



THE AUGUST MEETING AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF EZZA NORTH LGA

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Abstract: In South East Nigeria, the month of August has become a very significant. This is because women gather in their numbers to articulate ideas to enhance the development of their various communities. This study, therefore, investigated women's participation in August Meeting and its implications and its implications for community development in Ezza North Local Government Area (LGA). Social Responsibility Theory was adopted as a theoretical framework for the study. The study adopted cross sectional survey design and the sample size was 389 respondents. The instruments used for data collection was questionnaire and data collected were presented and analyzed using simple percentages and frequency tables. The finding reveals that participation in the August Meeting is symbolic and significant for economic development. It is a month of reunion of women in Ezza North LGA. Projects have been articulated and executed during this period. Based on the findings, the study recommends, among others, that there is a need to organize seminars for some illiterate women in rural communities. This would help to create more awareness on the importance of women's participation in the August Meeting.

Key words: August Meeting, Women's participation, Community Development, Ezza North

Introduction

In Nigeria, the 'Mothers' Summit', popularly known as "August Meeting", is a concept common among women of the South East who are resident in Nigeria or indeed abroad (Anyaegebu and Iguh, 2018). This meeting, usually organized during the month of August, is the exclusive preserve of married women. These Igbo-speaking women gather in their home towns in a grand meeting that lasts for days to discuss and deliberate on issues that affect them in common. The meeting is structured so that the women first meet in their villages and wards to articulate ideas based on community development. From the second day, they converge at the central avenue where all the women of the town will commence the five-day heated and fruitful discussions that have helped in different ways to erect town halls, community health clinics, civic centers, secondary schools etc.

The concept of August Meeting is an initiative of the *OtuAlutaradi*. These are women whose common bond is their place of marriage. The transformation of OtuAlutaradi to August Meeting can be traced back to the colonial periods of mass urbanization which affected the Igbo social space along with most other parts of Nigeria, leading to the opening up of such urban centers as Enugu, Port Harcourt, Umuahia, Onitsha, Aba, Owerri, Calabar in the old South East and elsewhere in Nigeria (Odoemena, 1997). Within these cities, women established various ethnic

associations in a bid to provide some socio-economic security to the urban migrant and to also maintain a link with their rural communities. Through this arrangement, they were able to maintain “urban-rural linkage” for development. This is what became popularly known as the “Home and Abroad” meeting in Igboland (Abroad simply means one who lives outside Igboland). Convened once a year, usually during the Christmas period, this meeting was where issues of development and progress in the rural communities were discussed (Uwalaka, 2006).

The “Home and Abroad” meeting was the forerunner of the “August Meeting”. With time, the “Home and Abroad” meeting stopped and the women settled for “August Meeting” only (Uwalaka, 2006). Women meeting during the month of August can be traced to the 1940s, when the Church Missionary Societies saw the need to devise a way to give women a voice in the affairs of their community. Ideally, August is a month of rest, when people are free from all kinds of labour in Igbo traditional society (Nzuko, 2008). Most schools in Nigeria are also on long vacation so teachers are free from school work. Celebration of the new yam festival, a major cultural event in Igbo land, usually occurs during this month. August is an important month for all Igbo women living within and outside Nigeria. It is a period when they gather to articulate ideas, projects and programmes to be executed for the wellbeing of their communities. They take this seriously. Once it is June, they begin to plan and prepare. Even those in America and Europe also make their own plans and send delegates to attend and bring them feedback from the proceedings (Nzuko, 2008).

Since its existence, August Meeting has been a force to reckon with in Igbo land as several communities now plan their communal activities to fall within the meeting period. Many state governments now partner with these women groups. The Igbo women have carefully designed this forum to ensure that peace and love reign in their communities and that they keep their dignity intact so as to give womanhood the pride of place it deserves in national integration and development. Women today, through August meeting, are involved in one economic activity or another to assist in developing their homes. As stated by Umebali and Akubailo (2006), women raise fund during August meeting to support their enterprises. According to Ijere and Mbanaso (1998), women are good mobilizers and have been found to promote development in communities through August meeting. August Meeting has enthroned women socio-political integration and church progress. Other development initiatives are building of church halls, women’s rights protection; ethical and moral training, and settlement of disputes among families, members and communities. All these are indications that women are held to be steadfast in abiding by unanimously reached decisions of their group (Ijere, 2008). This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role of women in community development in Ebonyi State through women’s August meeting.

