

August Meeting and Its Change Mantra: An Appraisal of the Quest for Economic Independence for Rural Women in the Igbo Ethnic Group of Nigeria

Grace A.T Scent, PhD

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, Nigeria. ORCID: 0000-0001-8846-6881.
E-mail: gatscent@gmail.com

Chukwu, Christian Chima, PhD*

Senior Research Fellow, Serenity Publishers, Lagos, Nigeria
ORCID: 0000-0002-4290-234X. E-mail: chukwuchidr@gmail.com
chukwuchidr@gmail.com

DOI: 10.56201/rjhcs.v9.no1.2023.pg8.22

Abstract

The impact of discrimination, subjugation and marginalization has negatively affected the psyche of women, particularly those in the rural areas of south east Nigeria. But with the emergence of August meeting, a new change has occurred. On the basis of this, this study interrogated the essence of August meeting and its change mantra, especially its economic self reliance strategy for improving the living conditions of rural women in the Igbo ethnic group of southeast Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive and survey research designs and data collection through structured questionnaires; focus group discussions and in-depth-interviews. Among the findings, the study revealed that August meeting is nowadays more than ever very committed to changing the ugly narrative of Igbo women through the building of basic socio-economic infrastructure in rural areas. Through the activities of August meeting and its change mantra, the economic self reliance of women has changed the widespread poverty amongst women. Thirdly, the study also showed that August Meeting has become a force to be reckoned with, particularly in the dismantling of all discriminatory and oppressive practices against women. Based on this, the study concluded that all the initiatives to improve women socio-economically were in line with the promotion of higher rural productivity and the good welfare of the rural population. Sequel to this, the paper 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. Secondly, August meeting should condemn any deviant behaviour that is inconsistent with the change mantra. All concerted efforts of August meeting should be guided to ensure that peace and love reign in the different communities in the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria.

Keywords: *August meeting; Patriarchy, Change mantra; Economic self-reliance: Rural areas, Critical appraisal*

1. Introduction

Despite all condemnations against the practice of patriarchy, the unatonement the Igbo traditional society of south-east Nigeria towards the non-recognition of women in the development of their immediate milieu is disturbing. The ever growing interest to perpetuate callousness against women is one of the most vexing characteristics of the Igbo ethnic group of south-east Nigeria (Chukwu, Scent, Emeka, Obi & Kalu, 2014). This attitude has hampered women's ability to be freed from poverty; they cannot secure superior options to improve their lives (Carmon, 2013). But rather than being dejected, the world has acknowledged a tremendous signal of liberation and emancipation amongst the womenfolk since the emergence of August meeting in Igboland. Undeniably, Nyong and Archibong(2018) assert that women have discovered they possess the largest untapped reservoir of talent to engage in the developmental roles in their communities, local environs and respective fields of endeavours and there is no stopping them to showcase their talents as they begin to climb new heights and consistently expand their horizon to overcome the shackles of all forms of discrimination and inequality against them. As a result of this, Igbo rural women have become more confident in their intuitiveness and desire to participate with their men folk without being seen as inferior. What is more, their hidden and suppressed exceptional qualities have blossomed and are currently serving as "agent of change" toward the realization women agenda within a once dysfunctional Igbo society.

August meeting has developed the necessary measures to ensure women are allowed to occupy the frontal seat where they can participate in decisions to improve their plight. Ever since, women have remained central in maintaining and developing the collective values, including sustainability resource management, transfer of indigenous knowledge, cultural identity and family food security (AIPP, 2014). This visible acknowledgement is not unconnected to the resilience shown after the emergence of August meeting and also the quest to create an egalitarian society. Regardless of this pursuit, patriarchy still rears its ugly head to, subjugate and oppress women. But August meeting has upped women status and positioned as the mainstay of Igbo contemporary society. Writing earlier, Chukwu, et al (2014) observed that the Igbo ethnic group is culturally endowed, and a good grasp of their cultural anthropology and cosmology showed the pride with which the people upheld their cultural practices even though some of these ways of life are archaic, dangerous, and damaging to the psyche of women.

