be traced back to MWPSU's fundraising obligation and outreach projects for church mission, without identifying and focusing on women's issues. Despite MWPSU being recognised as the most organized and systematic women's organization, even as the "backbone of the church", women's issues like poverty, food insecurity and poor maternal health prevalent in rural areas are still to receive attention.

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<sup>520</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 35

<sup>521</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 167.

<sup>522</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

<sup>523</sup>Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 167.

According to Clifford, biblical interpretation or church teachings must liberate women and not promote diminishment of persons.<sup>524</sup>

## 6.5 The Need for Transformation

As seen in chapter two, the MWPSU has journeyed with women, providing them a space within which to shape their faith, and receive spiritual guidance, personal support and leadership. Of significance is the sisterhood sustained through weekly prayer meetings and pastoral visitations extended to the local community. Despite the invasive marginalization and subordination of women's experiences, agency and human dignity within the organisation, MWM profess faith, hope and trust that MWPSU can help transform their lack of food autonomy helping them work towards improved maternal health. Likewise, Mashobye women trust the organization's capacity to help them strategise, unite and initiate food gardens for the achievement of food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health.

Kanyoro suggests theologizing women's experiences in sermons so that women can make a connection between Church, home and society, sharing a story of faith, even pain, in the community of faith.<sup>525</sup> Accordingly, the L&D suggest that the local society is a local agent of transformation.<sup>526</sup> This means that the MCSA is in connexion with Mashobye society in mission and ministry. As a result, MWM is an organisation which promotes MCSA's mission of "healing and transformation" in the local context, including the promotion of gender equality and poverty alleviation. Accordingly, in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions have enabled MWM to "listen and validate their experiences and probe their subjugating causes"<sup>527</sup>. According to the research results, MWM's experiences reveal that food autonomy can be achieved through food production, which is culturally a male domain. Even though the proposed empowerment of Mashobye women for food production poses a challenge to socio-cultural and intra-household practices, headship, and decision making, it promises a restoration of a community of love, equality and justice. So the question to consider is how could MWM participate in activities that

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<sup>524</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 37.

<sup>525</sup> Kanyoro, *Engendered Communal Theology*, 163.

<sup>526</sup> *Laws & Discipline*, 83-84.

<sup>527</sup> Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

enable food autonomy and work effectively for the transformation of Mashobye society? First, women's "functionings" must be recognized as social imperatives at the same level with economic production. Second, economic and material institutions, structures and systems need transformation for the empowerment of women and food production. Third, gender equality must be promoted in the Church, home and society. Therefore, as a way of "transformative praxis",<sup>528</sup> MWM contributed money and bought seeds to start a vegetable garden. See appendix 6.

## 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyse perceptions, behaviours, cultural practices and values related to MWM's ability to achieve food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health. In this chapter, I discussed major themes I have drawn throughout the study. The findings of this chapter are as follows: first, patriarchy has been found to discriminate, marginalize and negatively affect all of women's life experiences according to social location and was found to hinder MWM's ability to achieve food autonomy towards the promotion of maternal health. Second, the other themes identified implicate gender, church teachings and key institutions. These were found to be interrelated and need further research. For instance, lack of food autonomy could also be related to socio-economic factors, religio-cultural factors and practices, and gender inequality, leading to poor yield or lack of food production and resulting in poor maternal health. Third, emphasising the importance of achieving food autonomy, food production enables women's access to adequate food and nutrition, which is essential for maternal health outcomes. Consequently, MWM's capacity to achieve maternal health as defined by WHO is beyond women's reach as it is dependent on the availability and accessibility of health facilities and services. In this way, the marginalisation of MWM and their experiences undermines MCSA's mission of healing and transformation as well as the perception and behaviour of the Church in society. Therefore, addressing these issues will require strategies of transformative action that is liberating. So, as a way to give voice to truth and wisdom, MWM will have to conduct workshops in the church and community, conduct Bible studies and preach sermons that address the humanity, equality and justice for women, men and children in the image of God.

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<sup>528</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 37.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the issues raised in this study. The aim of the study was to do a feminist theological analysis of the experiences of Mashobye women concerning food autonomy and how it relates to maternal health. It has, to a great extent, been successful.