The Igbo communities of South-Eastern Nigeria are still characterized by poor physical infrastructure and a negligible industrial base. Their main economy – trade and commerce – are highly individualized and have never been organized to favour community development (Onugu and Ojiagu, 2015). The Igbos are found in the remotest of communities in all parts of Nigeria and beyond doing business and trade. Yet, back home, some of their communities lack good health facilities, with high death rate, high level of unemployment, low wages and limited access to other social services (Onugu and Ojiagu, 2015). There exists a preponderance of the weakest of the Igbo people at home in most Igbo communities. Community dwellers are not empowered and strategically placed to contribute meaningfully to development. The few elites and particularly their supposed leaders who are in vantage political positions are corrupt. They oppress and suppress, ensuring that their citizenry remain poor and voiceless. Most active citizens migrate to urban areas leaving behind the old people, women and children, who are generally considered to be at the lowest rung of the poverty level in Nigeria (Iheduru, 2006).

Due to the mentioned factors, communities are not productive, viable, competitive or progressive. Indeed, life is still precariously miserable for community dwellers, especially women. According to Nweze (2002), various

policies have been initiated, with its attendant programmes executed to improve the conditions in the rural areas by successive governments, with marginal or no development effect. Onuoha (2006) asserted that in most cases such programmes with “loft objectives”, often died with the government that initiated it.

We had in the past, Better Life for Rural Women (BLFRW); Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP); and presently, Women for Change Initiative, all promoted at the national level, centered on women’s empowerment and executed by the first ladies of Nigeria. In spite of these initiatives, there are still the marginalization and deprivation of women in development, especially at the rural areas. Who then are the women initiators of this annual “August Meeting” and how organized are they? What constitute the criteria for membership and how is the organization characterized? Does “August Meeting” meet the developmental challenges of women in Ebonyi State Nigeria? These issues raised constitute the problem of this study.

The broad objective of the study is to examine the Impact of women’s August Meeting in Community Development: A Study of Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State”. While the specific objectives are, to:

1. Determine the extent to which women’s meeting in August meet the developmental needs of communities in Ezza North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State;
 2. Assess the extent to which women’s meeting in August solve key challenges of women in Ezza North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State;
 3. Ascertain the reasons why women meet in August in Ezza North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State.
- This study is centered on investigating the impact of women’s August Meeting in community development: a study of Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi State. It will examine the basic roles played by women to ensure they contribute to community development

through women’s August Meeting. The study will be limited to Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi State, this is due to the researcher's closeness to research area.

Literature Review Women August Meeting

The “Mothers’ Summit”, popularly known as “August Meeting”, is a concept common among women of South East Nigeria who are resident in Nigeria or abroad. This meeting, usually organized during the month of August, is the exclusive preserve of married women. These Igbo speaking women gather in their home towns in a grand meeting that lasts for days to discuss issues that affect them in common. The meeting is structured so that the women first meet in their villages and wards to articulate ideas based on community development. From the second day, they converge at the central avenue where all the women from different towns will commence the five-day heated and fruitful discussions that have helped in different ways to erect town halls, community health clinics, civic centers, secondary schools, initiate income-generating ventures and even make peace.

It was conceived a few years after the Nigeria civil war in 1970, when the displaced Igbo people of the South East, the area then known as “Biafra,” returned to homes, communities and towns that had been devastated and ravaged by war. Schools were destroyed and hospitals were razed to the ground. Expected government help was not forthcoming, and the people known for their resilience, determination and enterprise adopted the self-help method to rebuild their communities (Nwankwo, 2010). As a matter of fact, the August meeting was a strong chord binding the women of the same historical and cultural descent and propelling them to cooperate in working out development agenda for their communities. Self-help projects are mutually agreed upon and carried out to the progress of societies, and structures are determined and built into the system to regulate behaviours and interactions between the people. The period for this meeting is usually the month of August that gave rise to the mantra ‘August Meeting’.