Culture, in the work of Chiazor, Ozoya, Udume & Egharevba (2016) accords women no rights, privacy, self-preservation and dignity given the fact that it is defined by discrimination, inequality and subjugation of women. Despite the strong beliefs which upheld patriarchy in Igbo land, new studies have shown that these behavioural differences between men and women were given more to social learning than to biological science. Among Igbo people, certain beliefs regarding behavioral and personality differences are based on the same mode of thinking as in racism, particularly when differences between men and women are highlighted. There is a high degree of sexism exhibited and the foundation of this ideology is racist based. In view of this,

Chukwu, et al.(2014) submitted that due to the high degree of sexism attributed to their femininity, women were assigned less significant roles, while men, as a result of their masculinity were considered more important and assigned what the traditional Igbo society termed as special roles. Whatever the term: special role meant it is imperative to acknowledge that with the new ways of life championed by women through August meeting, the wrath of the gods rather than been provoked has accommodated them hence; no traditional rites had been performed till this day to cleanse the land of the so-called abominable infractions perpetrated by these women. The reason is simply that after centuries of being in bondage, women have suddenly realized that they possess the strength of a stallion. A male horse is called a stallion, and its kicking force is estimated to be 2, 000 psi, with an average speed of 200 miles per hour. That is technically more than how hard any skilled boxer could ever punch. That said, most trained horses, like women, will prefer not to kick unless they are really pushed to the edge. Today, after all the harrowing experiences encountered, women through August meeting are kicking for a just society In fact, the maximum output of a stallion can be up to 15 horsepower, and the maximum output of a human is a bit more than a single horsepower.

Going by this analogy, women's kicks have come through effective persuasion, diplomacy, astuteness and dexterousness; the ever domineering power of patriarchy has weakened. In other words, patriarchy that was once held sacrosanct and passed down from generation to generation has lost its firm grip on women. Sequel to this, humanity has acknowledged a significant degree of freedom of women courtesy of August meeting. Consequent upon this, women are today, more than ever, emboldened to provide most of the felt-needs of their communities in order to improve the living conditions of their kind in rural areas. Candidly, the emergence of August meeting with its change mantra has altered the poverty narrative of women; especially those who live principally on agriculture through manual labour.

Following this, it has become something of the past to continue to view patriarchy as an obstacle to the liberation of women from the whims and caprices of men. Thus, it is no longer worthy of preservation. Admitted, this bias attitude against women has for centuries hampered women's ability to wriggle out of poverty; no improved options to better their lives whatsoever. The emergence of August meeting has been of utmost interest to Gender scholars in regards to community development. Currently, it has become a process of assisting women, chiefly rural women to explore their inert potentials, access information and knowledge. Today, August meeting has moved women from the point of enforced powerlessness to a position of power through the acquisition of skills to improve their lot. Through August meeting, women have become a major factor in economic development and are increasingly at the core of community development. In essence, August meeting has become economically, educationally, socially and even legally aimed at widening the scope of their economic activities, strong flaming their economic competence.

Today, August meeting has emerged to right the wrongs visited upon women; it has gained wide acceptance and seamlessly begun to exit women from the economic dependency foisted on them by man-made culture. If anything, there has been a concerted effort to liberate and improve the conditions of rural women through the August meeting. Clearly, right from the era of Maryam Babaginda, the founder of Better Life for Rural Women Program (BLRWP), Nigeria has become one of the few countries in the world with several projects and programs to ameliorate the poor

living conditions of women, particularly those in the rural areas. Some of these programs included Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP), Peoples' Bank (PB), Better Life for Rural Women Program (BLRWP), Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP), Primary Health Care (PHC) National Poverty on Sustainable Eradication Program (NAPEP), Family Support Program (FSP) as well as Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS). Despite all these laudable programs, the anticipated changes in the ways of life of rural women were surprisingly still clothed in poverty and continued miseries until the birth of August meeting.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Over the years, women have been battling poor economic condition, mostly because of patriarchy. Neglect and exclusion from community development sphere has been their portion. However, the emergence of August meeting has been criticized and no one seemed to laud the freedom women have attained through the group. There have been accusations and counter accusations despite the wonderful improvement in the well-being of rural people, particularly women. The society in most cases viewed the emergence of August meeting with contempt despite creating enlarging opportunities through their exceptional programs and projects to improve the socio-economic conditions of their kind in rural areas. Till today, the critics do not seem to acknowledge the freedom from patriarchy; they do not appreciate the articulation of brilliant ideas, projects and programs executed for the wellbeing of rural communities. They joke about the group even when their successful participation in community development has been very impressive. In spite of all these which would have deterred August meeting from congregating to continue to change the pathetic living conditions of their colleagues in rural areas, the group has continued to gradually and steadily equip women with necessary empowerment skills to create a sustainable ways of living above poverty lines in order to embrace change for their emotional, physical and economical development. Sequel to the stated, this study examined August meeting and its change mantra for self reliance of rural women in the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria.

