

## **INFLUENCE OF ANNUAL AUGUST MEETINGS ON WOMEN MOBILIZATION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study examined the influence of Annual August Meetings on women mobilization towards the socio-economic development of Imo State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consist of 2,990 women who are members of registered August meetings in selected LGAs of the state. A total of 299 respondents representing 10% of the population were chosen as sample through the stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected through a 25 item likert type questionnaire titled; August Meeting and Socio-Economic Development Questionnaire (AMSEDQ) with  $r=0.81$  reliability coefficient. It was analyzed with the use of the mean statistics. The findings revealed that the gatherings of the Annual August meetings serve as veritable platform in mobilizing women to participate in programmes of women empowerment, girl child education, infrastructural development and the elimination of some harmful cultural practices in Igboland. Based on the findings, it is recommended that government, non-governmental bodies and other stakeholders should encourage the womenfolk to participate in activities of August meeting to pool their resources together for the implementation of socio-economic development in communities in Imo State and other parts of Igboland in the South Eastern part of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Annual August Meetings, women, mobilization, Socio-Economic development, Communities.*

### **Introduction**

In the practice of community development, the extent to which resources of the society are harnessed to bring about improvement on the wellbeing and socio-economic development at the community level depends on how people are mobilized. The effective mobilization of people vis-à-vis resource utilization is sine qua non to every development effort needed to galvanize the

people to action. One way of mobilizing people into action is by conversing on meetings for collective voices for decision makings. In Nigeria, a regular feature in the organization of meetings is found among the Igbo held during the month of August tagged “Annual August Meeting” by the women.

Annual August meeting is a forum that represents the gathering for the socio-cultural, political and economic development initiatives of women within the public sphere. The people of Igbo land in the south eastern states of Nigeria consider the month of August as very significant as women organize themselves into groups and get involved in one economic activity or the other to assist in developing their homes and communities at large. The Annual August meeting serves as a platform for women in the identification of their needs and proffer lasting solutions thereby acting as catalysts to the developmental processes.

Writing on the gathering of women, Nwaoko (2008) and Ifedigbo (2008), adduced that the month of August to the Igbos is a month in which women visit their home to discuss matters relating to the pursuit of their communities welfares and national developments. The idea was borne out of women recognition and the necessity for them to make contributions to the development of their communities. The meeting activities has now spread and had become rallying points to harness the economic potentials and galvanize support for the women folks. It is now commonplace to see large groups of predominantly female Igbos travelling home in the month of August to hold the annual meetings for different purposes to provide services for their communities.

The first ever South East August Women Meeting was held at Owerri, the Imo State capital on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016, with the theme: looking at the next generation of mothers. The event was conceived by the wives of the South East Governors and was chaired by Senator Jim Nwobodo. The wife of the Imo State Governor Mrs. Nneoma Okorocha used the medium to draw attention on ways of eliminating obnoxious and harmful cultural practices against women. According to her, the Annual August meeting should afford women the opportunities to acquire “self-improvement skills and have access to better their lives” and also, to shift their focus from yearly jamboree and show offs to communities developmental projects and empowerment initiatives that can turn their lives around. The event created the opportunity to educate women in various trades and crafts that would improve their standard of living to bring about self-reliance.

Bai (2010) and UNIFEM (2000) believed that investing in women, is therefore a means to sustainable development, contributions to economic development; and the key to economic progresses anywhere in the world

The conceptualization of the South East Women meeting relates to one of the core objectives which community developments are designed to achieve. Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) noted that the dynamics of society involves an expansion of the objectives of community development to include the fight against ignorance, poverty, diseases, harmful and obnoxious cultural practices and social apathy among people regardless of age, sex, class or religion. A significant aspect is that several communities of the Igbo extraction plan some of their communal activities to fall within the meeting periods. These afford them the opportunities of making the best use of the presence of the large number of their daughters and daughters-in-law abroad, and the meetings often turn out to be quite desirable as various communities usually benefit in one way or the other from the various initiatives the women groups bring home from their various places of abode.