Women's August Meeting in Ebonyi State

In Ebonyi State, the wife of the former governor, Mrs. Josephine Elechi, fashioned August Meeting programme such that it is first flagged off at the state capital, Abakaliki and in the three zones of the state – Central, North and South – before the women go to the villages for their various meetings (Uka, 2013). The greatest is that August meetings bond mothers together for a self-determination and the actualization of their dreams. It is not a surprise that women look forward to participate in the annual August Meeting. The truth is that August Meeting is not about wearing uniforms, but a strategic platform for peace, unity and community development. It is to strengthen the efforts of our mothers, inspire them for greater productivity and tap from the many gains of these annual August meetings that the wife of the former governor of Ebonyi State, Chief Mrs. Rachel Umahi since inception of office has continued to support it.

One of the past themes is “Effects of Insecurity on Women and Children”. The theme was chosen on the heels of mounting insecurity confronting Ebonyi state and Nigeria with women and children as the most valuable groups. Recent cases of insecurity include armed attacks on women who were going for their business or to early morning church service; cases of rape on women and girls, sometimes, in their homes, horrifying assaults by herdsmen and bandits even in their farms; kidnapping and other violent crimes. All these, put women and children at great danger and affect their socioeconomic life. It is to fight this dangerous situation that compelled Chief Mrs. Rachel Umahi to champion the domestication of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in Ebonyi State. Therefore, the theme was meant to educate the women further on how to manage situations of insecurity, what to do in the face of insecurity and the assurances of government's protection.

Apart from insecurity, other fundamental issues concerning the well-being of mothers and the general development of various communities were discussed. The 2019 Ebonyi State August meeting took place in all the 13 local government areas down to the communities. The wife of the then Ebonyi State governor, Chief Mrs. Rachel Umahi personally flagged-off the year's August Meeting on Monday 12th August, 2019 at Ebonyi Local Government Headquarters, Ugbodo for Ebonyi North Zone; Tuesday 13th August, 2019 at Ezza North Local Government Headquarters, Ebiaji for Ebonyi Central Zone, while that of Ebonyi South Zone took place on Wednesday 14th August, 2019 at Obiozara, Ohaozara Local Government Area Headquarters (Ebonyi Project, 2019).

Women's August Meeting and Community Development

Igbo women have helped in different ways, and at different times, to erect town halls, community health clinics, civic centres, secondary schools, skills acquisition centres and so on. In Ezza North, women have assisted in building town halls, and skill acquisition centres through funds generated from the “women's August meeting”. Some of the projects the women established are profit-yielding ventures such as construction of class room chairs and desks for both teachers and students in Ezza North villages and communities in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi.

August Meeting can be explored by women by using it to promote the confidence of various communities and give them sense of belonging. To Oguomu (2007), women participation in community development is an important element and a sure way to speedy development of the rural communities in Nigeria. According to Oguomu (2007), in the wake of the global conference on women in Beijing, China, the world community has witnessed several conferences where efforts have continued to encourage women participation in their societal development.

Scent and Chukwu (2023) interrogated the essence of August meeting and its change mantra, basically its economic self-reliance stratagem for improving the living conditions of rural women in the Igbo ethnic group of southeast Nigeria. It adopted the descriptive and survey research designs and data collection via structured

questionnaires, focus group discussions and in-depth-interview. The study revealed that August meeting is highly committed to changing the ugly narrative of Igbo women. This is achieved through building of basic some socioeconomic infrastructure in rural areas. The study also found that August Meeting has become a force to be reckoned with given its strong opposition to all forms of discriminatory and oppressive practices against women. Their study recommended that August meeting and its change mantra should be holistic in its engagement to promptly address the widespread poor quality of life associated with women in rural areas.