Chapter one introduced and provided a guide to the study. It included the background to MWM, the motivation of the study, research problem, aim and objectives, the theoretical framework, research design, procedure and methodologies that were used to achieve the aim. The limitations and structure of the dissertation were also discussed.

Chapter two discussed the history of MWPSU, addressing objective three: “how has MWPSU contributed towards food autonomy in relationship to maternal health?” This chapter affirmed the contribution of missionary teachings towards the spiritual empowerment of women in particular. However, missionary domestic teaching was shown to have conditioned MWPSU to the marginalization of women’s experiences and the inferior, subordinate and dependent state of women. This is because women were removed from agricultural food production and confined to household responsibilities that denied them the ability to achieve food autonomy. Similarly, MWM, which is in connexion with MWPSU, were trusted to be agents of transformation towards Mashobye women’s efforts to achieve food autonomy and maternal health.

Chapter three dealt with the literature review, addressing objective one: “the significance of food autonomy in relations to maternal health”. The chapter used scholarly and academic books, journals and articles to argue that food is a gift from God that must be available to all people. It pointed to the UN Human Rights Declaration - Art. 25 (1), referring to continental and regional conditions of poverty affecting particularly rural women and children, and the South African Constitution Bill of Rights Section 26 and 27 commitment to make food and nutrition accessible to all individuals. In addition, it pointed to the manifestation of patriarchy through colonialism,

industrialization and apartheid systems and structures, as well as Church teachings, and the role of these in hindering food autonomy and production, access and distribution of food and nutrition. Furthermore, the influence of culture and gender inequality as perpetuating conditions that lead to malnutrition was discussed. Moreover, education and the right to land were shown to provide potential solutions towards improved food autonomy and maternal health.

Chapter four discussed the design, methodology and data analysis used in the study to discover and gain understanding of the experiences, perceptions and perspectives of MWM on food autonomy and how it relates to maternal health. This chapter explored the literature review and access to scholarly and academic debates. It discussed how qualitative research methods facilitated access to the experiences of MWM on food autonomy and its relations to maternal health undertaken, in the women's natural context. It indicated that books, journals and articles drawn from UKZN libraries and resource centre were used as well as one-on-one in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions to access information from MWM as experts of their own experiences and context. This chapter discussed how one-on-one individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted, information recorded and analysed and conclusions drawn from the findings of the study. In addition, this chapter discussed the Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology as a framework of analysis, and the capability approach for well-being and development as articulated by Jacka in relation to enhancing Mashobye Women's agency, affirming their dignity and promoting their well-being.

Chapter five presented, analysed and interpreted research findings based on the research done in Mashobye Methodist Church about the experiences, perceptions and perspectives of MWM on food autonomy and its relations to maternal health. This chapter addressed objective two: "what are the experiences of MWM about food autonomy in relation to maternal health?"

The research established that food is the mainstay of health and a source of energy because it provides the body with the necessary micronutrients, vitamins, minerals and protein which combat malnutrition. In addition, food was seen as an important component in enabling MWM to achieve daily "functionings" and enhancement of "agency" towards the promotion of dignity and

well-being.<sup>529</sup> Moreover, MWM are of the opinion that food can provide much needed income from surplus and reduce poverty. Therefore, food autonomy is seen as an imperative as it could enhance women's agency, and promote women's human dignity and well-being.

Chapter six provided a theological reflection on the findings of the study. This chapter addressed objective four, "how can the findings of the study be used to promote a theology of food autonomy among MWPSU?" The findings of this chapter revealed that patriarchy diminishes the capacity to achieve food autonomy as it contributes towards the subordinate, inferior and dependent status of women. In addition, outreach and food donation to the poor was seen as a temporary solution to poverty and hunger and a further perpetuation of dependency. Alternatively, women's experiences were found to be a necessary resource that could direct the church's and socio-economic institutions' development and empowerment projects. Similarly, food production was seen as key to the achievement of food autonomy, enabling women's independent decision making and providing a resource for women to achieve their daily household responsibilities. Hence, this chapter concluded that MWM need empowerment beyond "survival strategy", to live life in all its fullness achieving food autonomy which promotes joy, harmony, well-being and maternal health.