Annul August meetings are therefore veritable platform to promote not only the social status of women but to bring about development in various communities. One notable area is that the platform is used to address educational matters especially that of the girl child. Kobani (2015) asserted that education is one of the most critical areas for empowerment of women and girl-child, stressing that the orientation of women folks minimize the effect of gender discrimination in some societies where discrimination exists in educational opportunities based on gender bias. Against this background, Kwapong (2005) stressed that empowerment of women through education is a process of improving the human capital of women for effective participation in all aspects of development of a nation. Similarly, Nwizu (2005) subscribed that empowering women with the knowledge and skills are required for effective adjustment and functioning in the society are very necessary. This is in accordance with the women empowerment programme of United Nations, which is to promote gender equality and to empower all women and girls with equal accesses to education, healthcare, decent work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes to benefit societies and humanity at large.

Another essential aspect associated with women gathering is the pooling of resources together through the process of fund raising. Funds are generated to promote the spirit of self-

help in financing capital projects like renovation and construction of church halls, civic centers, health centers, satellite markets etc to benefit people at the community. Ibeh (2008) maintained that many communities in Nigeria had attained their various levels of development through self-help development projects and not necessarily through government assistances. This is possible through citizens' participation in community development projects which are playing significant roles in the moral, social, economic, agricultural, and political development and stability of both the home and the nation as a whole, Eganti (2005).

Women in Igbo land have suffered one form of discrimination or the other in various communities. The discrimination ranged from harmful cultural practices like widowhood practice, female genital mutilation, syndrome of male preference among others. Ifemeji and Umejiaku (2004) asserted that for decades, spouses of Igbo customary law relational unions and little girls of such association have battled with various harsh, corrupting and prejudicial social practices which terribly hinder their constitutionally guaranteed rights. They enumerated the discriminatory tendencies against women to include chastisement, wife inheritance, harmful widowhood practices, refund of dowry, underestimation of ladies' privileges in case of disintegration of traditional marriages, female disinheritance, female gender mutilation, female trafficking and son-preference syndrome and polygamous nature of customary law marriages. Onwubuariri (2007) and onwuejiogwu (2000) lamented that it is quite worrisome that these discriminatory aspects like osu caste, widowhood practice and violence against women appear to be so deeply rooted in our Igbo cultural system that uprooting same have for decades proved an uphill task. These discrimination regrettably persist despite the global upsurge in feminist jurisprudence which culminated in the enactment of international and national treaties and other instruments on women emancipation and empowerment.

It is true that every nation needs a healthy workforce and population to survive over time as the wealth of the nation depends on the health of its citizenry. When citizens are healthy, they have the propensity to exercise greater freedom in various facets of human activities. Against this background, Arikawei, Omun and Abia (2017) highlighted that the education on maternal health of women is one of the most important aspects of human health that promote the care of nursing mothers and children upbringing which guarantee healthy societies. The awareness of women about their maternal status is an important consideration to safeguard the life of an expectant mother. Such awareness will help to reduce the tendency of maternal and infant

mortalities in our societies that are bedeviled with numerous health challenges. The participation of women on health issues should entail a platform of enlightenment on population issues, food and nutrition as well as the reproductive disposition of women. For this reason, Okonofua (2013) pointed out that, clearly, integrated maternal, newborn and child health strategy is an important approach for the reduction in rates of maternal and child mortality in African countries. The growing concern of all should be to demonstrate efforts aimed at building healthy climates so as to produce healthy livings for safe and secured societies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Igbo land of Eastern Nigeria, the month of August is a period when the women in most communities assemble annually to discuss matters affecting the women folk. The forum does not only provide opportunities for newly married women to be initiated into womanhood but also to promote socio-economic developments of the societies. The platform is used as an avenue to educate members of different groups on women's rights, promote the maternal health of women, eliminate some obnoxious and harmful practices against women and promote infrastructural development which enhances the socio-economic development of people at the community level.