Onuoha and Owuaghalo (2016) investigated socio-economic characteristics and development roles of women involved in August Meetings in Nigeria. It centred on faith-based organizations and developmental Initiatives of women through the August Meeting, south east of Nigeria women of catholic and Anglican were the focus of the study. One hundred and fifty of the women were sampled from Anambra, Enugu and Imo States of South-East Nigeria. Primary data were sourced through questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from extant works. Result showed that August Meetings usually involves women from all socio-economic backgrounds. The meeting engages in development activities – women’s emancipation, ethical/moral training of women, conflicts management, church and community development – among others. The study recommended engendering of developmental process in decision-making, support of government, non-governmental organization and development-aid agencies to strengthen their operations.

Ndukwe and Nwokwu (2018) examined possible best strategies to enthrone all round development in the local government areas, Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, in particular. Data were collected from secondary source and content analysis was adopted to analyze the collected data. The study was anchored on integrated development model by World Bank (1975). The study found, among other, that the headship of the council should allocate enough resources to education so as to empower the rural dwellers and that lack of political will on the part of the council’s leadership is one of the factors envisaged to affect rural development drive of the local government area. It recommended that the council leadership should intensify her internal revenue drive in order to raise sufficient revenues necessary to undertake developmental programmes and should partner with nongovernmental as well as international organizations to address critical areas of the rural economic development.

Nzewi and Ojiagu (2014) investigated women august meeting and socio-economic development of selected communities in Anambra State. The assessed the perception of members on whether training in skill acquisition has enhanced their income generation, and examined the extent to which soft loan provision has facilitated investment in micro businesses. Descriptive survey research design was employed and data were analyzed with mean and standard deviations. One sample t-text of significance and Kruskal-Walli’s test of independence were used to test the formulated hypotheses at 5% (percent) level of significance. Findings revealed that there is significant difference in responses of members that training in skill acquisition has enhanced their income generation. It is therefore recommended that women should create new strategies for sourcing funds outside the churches and the government at all levels (local, state and federal) should provide grants to the women for comprehensive training in skill acquisition and establishment of micro-businesses.

The effort toward overall development, unlike the narrower Eurocentric view of the concept, remains a major preoccupation of African countries and the developing world generally. In Africa, colonialism imposed the self-serving Western capitalist societies’ view of development which revolves around the modernization theory on the people, without regard to existing differences in social and cultural values. Invariably, urbanization, provision of modern infrastructural facilities and the adoption of Western social habits became prominent parameters of measuring development. Unfortunately, these were restricted to the urban centers. Among the indigenous rural

dwellers, the situation amounted to a deprivation of their rights to the good things of life and led to the migration of people from rural areas to the urban centers. This trend engendered changes, both in various aspects of the culture of Africa's indigenous peoples and in the developmental activities of notable cultural groups, including the Umuada (daughters of the lineage or community) among the Igbo of southeast Nigeria which is the case study in this paper. Within the pre-colonial Igbo society, Umuada were indispensable and complemented the men's efforts in the development of their various patrilineal communities. However, considering the debilitating effects of Western-influenced and male-dominated urban centers on the cultural practices of the people vis-à-vis the fact that the modern developmental roles of the Umuada in their rural communities are engineered mainly by their urban-based members, there are conjectures regarding the actual influence of urbanization on the group's efforts towards the development of their various communities.

Amaechi, C. M. and Muoh, O. U. (2018) examined influences of urbanization and the notions of gender equality and "complementarity" on the Umuada's developmental roles over time and their potentials as true partners in the efforts to extend development or the fundamental necessities of life to rural areas. Anchored on modernization theory, it surveyed the cultural clash between Africa and colonialists. The study argued that colonialism imposed the self-serving Western capitalist societies' view of development that revolves around the modernization without regard to existing differences in social and cultural values. It recommended extension of development to rural areas while having Umuada as of its agencies.

Ohaegbuchi (2014) studied women in community development: interrogating the role of women August meeting in South East Nigeria. The Study examined the involvement of women in community development with a view to interrogating the impact of the annual women August meeting in the South East, Nigeria. The paper argued that the involvement of women in community development promotes peace and consequently gives room for sustainable development and good governance. Methodologically, primary and secondary data were used and for theory, social responsibility theory was used in the study. The study made use of qualitative research approach. The research submitted that the yearly August Meeting should be used to consolidate peaceful relations and coexistence. It recommended that August meeting should be given more attention in order to get to the root causes, information, understanding and management or resolution of violent conflicts.