Chapter seven provided a general conclusion of the study and a summary of each chapter. It also provided possible strategies for MWM's achievement of food autonomy. The first is to recognize Mashobye women's need for food autonomy. Second, is to enable Mashobye women's agency. Third, is to advocate for key institutions and structures to avail Mashobye women with the necessary production resources, information and skills. The next section provides the recommendations in detail.

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<sup>529</sup>Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 188.

## 7.2 Recommendations

This study affirms that rural women and Mashobye women in particular have always been productive workers involved in cultivation,<sup>530</sup> and decision making,<sup>531</sup> and continue to play a “key role in running households and make major contributions to agricultural production in rural areas of the developing world”,<sup>532</sup> but that patriarchal, institutional and structural assumptions, factors and practices hinder and discriminate against women’s agency.<sup>533</sup> For instance, this study has shown that MWM value their “functionings” in subsistence food production, household reproduction and caring activities because these affirm their human dignity, contribute to “spiritual harmony”,<sup>534</sup> and promote maternal health. So transformation of key institutions, structures, socio-cultural practices and factors is imperative. As a result, the promotion of agency could affirm the acceptance of the equality of all human beings made in the image of God, be an important part of the solution to free Mashobye women’s agency, and create an attractive concept of “personhood and mutual advantage”.<sup>535</sup> In this way, enabling key institutions and structures to equally distribute material and economic resources is a way of “transforming patriarchal and gendered power relations”.<sup>536</sup> Consequently, gender equality could be achieved when Mashobye women have access to economic and material resources, education, technological information and skills. For instance, in Mashobye women’s experience, food autonomy is determined by their ability to produce their own food, make their own beneficial decisions and have access to production resources. In this way, the physical, psychological and spiritual effects of poverty, hunger and disease and their deleterious effects on the promotion of maternal health would be limited.

Accordingly, this study recommends that MWM’s experiences are crucial in any discussions on food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health. Hence the study affirms Mashobye

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<sup>530</sup>Gaitskel, “Housewife, Maids or Mothers”, 243.

<sup>531</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 197.

<sup>532</sup>IFAD, Women and Rural Development. Enabling Poor Rural People to Overcome Poverty, 2010.

<sup>533</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 197.

<sup>534</sup> This can further explain how the colonial missionary domestic ideology becoming enmeshed with women’s spiritual role, seems to imply that women’s inability in household production, reproduction and caring becomes like a failure in women’s Christian duty as if it is a ‘divinely ordained role of motherhood’, Gaitskell “Housewives, Maids or Mothers”, 242.

<sup>535</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 200.

<sup>536</sup>Jacka, “Left-Behind and Vulnerable”, 200.

women's recommendation that MWM unite to facilitate strategic discussions on how to start and sustain a food production project. This can be done in association with the "connexional" MWPSU, so as to restore an integrated, life giving connection, and incorporate MCSA doctrinal mission imperatives. These include the "preferential option for the poor", which holds a strong calling and motivation to redress poverty and social inequality, as well as "growing in perfection" that promotes love for God and each other.<sup>537</sup>

As the study evidenced Mashobye women's inability to achieve food autonomy, the resulting poor maternal health, lack of access to beneficial information and resources, and low education status, MWM has to be empowered to facilitate access to beneficial information. This will help to enable food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health. For instance, MWM must be made aware of the MCSA Pula Fund, a mission focused project fund, to help fund their food production project. In addition, MWPSU as an organization in "connexion" with MWM could help access information on IFSS as a focused rural development strategy by the Department of Agriculture Rural Development, Department of Social Services, and the Department of Health. Furthermore, MWPSU could empower MWM to advocate for Mashobye women's and girl children's education, including access to adequate reproductive health rights in order to reduce the rate of illiteracy, delay early marriage, childbirth and enhance Mashobye women's development and economic participation. Furthermore, MWM can be empowered to conduct Bible Studies during their prayer sessions, focusing on acknowledging the humanity of women and their capacity to make beneficial decisions, in order to promote gender equality. Similarly, MWM need to work with women and men from other faith communities, religions and traditions to fight lack of food autonomy and associated poor maternal health in Mashobye. Moreover, the MCSA as a Healing and Transformation Discipleship Movement need to question and advocate against political, social, economic and cultural issues that perpetuate lack of food autonomy, poverty, hunger and diseases, and blur the image of God inherent in all humanity, including Mashobye Women.