However, there had been a public perception and film shows through the Nigerian home videos and Nollywood that the activities of Annual August Meetings are used as means of showcasing selfish interests, class competition and rivalry of the women to run down the home. Moreso, it acts as a breeding ground to advance fetish and nefarious activities to the detriment of societal development. In Imo State of Nigeria, the emergence of this Annual August Meetings exist virtually in all communities. Therefore, the question that comes to mind is, are the Annual August Meeting doing anything to mobilize the consciousness and raise the status of women? Are they helping to promote the socio-economic development of their respective societies? It is against this background that this study intends to examine the influence of Annual August Meeting on Women Mobilization towards the socio-economic development of communities in Imo State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of the Annual August Meeting on women mobilization towards the socio-economic development of communities in Imo State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Examine how the Annual August Meetings are used to mobilize women to participate in programmes of economic empowerment towards the socio-economic development of communities in Imo State.
- ii. Ascertain how the Annual August Meetings are used to promote Girl-child education towards the eradication of illiteracy in Imo State.
- iii. Find out how Annual August Meetings are used to educate women on maternal health towards the reduction of mortality rate in Imo State.
- iv. Examine how the Annual August Meetings are used to mobilize women in the provision of infrastructural development to enhance the quality of life in communities in Imo State.
- v. Ascertain how the Annual August Meetings are used to eliminate the harmful traditional and obnoxious practices against women in Imo State.

### **Research Questions:**

The following research questions are posed to guide the study:

1. In what ways had the Annual August Meetings assisted in mobilizing women to participate in programmes of economic empowerment towards the socio-economic development of communities in Imo State?
2. How had the gathering of the Annual August Meetings assisted in promoting Girl-child education towards the eradication of illiteracy in Imo State?
3. How had the Annual August Meetings helped in educating women on issues of maternal health towards the reduction of mortality rates in Imo State?
4. In what ways had Annual August Meetings helped in mobilizing women in the provision of infrastructural development to enhance the quality of life in communities in Imo State?
5. In what ways had the Annual August Meetings assisted in the elimination of harmful traditional and obnoxious practices against women in Imo State?

### **Method**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of two thousand nine hundred and ninety (2,990) women from twenty one (21) functional groups derived from field survey data in Imo State. The sample was two hundred and ninety nine respondent representing 10% as recommended by Nkpa (1997). It was chosen through the stratified random sampling technique as shown.

**Table 1:**

**Showing the Population and Sample of Participants of August Meeting Groups in Selected LGAs in Imo State.**

| S/N          | August Meeting Groups                  | LGA          | Number of Registered Members | Sample Selected (10%) |
|--------------|--|--------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1            | Oguta Progressive Union                | Oguta        | 120                          | 12                    |
| 2            | Egwe Progressive Association           | Oguta        | 160                          | 16                    |
| 3            | Egbuoma Development Union              | Oguta        | 120                          | 12                    |
| 4            | Anara Women Progressive Union          | Isiala-Mbano | 100                          | 10                    |
| 5            | Amuzi Women Forum                      | Obowo        | 110                          | 11                    |
| 6            | Amaifeke Progressive Association (APA) | Orlu         | 180                          | 18                    |
| 7            | Ihioma Women Association (IWA)         | Orlu         | 140                          | 14                    |
| 8            | Umudioka Women Forum                   | Orlu         | 200                          | 20                    |
| 9            | Umuguma Women Association              | Owerri West  | 160                          | 16                    |
| 10           | Nkwerre Women Progressive Union        | Nkwerre      | 130                          | 13                    |
| 11           | Abazu Development Union                | Ikeduru      | 150                          | 15                    |
| 12           | Amakohia Progressive Association       | Ihitte-Uboma | 130                          | 13                    |
| 13           | Isu Development Union                  | Nwangele     | 200                          | 20                    |
| 14           | Ezulu Women Association                | Onuimo       | 120                          | 12                    |
| 15           | Umunabali Development Association      | Nwangele     | 120                          | 12                    |
| 16           | Amaigbo Women Association              | Nkwerre      | 140                          | 14                    |
| 17           | Umuneke-Ngor Women Association         | Ngor-Okpala  | 130                          | 13                    |
| 18           | Emekuku Women Forum                    | Owerri North | 120                          | 12                    |
| 19           | Okigwe Women Association               | Okigwe       | 160                          | 16                    |
| 20           | Ahiazu Mbaise Women Forum              | Mbaise       | 140                          | 14                    |
| 21           | Ehime Development Union                | Ehime-Mbano  | 160                          | 16                    |
| <b>Total</b> |  |              | <b>2,990</b>                 | <b>299</b>            |