Mamah (2011) investigated participation of women in community development in Nigeria: a study of Igbo Eze South Local Government Area, Enugu State. It was carried out due to the observed lag in women participation in community development all over the country. The researcher made use of both primary and secondary sources of data to generate data used for the study. These data were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage. The researcher found out the various barriers to women participation in community development to include cultural practices, low level of women education, and poverty among the rural women. It, therefore, recommended that cultural practices that deny women free access to land should be abrogated, provision of modern farm implements to enhance productivity and girl child education should be made free and also compulsory at least at secondary school levels.

Agunyai and Etembo (2017) studied women August meeting and the quest against discrimination of Osu in South-East, Nigeria. The study examined the utility of yearly August meeting of Igbo women as a vehicle for denouncing the orthodox belief that sees the Osu as less humans in the South-East, Nigeria. The study contends that this annual women meeting holds great promise in this direction in that, it will help to educate and create awareness against the treatment of the Osu as inferior human beings, a situation that had caused more alienation among Igbo stock. The study utilized qualitative data sourced through key respondents' interviews of chairmen of the August women meeting, leaders of both Osu and Diala extractions purposively selected from two communities each the state. Imo and Enugu States were selected because they still have some communities that treat Osu

as inferior human beings. The data were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis. Results of the analysis showed that discrimination against the Osus in the South-East was based on mere belief and ignorance transferred from one generation to the other and that patterns and levels of discrimination against the Osus took the form of rejection, open abuse, planned attacks, divorce, isolation, separation and applying of poison. The study concluded that effective and rapid mitigation of the Osu caste system in the South-East demands a multi-faceted approach in its implementation as it affects both men and women in the region.

Criticisms and Challenges of Women's August Meeting

The history of the 'August Meeting' among Igbo women shows that it has not always been a smooth story to tell about its conduct, activities and achievements nor has its convocation been without the normal challenges and difficulties that have confronted such gatherings in recent times. Indeed, there were issues of conflict generation and/or escalation that were attributed to the group in various parts of Igboland. The initial branding of this annual congress as 'evil', 'wasteful' and 'chauvinistic' (probably due to its presumed feminist posture) was a major setback in the proper rooting of this ideal at the time. Similarly, its unacceptability and boycott by most Pentecostal-based church members and the indifference shown by some others posed yet another set of problems which, to an extent, militated against the proper functioning of the group in parts of Igboland. The first criticism this women's annual re-union faced, and still faces, is that it is a mere "fashion show" for women of class to showcase their husbands' affluence, or indeed, theirs. Mgbeahurika (2008, p. 56) asserted that women's August Meeting is characterized by ostentatious show of wealth. He further noted that: It behooves men in the South East whose wives are members to buy the latest fabric for them. Unfortunately, husbands who could not make their wives look important during "August Meeting" are seen, most times, to be Efulufu (worthless persons). Their wives would deride them. So, men also prepare big for their wives to stave off the shame.

Anamelechi (2006, p. 7) pointed to this fact as underlining the groups' propensity for conflict generation, especially at the family level, in Igbo communities: There was a time woman were coming to the meeting to show off their husbands' wealth. Men were then going to take loans to buy new clothes for their wives for the "August Meeting", and if they (their husbands) do not provide them, this meant big problems in their families. Many of these families broke up on account of this trend. Without a doubt, the annual gathering at 'that time' shifted from being an issue-oriented one and a conscious effort at community building, to one in which married Igbo women from all over the world flocked back home to what could best be termed a 'big jamboree'. For instance, Ifedigbo (2008: 109) noted the attitude of these women, especially the *abroadians* to the congress: The abroad women carried themselves with an air, stamping their superiority to the home-based women and it was a thing of pride for every home-based granny to have an abroad daughter-in-law who she showed off at the August Meeting. Women who did not turn out in their best or whose best was not good enough i.e. did not meet the prevailing standard, were treated as second class and their opinion in the meeting was more often than not disregarded.