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<sup>537</sup>*Laws & Discipline*, 238.

### 7.2.1 Facilitate MWM Participation in Food Production

Most participants uttered sentiments like *“I feel I have life and I am in control if I have food all the time or when I can produce my own food”*<sup>538</sup>. This response reflects a sense of achievement, yet Mashobye women struggle daily with household production, reproduction and caring which food and nutrition forms its major part. Moreover, the passion and compassion reflected in the care and commitment of Mashobye women in providing food and nutrition despite adverse conditions reflects Christian conviction and obedience to God’s law of love. Hence, Mashobye women’s early start and late retiring is an attempt to balance agricultural labour or collect wild leafy plants and carry out their household responsibilities. In addition, proper food utilization requires Mashobye women to make sanitary and hygienic choices and as a way of ensuring healthy outcomes.

However, food production enables MWM to make choices about certain foods over others and ensures that “culture specific food”<sup>539</sup> is consumed in order to provide adequate nutrition relevant to the Tsonga tradition of Mashobye. As Gould says, sometimes “even if people consume the correct calories they often lack energy necessary for active work”.<sup>540</sup> As a result,

*In the villages we need food that gives us energy, we need to eat ‘bushwa’<sup>541</sup> because it gives energy and makes me feel full, because bread does not sustain energy. We eat more food like ‘matsau’ like ‘merogo’.*<sup>542</sup>

In the same way, Choudary and Parthasarathy posit that “rural women are responsible for 70% of family food security requirements as such they make the highest contribution to accessibility and stability dimensions of food security”.<sup>543</sup> When Mashobye women can make food choices and access their food preferences, they derive joy, pleasure and satisfaction in their daily food work. In the process of MWM’s caring activities, they provide warmth and love, and transmit cultural

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<sup>538</sup>Response from participant (P4), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

<sup>539</sup>Van Esterik, “Right to Food”, 225.

<sup>540</sup>Gould, “Deep Food Autonomy”, 19.

<sup>541</sup>This is Mashobye staple food. It is commonly known as ‘pap’ and is also South Africa’s staple food but it is cooked and dished up in a special Tsonga way in Mashobye and also in Sepedi culture.

<sup>542</sup>Response from participant (P5), in-depth interview held on 12/09/2015, describing a Xitsonga name for a wild spinach. There are a variety of green leafy vegetables, domestic and fallow.

<sup>543</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, “Gender, Work and Household Food Security”, 531.

codes and family values which affirm their human dignity and promote their health and well-being.

Moreover, Mashobye women express confidence, joy and pride when their nutritional needs have been satisfied; they feel healthy and good enough to go out into the public sphere in search of employment. Indeed Mashobye women's experiences confirm that every meal with adequate nutrition is "God's restoration of life"<sup>544</sup> as it enables them to fulfil their physical, biological and spiritual role. As research has shown, adequate food and nutrition throughout a woman's life contributes to healthy outcomes. During pregnancy and postpartum, it minimizes maternal complications, as well as child physical and cognitive defects. It enables growth toward becoming an independent, socially and economically contributing individual. Therefore, it is imperative for MWM's to meet their need for the achievement of food autonomy in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Right to Food, and Art. 27 of the Constitution of South Africa.<sup>545</sup> In this way, MWM could experience justice, human dignity and the restoration of their inherent image of God. Most importantly, MMWPSU's sense of self-worth can be enhanced as women contribute socially, economically and culturally to their individual, family, community and society well-being. According to Van Esterik, food work can help women to stand up for themselves, enact their place in the world, influence others and define themselves.<sup>546</sup>

### **7.2.2 Improve MWM Education**

Most participants in this study indicated that they have access and control over family property which they try to use for subsistence agricultural production. As indicated above, these women often cannot access financial information, available technological skills training or government grants due to the limitations imposed by lack of education. In fact, Kumalo in his PhD thesis, drawing from Paolo Freire's theory of liberation through education, argues that liberatory education brings awareness to the situation of the oppressed as it speaks against the domination

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<sup>544</sup>"Food for Life a Theological Paper Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance: Why should we Care for the Hungry?" (Some Theological grounding for EAA's Food for Life Campaigns). [www.cws.org.nz/files](http://www.cws.org.nz/files)> Food.accesses 10/07/2015.