Five research questions were posed to guide the study. A four point structured Likert questionnaire titled “August Meetings and Socio-Economic Development Questionnaire (AMSEDQ)” was designed for data collection. It was validated by two specialists in the Department of Educational Foundations, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The test-retest

method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. It was computed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation method. A reliability co-efficient of 0.81 was obtained. The mean statistics was used in answering the research questions at 2.50 as the criterion mean used for decision making and analysis of the work.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Research Question 1:**

In what ways had the Annual August Meetings assisted in mobilizing women to participate in programmes of economic empowerment towards the socio-economic development of communities in Imo State?

**Table 2:**

**Mean responses on ways the Annual August Meetings mobilized women for economic empowerment towards socio-economic development of communities in Imo Stat**

| <b>S/N</b>        | <b>Statement</b>   | <b>SA</b>     | <b>A</b>     | <b>D</b>    | <b>SD</b>  | <b>Total</b>  | <b><math>\bar{X}</math></b> | <b>Decision</b> |
|-------------------|--|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1.                | August meeting encourages women to get agricultural inputs to boost their farming activities.                              | 75<br>(300)   | 224<br>(672) | 0<br>(0)    | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(972)  | 3.25                        | Accepted        |
| 2.                | August meeting encourages women to form co-operative societies to pool resources together to assist one another.           | 262<br>(1048) | 37<br>(111)  | 0<br>(0)    | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(1159) | 3.87                        | Accepted        |
| 3.                | August meeting provides opportunity for women to acquire skills for self-reliance.   | 112<br>(448)  | 74<br>(222)  | 74<br>(148) | 39<br>(39) | 299<br>(857)  | 2.86                        | Accepted        |
| 4.                | August meeting provides women opportunity to get financial support through micro credit.                                   | 112<br>(448)  | 150<br>(450) | 37<br>(74)  | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(972)  | 3.25                        | Accepted        |
| 5.                | August meeting provides the opportunity for the women to meaningfully contribute to the community through wealth creation. | 112<br>(448)  | 150<br>(450) | 37<br>(74)  | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(972)  | 3.25                        | Accepted        |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |  |               |              |             |            |               | <b>3.29</b>                 | <b>Accepted</b> |



The result on **table 2** concerning the mean response of Annual August Meeting and mobilization of women for economic empowerment shows that items 1,2,3,4 and 5 all had mean scores of 3.25, 3.87, 2.86, 3.25 and 3.25 respectively with an overall grand mean of 3.29. This means that the research question one is accepted as the Annual August meeting has helped to mobilize women to get agricultural inputs to boost their farming activities, form co-operative societies to pool resources together to assist one another, provide opportunity to get financial support through microcredit and also provide opportunity for the women to meaningfully contribute to the community through wealth creation.

### **Research Question 2:**

How had the gathering of the Annual August Meetings assisted in promoting Girl-child education towards the eradication of illiteracy in Imo State?

**Table 3:**

**Mean responses on the ways the Annual August Meetings assisted in promoting Girl-Child Education towards eradicating illiteracy in communities in Imo State**

| S/N               | Statement  | SA           | A            | D            | SD         | Total        | $\bar{X}$   | Decision        |
|-------------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 6.                | August meeting provides avenue to facilitate women and education of girl child in formal and non-formal education.       | 75<br>(300)  | 112<br>(336) | 112<br>(224) | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(860) | 2.87        | Accepted        |
| 7.                | August meeting organizes scholarship scheme for indigent students of the community.                                      | 75<br>(300)  | 187<br>(561) | 37<br>(74)   | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(935) | 3.12        | Accepted        |
| 8.                | August meeting is used as an avenue to organize seminars and campaign on the importance of education for the girl child. | 112<br>(448) | 75<br>(225)  | 75<br>(150)  | 37<br>(37) | 299<br>(860) | 2.87        | Accepted        |
| 9.                | August meeting renovates community schools for the students teaching and learning.                                       | 75<br>(300)  | 112<br>(336) | 75<br>(150)  | 37<br>(37) | 299<br>(823) | 2.75        | Accepted        |
| 10.               | August meeting is used as an avenue to provide library and instructional materials for teaching and learning.            | 0<br>(0)     | 187<br>(561) | 112<br>(224) | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(785) | 2.62        | Accepted        |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |  |              |              |              |            |              | <b>2.84</b> | <b>Accepted</b> |