Some women, in some other given instances, are known to have sunk all their savings into preparations for the meetings, thus leaving their families even poorer. Abonyi (2008) believed that these challenges occur because 'August Meeting', as currently practiced in most Igbo communities, 'has grossly deviated from the purpose for which they were initially formed'. In consequence, instead of these women coming back from the meetings better equipped to face their roles as mothers and wives, most of them have been found to be more vain, emptier and materialistic with no evidence of improvement; developments that have made some men to literally 'ban' their wives from attending any such meetings (Abonyi 2008).

An interesting angle was even canvassed by some who held 'hard views' on the 'August Meeting'. For them, the 'August Meeting' groups are merely a further and 'covert' extension of 'patriarchy' and male domination. In line with this pattern of thought, a respondent notes thus: 'However you look at it, these women only do the bidding

of the men who act behind. Their decisions are most times men-induced' (Eberechukwu, 2008). Ogbenyealu (2008) further corroborated this theory of patriarchal extension, pointing out that 'these groups are made up of women who are married and so, true to our African tradition, first loyalty will always be to their husbands'. There is also a seeming boycott of the 'August Meeting' by Pentecostal Church members, who see it as not conforming with their core beliefs and practices as 'born-again Christians'. This has actually led to some divisions and disaffections in some Igbo communities. The argument against these Christian sects' position on the "August Meeting" and its activities is that, at the end of the day, these "bornagain Christians" will very much benefit from whatever development project initiated or carried out by the women's group, as there is no way they could be excluded from these gains.

Thus, the bulk of the women involved in the 'August Meeting' and their various projects are mainly those of the Catholic, Anglican, Apostolic, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations. Hence this development is a significant drawback to the 'August Meeting' activities in the rural communities of Igbo land.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on social responsibility theory. The first formal theory of social responsibility was developed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1965. The conflict analysis tool of social responsibility theory is considered useful for explaining the reason why women must be involved in conflict management and peace building. This theory puts lots of responsibility on the women. Social responsibility theory gives theoretical explanation of women involvement in conflict management and peace building activities through the organization of programmes that would promote tranquility and development.

The thrust of this theory is that conflict can be prevented if the stakeholders, especially women can take peace education and advocacy as part of their institutional responsibility and that woman have the task of putting community interest above their parochial interest. The unique nature of women makes society to expect a particular role which they should play in getting rid of social evils, educating people, criticizing government policies and exposing other wrong doings. In the words of Middleton (2009), social responsibility entails the necessity for the women to keep society's interest as a top priority. This can also be seen as a collective responsibility or public interest responsibility. The responsibility in the context of this study does not only apply to women in positions of authority but also the whole women in the community wherever they are located.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was the descriptive survey design. This study was carried out in Ezza North Local Government Area, Ebonyi State Nigeria. The population of the study is one and two thousand three hundred and thirty (102,330) according to available record in the Local Government Area. The sample size was determined with topman's index (Kothari, 2018). However, the sample size was three hundred and sixty-eight (368) respondents while the sample technique adopted was purposive sampling technique. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents and the data collected were presented and analyzed using simple percentages and frequency tables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

All the data collected through the questionnaire were fully analyzed and discussed in an attempt to provide answers to the research questions. A total of four (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered to women in communities in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi State, three hundred and sixty-eight (368) were properly filled and returned, while thirty-two (32) copies representing (8%) were not properly filled or returned. Therefore, a total number of 368 copies returned, representing (92%) of the return rate was used for the analysis. This subheading is organized under two sections A and B. Section A deals with demographic characteristics of respondents, while section B treats thematic issues.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Information was gathered on respondents' age, marital status, and educational qualification.

Information on respondents' ages are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage%
between 18 and 30yrs	70	19
between 31 and 43yrs	120	32.6
between 44 and 55yrs	92	25
between 56yrs and above	86	23.4
Total	368	100

Fieldwork (2022).

Information in table 1 above shows that 70 respondents were aged between 18 and 30 years representing 19%, 120 respondents were aged between 31 and 43years representing (48.7%), 92 respondents were aged between 44 and 55years representing (48.7%) while 86 respondents were aged between 56 years and above representing (19.7%). This implies that majority of the women who attend civil servants in Ebonyi State were within the age bracket of 31-43 years.