<sup>545</sup>Buckingham, "Food Security, Law and Theology", 11.

<sup>546</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 226.

of people.<sup>547</sup> The MCSA acknowledges the churches' responsibility towards educating and empowering women against poverty and food insecurity, reproductive health rights and gender equality. Similarly, according to Bremner, "education gives girls and women resources, information and services necessary to meet future agricultural and nutrition challenges".<sup>548</sup> Hence, Kumalo further calls for the revival of an educational ministry that is "liberating and functional".<sup>549</sup> Being empowered through education and participation in the economic market would enhance MWM's chances for occupational and economic gain. According to Das Gupta, education is important to women and girls.<sup>550</sup> Therefore, education and skills training for MWM and girls must be prioritised so as to increase their earning, income generating capacity and an increased achievement of food autonomy for the enhancement of their agency, human dignity and wellbeing.

In fact, deprivation is a contradiction to God's divine plan of equality in God's image<sup>551</sup> as an expression and the promotion of love, peace and human dignity in a family, community and society.<sup>552</sup> Mashobye women's sole responsibility towards the household deprives them of participation in empowering activities and personal development. This was seen to perpetuate the socio-economic, cultural and gendered view which assigns childrearing to be solely women's responsibility and entrenches the patriarchal male domination of women. Furthermore, it interferes with God's plan of creating a family with two parents for joint responsibility of raising and providing for their family. Therefore, as a way of creating awareness of the challenges created by patriarchy, lack of capacity to make decisions, and denied access to material and economic resources, MWM could conduct workshops and Bible studies. In this way, they can conscientize women about the oppressive and discriminating effects of patriarchal and androcentric ideologies that deny food autonomy and the promotion of maternal health.

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<sup>547</sup>Simangaliso R. Kumalo, "Theology of Education: The Role of the Church in Education for Social Transformation: A Methodist Contribution", (PhD Thesis., University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, 2005), 34-38.

<sup>548</sup>Bremner J, "Population and Food Security Africa's Challenges Population Reference Bureau Policy Brief", 2012, 4.

<sup>549</sup>Kumalo, "Theology of Education", 107.

<sup>550</sup>Das Gupta, "Women's Empowerment and Fertility",

<sup>551</sup>Abraham, "Give Us this Day our Daily Bread", 8-9.

<sup>552</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Food Security, Law and Theology", 19.

### 7.2.3 Promote Reproductive Health Rights

Studies have shown that access to reproductive health rights and information delays both early childbirth and early marriage by increasing girls' chances to stay longer in school and increasing their prospects of participating in labour.<sup>553</sup> Similarly, most of the young participants showed some awareness of their right to sexual and reproductive health rights and the South African government's commitment to ensuring that all people have the right to choose to have or not to have children. So, inadequacy of health facilities and services limits Mashobye women's access to sexual and reproductive health rights and hinders access to beneficial information due to lack of privacy. Otherwise, Mashobye women can be empowered to take control over the number of children they will have, ensure adequately spaced birth, and care for orphans of their late siblings. As a result, the desired number of children would enable MWM to raise, feed and educate their families. It would also decrease worry and anxiety over health and nutrition and improve food supply in their homes. Similarly, time for household reproductive activities and subsequent energy and health depletion could be reduced while women benefit time and creative energy to transform their lives, health and nutrition, particularly by participating in economic activities and studies, in an effort to eradicate poverty and malnutrition, and promote maternal health. Hence, Das Gupta's emphasis on the importance of reproductive health rights in delaying "marriage, increase probability of long duration of professional training and better qualifications for higher paying jobs and lifetime earnings".<sup>554</sup>

However, most members of MWM are not aware of the MCSA commitment to facilitate women's access to reproductive health rights<sup>555</sup> and food security.<sup>556</sup> This shows that when commitments entered at international, regional, national, even "connexional" level do not permeate local contexts and influence the lives of ordinary women, success cannot be assured. Thus women's health and nutrition continues to be compromised, violating various aspects of human dignity. According to the WHO, most maternal deaths in developing countries can be prevented through adequate nutrition and proper health care, including access to family planning

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<sup>553</sup>Das Gupta, "Women's Empowerment and Fertility", 4.