The result on **Table 3** showed that statement on items 6,7,8,9 and 10 were all accepted as they all had the mean scores of 2.87, 3.12, 2.87, 2.75 and 2.62 respectively. These indicate that the Annual August Meetings serve as forum for promoting girl-child education. With the grand mean of 2.84, the responses show that women and education of girl-child, award of scholarships to indigent students, campaign on the importance of education were activities carried out by women of the August Meetings. Similarly, the result show that the medium is used to generate funds for the renovation of community schools for students and also in providing library and instructional materials to promote education in various communities.

### **Research Question 3:**

How had the Annual August Meetings helped in educating women on issues of maternal health towards the reduction of mortality rates in Imo State?

**Table 4:**

**Mean responses on how the Annual August Meetings are used to educate women on Maternal health towards the reduction of mortality rate in Imo State**

| S/N               | Statement   | SA           | A           | D            | SD       | Total        | $\bar{X}$   | Decision        |
|-------------------|---|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 11.               | They organize programmes that educate women on family planning.   | 75<br>(300)  | 75<br>(225) | 149<br>(298) | 0<br>(0) | 299<br>(823) | 2.75        | Accepted        |
| 12.               | They organize seminars on the importance of health education, breast feeding and personal hygiene.                        | 112<br>(448) | 75<br>(225) | 112<br>(224) | 0<br>(0) | 299<br>(897) | 3.00        | Accepted        |
| 13.               | August meeting creates a platform to educate women to patronize antenatal care services.                                  | 112<br>(448) | 75<br>(225) | 112<br>(224) | 0<br>(0) | 299<br>(879) | 3.00        | Accepted        |
| 14.               | August meeting creates a platform to educate women to patronize immunization programmes to protect their new born babies. | 149<br>(596) | 38<br>(114) | 112<br>(224) | 0<br>(0) | 299<br>(934) | 3.12        | Accepted        |
| 15.               | August meeting creates a platform to educate women to exercise regularly during the period of pregnancies.                | 0<br>(0)     | 75<br>(225) | 224<br>(448) | 0<br>(0) | 299<br>(673) | 2.25        | Rejected        |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |   |              |             |              |          |              | <b>2.82</b> | <b>Accepted</b> |

The result on **table 4** shows that the statements on items 11, 12, 13 and 14 were all accepted, except for statement on item 15 that was rejected. These imply that the Annual August Meetings are used as forums to organize programmes that educate women on family planning, the importance of health education and personal hygiene. They also created platforms to educate women to patronize antenatal care services and also creates a platform to educate women to patronize immunization programmes to protect their new born babies through patronage on immunization exercises. With a grand mean of 2.82, therefore, the findings on research question three are accepted.

#### **Research Question 4:**

In what ways had Annual August Meetings helped in mobilizing women in the provision of infrastructural development to enhance the quality of life in communities in Imo State?

**Table 5: Mean responses on the ways Annual August Meetings was used to mobilize women in the provision of infrastructural development in communities in Imo State**

| S/N               | Statement  | SA           | A            | D            | SD         | Total         | $\bar{X}$   | Decision        |
|-------------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 16.               | August meeting is used for financial contribution for the provision of water and electricity in the rural communities. | 150<br>(600) | 149<br>(447) | 0<br>(0)     | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(1047) | 3.50        | Accepted        |
| 17.               | August meeting is used for financial contribution for building and renovation of churches and schools.                 | 187<br>(748) | 112<br>(336) | 0<br>(0)     | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(1084) | 3.62        | Accepted        |
| 18.               | August meeting is used for financial contribution for maintenance of feeder roads in the society.                      | 37<br>(148)  | 112<br>(336) | 113<br>(226) | 37<br>(37) | 299<br>(747)  | 2.50        | Accepted        |
| 19.               | August meeting is used for financial contribution for recreational projects.   | 150<br>(600) | 149<br>(447) | 0<br>(0)     | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(1047) | 3.50        | Accepted        |
| 20.               | August meeting is used to make demand from government in the provision of infrastructural facilities.                  | 75<br>(300)  | 149<br>(447) | 75<br>(150)  | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(897)  | 3.00        | Accepted        |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |  |              |              |              |            |               | <b>3.32</b> | <b>Accepted</b> |