Based on this, the study investigated how August meeting and its change mantra has impacted positively on women, particularly those in rural areas. Essentially, one could without any iota of contradiction hold that community development as embarked upon by August meeting is basically a self-help commitment that has continued to provide basic socioeconomic infrastructure for the improvement of rural people. Based on this, the study specifically seeks to:

- a) To determine August Meeting and its change mantra for economic self-reliance of women in Igbo land
- b) To find out how the change mantra of August Meeting has freed women from discrimination, subjugation and oppression within the ethnic group
- c) To assess the extent August Meeting has provided basic socio-economic amenities in the rural areas

In view of the agreed objectives of this study, three research questions were therefore formulated to guide the study:

- a) How has August Meeting and its change mantra improved the economic self-reliance of women in Igbo land?

- b) How has the change mantra of August Meeting freed women from discrimination, subjugation and oppression in the Igbo land?
- a) Has the change mantra of August Meeting provided basic socioeconomic amenities in the rural areas?

From the foregoing, the significance of the study highlighted the unique roles of women which were prior to this era suppressed and subjugated and consequently seen as innately second-rate to the man, both physical and mentally. In spite of the imposed cultural restrictions on women, August meeting and its change mantra has initiated positive changes in rural women to make them viable for community development. Put simply, the emergence of August meeting has challenged patriarchy and positioned women appropriately in Igbo land. Essentially, August meeting and its change mantra for economic self reliance of rural women cannot be overemphasized. This is because August meeting has boosted the confidence and determination of women to excel where they had previously failed.

2. Conceptual issues:

2.1 Origin and concept of August meeting in Igbo land

There are three contending origins of the emergence of August meeting. The first traced it to the 1940s when the Church Missionary Society incorporated women into the affairs of the church and gave them the impetus to develop themselves unhindered despite the influence of patriarchy. This school of thought tended to argue that the spread of August meeting and its change mantra has so much of church activities embedded in it. In an attempt to corroborate the church history, a group of married women known as *Umunwanyi Alualuor*, *Otu Alutarunadi* or preferably *Ndi Iyom Di* who returned after awhile from the cities to initiate and execute developmental projects in their matrimonial communities to improve the deplorable living conditions of rural women. These developmental efforts could be infrastructural or policy changes at all levels: church, family, kindred and community. During this period, different kinds of not too expensive beautiful uniforms are worn by women and bright banners placed at different strategic junctions, event centers and churches across towns showcasing their presence, unlike earlier when the group was visibly known for extravagance in outlook.. However, not much is said about the role of *Umuada* (daughters of the family who retained their ties with their families of orientation after marriage) in the whole narrative surrounding the emergence. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the church did not discriminate between married and unmarried in assigning responsibilities to women. To the church, the responsibility and dignity of womanhood was not tied to marriage. Marriage or no marriage, every woman has inert potentials waiting to be harnessed. After all, not all men and women were created to marry; the bible says for the sake of the kingdom, some were made eunuchs ... In essence all women were granted the same opportunity to develop themselves using the church as a platform to over throw patriarchy. Without contradiction, one could contend that an assemblage of *Umuada* (daughters of the family who retained their ties with their families of orientation after marriage) and *Otu Alutarunadi* (married women in their matrimonial homes) cooperatively birthed *Nzu-uko Ndi-Umunwanyi* (Association of women) to safe guard their common interests. This collaboration further strengthened women's mission to change the old held narrative about the place in the society. But to credit the entire course of women liberation from patriarchy to the Church Missionary Society was faulty since women of Igbo extraction

prior to the arrival of Christianity had been organizing themselves more prominently along kinship and friendship before the birth of the present day August meeting.