<sup>554</sup>Das Gupta, "Women's Empowerment and Fertility", 2.

<sup>555</sup> *Laws & Discipline*, 283.

<sup>556</sup> *Laws & Discipline*, 283.

and attendance by skilled birth personnel.<sup>557</sup> In fact, MWM's limited choices based on inadequate access to reproductive health rights means that they cannot contribute towards minimizing the maternal mortality rate and child mortality. Therefore, inadequate reproductive health and information in addition to other essential services continues to commit MWM to poverty, hunger and ill-health, escalating into persisting "high MMR and child mortality in South Africa".<sup>558</sup> Hence, Mashobye women's appeal to "connexional" MWPSU to enable strategies to harness unity and agency towards improved maternal outcomes. According to Das Gupta, access to "contraception is pro-poor" because it increases opportunity for development, job prospects, high level of human capital, improved life chances and capacity to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.<sup>559</sup>

#### **7.2.4 Advocate for Gender Equality**

In this study, gender equality would mean that both men and women are equal in all respects, including access to all human rights, particularly food, housing, health, freedom of speech, freedom of association and all the necessary resources that promote human wellbeing and welfare. According to the research results, gender inequality assigns women lower roles in society and denies them equal opportunity in development initiatives. This is evident in areas of education, production and reproduction spaces, job seclusion, the labour market and leadership positions. As evidenced in this study, married participants still had to come with their children to the interviews, leaving their partners at home, because childcare is culturally a woman's responsibility. Yet the contribution Mashobye women make to food production, processing and utilization is often invisible because it is not financially compensated and is classified as women's compulsory unpaid work.

Furthermore, Quisumbing et al. note that "economic, cultural, social constraints and inequality ignores women's active contribution as farmers, farm workers and natural resource managers".<sup>560</sup> As a result, MWM, like many women in Sub Saharan Africa find it difficult to break out of poverty because the disparities experienced by women are enforced through gender

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<sup>557</sup>WHO Maternal Mortality Fact Sheet 2014.[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheet](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheet). accessed 10/10/2015.

<sup>558</sup>Worku, National Coordinating Committee, 73.

<sup>559</sup>Das Gupta, "Women's Empowerment and Fertility", 2.

<sup>560</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: the Key to Food Security", 2.

inequality, entrenched in socio-economic factors, religio-cultural structures, systems, institutions and practices. For instance, MWM's contribution to food production, processing and utilization includes browsing and collecting traditional wild green vegetables and roots from the neighbouring field and fallow areas. These perceived women's household responsibilities ensure that food consumed by families has "adequate protein, energy, micronutrients and mineral intake enhanced by the extent of care, love and warmth",<sup>561</sup> albeit rendered socially, culturally and economically invisible. Moreover, MWM's indigenous food knowledge, capacity for food production and motivation to save the environment as a source of livelihood has not been recognized. The disadvantage inherent in performing these socially beneficial activities requires MWM to "forego personal wages".<sup>562</sup> Yet, based on the potential financial value, household and national welfare these household activities are making to human development and national economic growth, Mashobye women and most women in developing countries of Sub Saharan Africa should receive adequate financial remuneration.<sup>563</sup> According to Quinsimbing et al., if "women had the same opportunities to education, access to finance and modern technology, like men agricultural yield would increase from 9-24%".<sup>564</sup> Therefore, if the value of MWM's acquired indigenous knowledge and commitment to the provision of food and nutrition as well as their reproductive and caring work was recognized, Mashobye women would have increased capacity to make independent decisions and choices about what constitutes adequate food and nutrition to be "fed and to feed others".<sup>565</sup>

Accordingly, if women earned adequate income, the family's food and nutrition status would improve because "household access to food also depends on who earns the income".<sup>566</sup> Mashobye women, like most women, have been shown to spend most of their income on family food for the improvement of children's health and nutrition status. In fact, Quisimbing et al. estimate women's household production, processing, reproduction and caring contribution at "40 to 60% of household income".<sup>567</sup> This would earn MWM bargaining power and capacity to

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<sup>561</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, "Gender, Work and Food Security", 523.