Information on respondents' marital statuses are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Marital Status of the Respondents

Status	Frequency	Percentage%
Married	290	78.8
Single	37	10.1
Widows	41	11.1
Total	368	100

Sources: Fieldwork, (2022).

Table 2 above shows that 290 respondents, representing (78.8%) were married, 37 respondents were single, representing (10.1%), while 41 respondents representing 11.1% were widows. This is an indication that majority of women who responded to questionnaire were married.

Information on respondents' educational qualifications are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Year of Service of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage%
PhD	30	8.2
M.Sc B.Sc	50	13.6
HND	110	29.9
OND/NCE	31	8.4
SSCE	48	13
FSLC	79	21.5
Total	368	100

Source: Fieldwork, (2022).

Table 3 above shows that 30 respondents, representing (8.2%) were PhD holders, 50 respondents representing (13.6%) were M. Sc holders, 110 respondents, representing (29.9%) were B.Sc holders, 31 respondents,

representing (8.4%) were HND holders, 48 respondents, representing (13%) were OND/NCE holders, 79 respondents, representing (21.5%) were SCCE polders, while 20 respondents, representing (5.4%) were with first school caving certificate.

Section B: Thematic Analysis

Table 5: Respondents view on the extent to which women's meeting in August solve key challenges of women in Ezza North LGA, Ebonyi State.

SN	Variable / Response	Confirmed	Did not Confirm
6	Money contributed during the women's meeting in		
7	August is given out as soft loans to other women	313 (85.1%)	55 (14.9%)
8	facing financial problem.		
9	During the women's August meeting, women come	293 (79.6%)	75 (20.4%)
10	together to suggest solutions to women's poor		
	participation in politics. Women discuss the	332 (90.2%)	220 36 (9.8%)
	increased intimate partner violence against women	(59.8%)	148 (40.2%)
	during August meeting.		
	Most women get job opportunities from the annual	321 (87.2%)	47 (12.8%)
	women's meeting in August.		
	Women meet to discuss the excessive sexual abuse		
	on women, especially in the rural areas.		

Source: Fieldwork, (2022).

From the information in table 5 above, it is gathered that 313 of the respondents, representing (85.1%) confirmed that money contributed during the women's meeting in August was given out as soft loans to other women facing financial problem, while 55 respondents, representing (14.9%) did not confirm that money contributed during the women's meeting in August is given out as soft loans to other women facing financial problem; 293 respondents, representing (79.6%) of the respondents confirmed that during the women's August meeting, women come together to suggest solutions to women's poor participation in politics, while 75, respondents, representing (20.4%) of the respondents did not confirm that during the women's August meeting, women come together to suggest solutions to women's poor participation in politics; 332, representing (90.2%) of the respondents confirmed that women discuss the increased intimate partner violence against women during August meeting, while 36, representing (9.8%) did not confirm that women discuss the increased intimate partner violence against women during August meeting; 220, representing (59.8%) of the respondents confirmed that most women get job opportunities from the annual women's meeting in August, while 148, representing (40.2%) of the respondents did not confirm that most women get job opportunities from the annual women's meeting in August. More so, 321 representing (87.2%) of the respondents confirmed that women meet to discuss the excessive sexual abuse on women, especially in the rural areas, while 47 representing (12.8 %) of the respondents did not confirm that women meet to discuss the excessive sexual abuse on women, especially in the rural areas.

Table 6: Respondents view on reasons why women meet in August in Ezza North LGA, Ebonyi State.

SN	Variable / Response	Confirmed	Did not Confirm
11	Women meet in every August to bring all the	350 (95.1%)	18 (4.9%)
12	women both home and abroad together for	318 (86.4%)	50 (13.6%)
13	reunion.	298 (80.9%)	70 (19%)
14	Women meeting in August is an avenue for the	281 (76.4%)	87 (23.6%)
15	women to discuss health matters, children	319 (86.7%)	49 (13.3%)
	welfare, marriages and family life, 318 (86.4%)		
	50 (13.6%) etc.		