The result on **table 5** shows that statement on item 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 with mean scores of 3.50, 3.62, 3.00, 3.50 and 3.00 were all accepted. These imply that the Annual August meetings contributed in the provision of water facilities and electricity in the rural areas, contribute in building and renovation of churches and school buildings. Also, the August Meetings was used as avenue for contribution to the maintenance of feeder roads in the society, contribute in fund raising programmes for developmental projects and also to make demands from government in the provision of infrastructural facilities. It has an overall grand mean of 3.32, indicating that answers to research question four is therefore accepted.

### **Research Question 5.**

In what ways had the Annual August Meetings assisted in the elimination of harmful traditional and obnoxious practices against women in Imo State?

**Table 6:**

**Mean responses on the ways Annual August Meeting had assisted in the elimination of harmful traditional and obnoxious practices against women in Imo State**

| S/N               | Statement  | SA           | A            | D            | SD         | Total         | $\bar{X}$   | Decision        |
|-------------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 21.               | August meeting is used to educate women to agitate for right to inheritance upon the death of their husband. | 149<br>(596) | 112<br>(336) | 38<br>(76)   | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(1008) | 3.37        | Accepted        |
| 22.               | August meeting is used to educate women on stopping the harmful practices of female genital mutilation.      | 112<br>(448) | 187<br>(561) | 0<br>(0)     | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(1009) | 3.37        | Accepted        |
| 23.               | August meeting is used to educate women not to get involved in fetish and ritual practices.                  | 74<br>(296)  | 112<br>(336) | 113<br>(226) | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(858)  | 2.86        | Accepted        |
| 24.               | August meeting is used to educate women not to be involved in the Osu (caste) system.                        | 37<br>(148)  | 113<br>(339) | 149<br>(298) | 0<br>(0)   | 299<br>(785)  | 2.62        | Accepted        |
| 25.               | August meeting is used to educate women not to be involved in prostitution and child trafficking.            | 112<br>(448) | 112<br>(336) | 0<br>(0)     | 75<br>(75) | 299<br>(859)  | 2.87        | Accepted        |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |  |              |              |              |            |               | <b>3.06</b> | <b>Accepted</b> |

The result on **table 6** shows that statements on items 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25 have the mean responses of 3.37, 3.37, 2.86, 2.62 and 2.87 respectively and were accepted. Implying that the August Meetings are used in educating women to agitate for their rights the death of their husbands, educating women against the harmful practices of female genital mutilation, educating women not to get involved in fetish and ritual practices, educating women not to be involved in the Osu (caste) system and also educating them not to be involved in prostitution and child trafficking. The annual August meetings assist in the elimination of harmful and obnoxious practices against women in Imo State. The responses have overall grand mean of 3.06 and it is accepted.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results of the study presented in **Table 2** revealed that the congregation of women under the auspices of Annual August Meetings as veritable platform to mobilize women for economic empowerment. The August meetings are used in encouraging women to get agricultural inputs to boost their farming activities, to form co-operative societies to pool resources together to assist one another, provide opportunities for acquisition of skills for self-reliance, provide opportunities for financial support and also provide opportunities for women to meaningfully contribute to the communities through wealth creations. These corroborate with Bai (2010) and UNIFEM (2000) who believed that investing in women, is therefore a means to sustainable developments, contributions to economic development; and the key to economic progress anywhere in the world. Similarly, Nwizu (2005) subscribed that empowering women with the knowledge and skills they require for effective adjustment and functioning in the societies are very necessary. These processes will help to raise the socio-economic standard of women in different ways.