<sup>562</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, "Gender, Work and Food Security", 524.

<sup>563</sup>Choudhary and Parthasarathy, "Gender, Work and Food Security", 523.

<sup>564</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: the Key to Food Security", 7.

<sup>565</sup>Van Esterik, "Right to Food", 225.

<sup>566</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: the Key to Food Security", 8.

<sup>567</sup>Quisumbing et al., "Women: the Key to Food Security", 12.

participate and influence household as well as socio-political decisions. Thus, gender equality has the potential to transform unfair traditional lenses and gendered views of women and women's work. According to Jacka, when interdependence and mutuality are recognized, key institutions and structures are enabled to avail financial and material resources, opportunities and social services equally to women and men.<sup>568</sup> In this way, women gain equal access to education, capital, social and economic participation. Their voices and experiences are incorporated in the public sphere, towards "transformed systems, structures and institutions".<sup>569</sup> This contributes towards the creation of a society that is more just, equal and healthy, in "keeping with the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus in word and deed",<sup>570</sup> and incarnating the Good News Christians proclaim as love. So food autonomy can empower Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano to "stand up for themselves"<sup>571</sup> and achieve maternal health.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is the conclusion that summarizes all six chapters of the dissertation. The second section provides recommendations as a way to enable MWM's achievement of food autonomy towards improved maternal health. The chapter suggested two workshops and a Bible Study as strategies that can contribute to the transformation of MWM's lack of food autonomy and poor maternal health. These include, first, a workshop on conscientizing Mashobye women of the experience gained through participating in the one-on-one in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Second is to conduct a workshop to strategize ways of sustaining a food garden. Third is to facilitate a Bible Study about the equal participation of all people in the image of God. These suggested strategies envisage transformation from experiences of oppression and dependence to the ability to achieve food autonomy for the promotion of maternal health for MWM.

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<sup>568</sup>Jacka, "Left-Behind and Vulnerable", 196-199.

<sup>569</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 38.

<sup>570</sup>Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 37.

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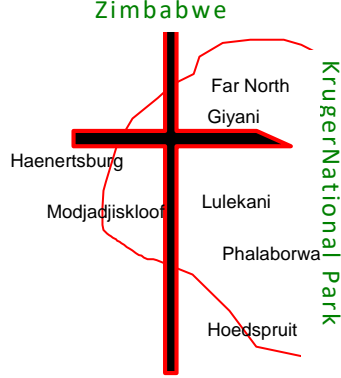
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**The Methodist Church of Southern Africa**

*A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations*

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**Superintendent Minister** (015) 3074525 (O)  
**Rev. Pierre A Naudé** B.A, B.Th. (015) 3074750 (F)

15 September 2014

Dear Storia,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE MASHOBYE SOCIETY

Thank you for your letter, dd 18 August 2014, requesting permission to conduct research among the members of the Woman's Manyano in the Mashobye Society of the Letaba Circuit, MCSA.

Permission is hereby granted.

Recognising that

- the circumstances and needs of the people of Mashobye are repeated a hundred times over in villages throughout the entire area known to us as "The Far North"
- you may in time, for purposes of control and comparison, wish to extend your research area, you are hereby also granted permission to conduct research among the Methodist People throughout the entire Far North area should it become necessary.

I wish you every blessing with your valuable research and the resulting Dissertation.

Yours sincerely

*Pierre Naudé*

Pierre A Naudé (Rev)

Superintendent Minister : Letaba Circuit MCSA

## Appendix2



# The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

*Limpopo District*

*Bishop Themba Mntambo*

Office

Based at The Kilnerton Centre, 81 Pitts Avenue, Weavind Park

Address: PO Box 546 Silverton 0127 Tel: (012) 804 0087/4336/2975 Fax: 086 653 4139  
email: admin@mcsalimpopo.co.za

10 September 2014

Dear Rev Seitsho

I am in receipt of your letter requesting permission to conduct research with the Women's Manyano of the Mashobye Society in pursuance of your Masters Degree with the University of KwaZulu Natal. I believe your area of study will benefit the church as it will provide valuable information to help us continue our efforts in mission, growing the church, empowering communities, especially women and resourcing the church to bring local solutions to local needs and challenges.