Women meet in August every year to fight against female genital mutilation and other issues affecting the child.

The women August meeting is a convention for women to show off their class and wealth.

It gives the women the opportunities to be integrated into their community development projects as stakeholders.

Source: fieldwork, (2022)

From the information in table 6 above, it was gathered that 350 respondents representing (95.1%) confirmed that women meet in every August to bring all the women both home and abroad together for reunion, while 18 representing (4.9%) did not confirm that women meet in every August to bring all the women both home and abroad together for reunion; 318, representing (86.4%) of the respondents confirmed that women meeting in August is an avenue for the women to discuss health matters, children welfare, marriages and family life, etc, while 50, representing (13.6%) of the respondents did not confirm that women meeting in August is an avenue for the women to discuss health matters, children welfare, marriages and family life, etc; 298, representing (80.9%) of the respondents confirmed that women meet in August every year to fight against female genital mutilation and other issues affecting the child, while 70, representing (19%) did not confirm that women meet in August every year to fight against female genital mutilation and other issues affecting the child; 281, representing (76.4%) of the respondents confirmed that women August meeting is a convention for women to show off their class and wealth, while 87, representing (23.6%) of the respondents did not confirm that women August meeting is a convention for women to show off their class and wealth. Lastly, 319, representing (86.7%) of the respondents confirmed that August meeting gives women opportunities to be integrated into their community development projects as stakeholders, while 49, representing (13.3%) of the respondents did not confirm that August meeting gives women opportunities to be integrated into their community development projects as stakeholders.

Discussion of Findings

Having examined the impact of August meeting in community development in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi State, it was found in table 5 that women's meeting in August has solved key challenges of women. The study found that money contributed during the women's meeting in August is given out as soft loans to other women facing financial problems. During the women's August Meeting, women come together to suggest solutions to women's poor participation in politics, discuss the increased intimate partner violence against women during August meeting and that most women get job opportunities from the annual women's meeting in August. Women also meet to discuss the excessive sexual abuse on women, especially in the rural areas. In line with this finding, Nwaoko (2008) affirmed that August meeting was used by Igbo women to settle disputes, such as marital or family conflict. They also use the medium to campaign against discrimination and sexual abuse women that mostly reside in the rural communities.

More so, the study also investigated the reasons why women meet in August in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi State. The study, however, found that women meet in every August to bring all the women both home and abroad together for reunion; women's meeting in August is an avenue for women to discuss health matters, children's welfare, marriages and family life, etc; women meet in August every year to fight against female genital mutilation and other issues affecting the child. It is also found that August meeting is a convention for women to show off their class and wealth, and that gives the women the opportunity to be integrated into their community development projects as stakeholders. Nzuko (2008) confirmed that Igbo women take August Meeting seriously.

From June every year, they usually began to plan and prepare. Even those in America and Europe also make their own plans and send delegates to attend and bring them feedback from the proceedings. Women come together to for reunion, and to discuss the welfare of the entire community (Nzuko, 2008).

Conclusion

August Meeting is an example of grassroots mobilization of women towards community development through self-help. In the past, through it, women have fought against cultural malpractices against them attracting government intervention resulting in legislation in some instances. Many Igbo women such as the women in Ezza North LGA of Ebony State participate in the August Meeting, but some, such as the “born again” Igbo women, are yet to embrace the idea. The gathering is, however, popular and appears set to continue if given the necessary support and encouragement by both government and non-governmental organizations. Finally, this study concludes that August meeting can be used to bring development in communities, to solve key challenges of women, to trace the causes of conflict and can also be used to prevent violent conflicts in the society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that women at executive level should appeal to their members who have higher educational qualifications to organize empowerment seminars for the less educated members. This will help to create more awareness and inculcate women on the need for community development through August meeting. Also, governments at all levels should provide grants and aids to the women for comprehensive training in skills acquisition and microbusinesses that would enhance rural development. Besides, religious leaders should encourage women to participate in women’s August meeting and stop the criticisms against the annual meeting embarked by women to promote socio-economic and community development.

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