Result in **table 3** revealed the ways the Annual August Meetings has assisted in promoting Girl-child education towards the eradication of illiteracy and educational empowerment. The result indicated that women committed themselves in carrying out enlightenment campaigns on the importance of girls' education, granting of scholarships to female students, provision of libraries and resource materials to community schools for effective teaching and learning. Through these processes, greater number of women were opportune to become educated to agitate for equity, engage in employment and become productive home managers. These findings are in line with the work of Kwapong (2005) who noted that

empowerment of women through education is a process of improving the human capital of women for effective participation in all aspects of development of a nation. These view are supported by Kobani (2015) who asserted that education is one of the most critical areas for empowerment for women and the girl-child, stressing that the orientation of women folks minimizes the effect of gender discrimination in some societies where discriminations exist in educational opportunities based on gender bias.

Similarly, **table 4** lucidly demonstrated the use of Annual August Meeting in educating women on maternal health for the reduction of mortality. The result implies that women had benefited from their meetings especially on issues of maternal and reproductive health. Greater number of women attested to the fact that they received enlightenment on the benefits of ante natal care, breast feeding nutritional habit and so on. The results corroborate the findings of Arikawei, Omun and Abia (2017) who maintained that education on maternal health of women is one of the most important aspects of human health that promotes the care of nursing mothers and children upbringing which guarantee healthy societies.

Furthermore, result in **table 5** revealed the ways in which the Annual August Meeting are used to mobilize women in the provision of infrastructural development to enhance the quality of life in communities. The result, affirm that provision of infrastructural development had been a guiding philosophy of women in their meetings. These infrastructural facilities include renovations of dilapidated school buildings, churches, building of markets, provision of boreholes, electricity and embarking on feeder roads. These activities agreed with Ibeh (2008) who maintained that many communities in Nigeria had attained their various levels of developments through self-help development projects and not necessarily through government assistances. The efforts of women is therefore in the right direction.

Finally, result on **table 6** explained the ways in which the Annual August Meeting assist in the elimination of harmful traditional and obnoxious practices against women in various communities, Women suffer discrimination on account of several cultural barriers. Some of these barriers are widowhood practices, Osu Caste systems and preference of the male child which are quite detrimental to human dignity. Against this background, Onwubuariri (2007) and onwuejiogwu (2000) lamented that it is quite worrisome that some discriminatory aspects like osu caste, widowhood practice and violence against women appear to be so deeply rooted in the Igbo cultural system that uprooting same have for decades proved an uphill task. Meanwhile, the

instrumentality of the August meetings now provide the desired platform and avenue in addressing some of these cultural barriers that discriminate against women in Igbo land.

## **Conclusion**

In any society, women have significant roles to play in the developmental processes. In the recent past, the women of Igbo land have been able to institutionalize for themselves platforms of discussing their affairs through august meetings. Primarily, their purposes are to initiate young women to become responsible mothers in home making. However, the platform is also used in discussing the totality of the womenfolk in the development process. Since the meeting had now become an annual event virtually in all parts of Igbo land, practitioners and development scholars need a better understanding of collaborating with the women especially on their modus operandi to mobilize support in all stratum of society. It is hoped that such understandings will galvanize the people in harnessing their potentials of advancing the economic, social and other key players of the society if the objectives of community development are to be realized.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been proffered.

1. The activities of August Meetings should be strongly encouraged by government, non-governmental bodies and individuals to support women for the promotion of their skills acquisition, small-scale businesses, and formation of co-operative societies to pool resources together to boost their productivities for economic empowerment and self-reliance.
2. The government, nongovernmental bodies and public spirited individual should support women activities of Annual August Meetings in raising funds for the provision of infrastructural facilities, enlightenment campaigns, granting of scholarships and procurement of teaching and learning materials to boost education especially for the education of the girl child.
3. The platform of the Annual August Meetings should channel more resources to provide healthcare facilities and organize regular seminars and workshops on family planning, personal hygiene and antenatal cares to help reduce infant mortalities, so as to improve on maternal healthcare.

4. The platform of the Annual August Meetings should advocate for the transformation of all obnoxious cultural practices, structures, institutions and ideologies through legislations to eliminate discrimination and subordination of women to enhance human dignity for socio-economic development in the society.

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