I hereby grant permission for you to conduct such research within the area you suggest. Trusting and praying for every success for you as you take up this important work.

Grace and Peace

THEMBA V. MNTAMBO  
(Limpopo District Bishop)

### APPENDIX 3

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR A ONE-ON-ONE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

1. What do you understand about the role of food in your life?  
Xana u twisisa yini hin nkoka wa swakudya evutonwini bya wena?
2. What is your understanding of women's health?  
Xana hi kwahihi ku twisisa ka wena hi rihanyu ra vavasati?
3. Does the right to make decisions about access to food affect women's health in any way?  
Explain your answer.  
Xana yi kona ndlela le yi yi nga yona hi tlhelo ra makumelo ya swakudya na rihanyu lerinene ra vamanana? Seketela nhlamulo ya wena.
4. What reasons or circumstances in your opinion limits women's capacity to provide food?  
Hi swihi swibangelo/kumbe swiyimo ku ya hi mavonele ya wena leswi hingakanyaka vavasati ku phemela swakudya?
5. Is there a way that the Mashobye Women's Manyano can influence women to live healthy lives? Explain your answer.  
Xana yi konandlela leyi vamanana va xikhongelo va ka Mashobye va nga yi tirhisaka ku kucetela Vavasatiku hanya rihanyu lerinene ? Seketela nhlamulo ya wena.
6. Is there a way in which Mashobye Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union can influence women how to feed their family? Explain your answer.  
Xana xi kona xiave lexi vamanana va xikhongelo va ka Mashobye va nga va na xona e ka wenahi tlhelo ra matirhiselo ya swakudya andyangwani wa wena ? Hlamusela hi ku hetiseka.

## APPENDIX 4

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUP

1. Is there a relationship between freedom to make decisions and access to health services?  
Explain your answer.  
Xana vuxaka byi kona exikari ka ntshunxeko wa ku endla makungu na ku fikelela mingingiriko ya rihanyu kee? Hlamusela nhlamulo ya wena.
2. What in your opinion could prevent women from making decisions about their health?  
Xana incini lexi u tshembhaka leswaku hi xona xi sivelaka vavasati ku endla kungu hi rihanyu ra vona?
3. What in your opinion could empower women to make personal decisions about access to food?  
Xana u pfumela ku ri hi yini xinga nyikaka vamanana matimba yo teka swiboho a ka makumelo yaswakudya ?
4. Is there a way that Mashobye Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union can influence women to live healthy lives? Explain your answer.  
Xana yi kona ndlela leyi kereke yi nga pfunaka ha yona vavasati ku hanya vutomi bya rihanyu lerinene? Hlamusela nhlamulo ya wena.
5. In your opinion do Mashobye Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union have a role to help women on health issues and why?  
Xana u pfumela ku ri hi yini xinga nyikaka vamanana matimba yo teka swiboho a ka makumelo yaswakudya?
6. Is there a way that the Mashobye Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union contribute towards beliefs about how women make decisions about feeding their families? Give reasons for your answer..  
Xana yi kona ndlela leyi vamanana va xikhongelo va ka Mashobye va nga kucetelelaka vavasati e ku pfumaleni ka vona loko va fanela ku teka swiboho mayelana na ku hlayisa mindyangu ya vona hi swa kudya? Hlamusela hi ku hetiseka.

03 March 2015

Rev Storia Cynthia Seitisho (213568915)  
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev Seitisho,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1496/014M

Project title: Food autonomy for maternal health: A feminist theological analysis of the experiences of Mashobye Methodist Women's Manyano in Limpopo Province about food autonomy in relation to maternal health

**Full Approval – Expedited Approval**

With regards to your application received on 04 November 2014. The documents submitted have been accepted by the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and **FULL APPROVAL** for the protocol has been granted.

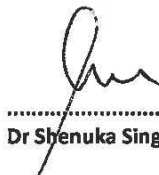
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Lilian C Siwila  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Catherine Murugan

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix 6 Mashobye Women's Vegetable Garden