This position takes us to the second school of thought on the origin of August meeting. This school of thought traced the drive behind August meeting to the work of Boserup (1970). Boserup's work provided the launch pad for women to acquire education in order to aspire to greater heights in the scheme of community development. This position is strongly supported by women in Diaspora who constitute the bulk of August meeting. Obviously, most of the programs aimed at ameliorating the poverty-stricken rural areas were taken from abroad and re-modified to suit contemporary times in Igbo land. It is in support of this group that seminars and workshops and other notable projects such as the building of town halls, community health clinics, civic centers, secondary schools and the like previously lacking were established. Fundamentally, August Meeting can, incontrovertibly, be said to be a knowledgeable revolutionary movement created by women of Igbo extraction, and the virus inherent in the movement has spread to every nook and cranny of the Igbo society (Chukwu, 2020). Succinctly, August meeting is a confederation of voluntary mutual aid associations formed by married women from a particular rural community but resident in different towns in the country and at times outside it. Therefore, as the world is fast collapsing into a global village each passing day, and with Boserup's work still attracting numerous academic reviews, women's associations with different mission statements have, like a bang, developed taproot in the entire Igbo ethnic group. Sequel to this, the tap-root phenomenon has catapulted women into formal leadership roles which, has propelled them through their single-mindedness to be free from all shackles of patriarchal bondage. Besides, new opportunities were created for women's empowerment. Sequel to the influence of Boserup, the activities of Igbo women have, to a large extent, brought changes in the affairs of the entire Igbo society.

Lastly the third school of thought, but certainly not the least tenaciously held the famous Aba Women Riot of 1929 as the institutionalization of August Meeting. According to this position, the quest to re-educate the colonial masters erupted the crisis that led to the change of narrative by women. The uprising has been described as one of biggest civil revolts of the 20th century in the black world. The explanation for protest was against women exclusion from government by warrant chiefs, the introduction of new taxes by the colonial government and the declining prices of agricultural products following the Great economic depression.

The famous Aba Women's Riot of 1929 in which Mrs. Margaret Ekpo (an Igbo woman married to an Efik) and her colleagues played prominent roles to curtail the excesses of the British colonial masters and by so doing, positively improved the status of women in the entire Igbo ethnic group. The effectiveness of their disapproval of the dominance of the colonial masters opened the eyes of the generality of women on how powerful they could be in formulating and influencing civic guiding principle. As a result, since the exit of the colonial masters, Igbo women had collectively redefined their future in a very subtle and diplomatic way by freeing themselves from and the firm grip of patriarchy and other obnoxious laws that had kept them under lock and key for centuries. Thus, anyone who described the riot as the fulcrum upon which August meeting was birthed could not be faulted. It was said to be the sole catalyst that changed women's concern for freedom. Aside from guaranteeing safety, peace and love in communities, August meeting has grown to become a formidable self-help group to reckon with in Igboland. In the present day, Anyaegbu & Iguh (n.d) agree that its growth and relevance has become so thrilling and encompassing that several communities now chart their communal activities to fall within the

meeting period. Besides, August meeting has given womanhood the pride of place it deserves. Since its emergence, many state governments have been working in partnership with August meeting to change the narrative of rural areas by providing meaningful communal projects for the people.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the birth of August meeting, whether it is the thought of the Church Missionary Society, Boserup's work, or Aba women riot, the essential point is that the group has become synonymous with the promotion of good life, happiness, solidarity and consolidation of the dreams and aspirations of the general good of women, particularly rural women. August meeting has become the harbinger of change and a force to reckon with in several communities as communal activities are nowadays planned to fall within the meeting period. Essentially, August meeting is a new brand of womanist movement that has meticulously overthrown the feminist movement imported from the western world; it has opened up new socioeconomic opportunities for Igbo women, as well as in the global village. From the foregoing, August meeting is the gathering of Igbo women in a grand summit that lasts for days to discuss and deliberate on issues that affect them in common. Basically, the speed with which many women associations sprung up in Igbo land, and patterned their philosophies toward improving themselves and also transforming their immediate communities cannot be overemphasized (Chukwu, Okonkwo & Kalu, 2013). According to these scholars, Igbo women are in the know that poverty is, indeed, a plague, a hydra-headed virus that emasculates and dehumanizes individuals and communities. This recognition has not only brought to the fore endemic fang of poverty on the inhabitants of rural communities, who are mostly women, but also the doggedness of Igbo women to change the narrative. From this perspective, one could therefore understand why their preponderance of their preference are on socio-economic infrastructures such as adequate water supply; maternity homes and dispensaries, micro-credit organizations, cottage industries, and many other developmental projects to alleviate poverty among their colleagues that live in the rural areas.

It is of interest to acknowledge that August meeting underlines the most important social roles of women as wives and mothers and each of these responsible roles is expected to be discharged smoothly and confidentially in the home, but with the world becoming a global village, there has been this push to change the deplorable conditions of rural women. In agreement with this, women have left the comfort of their homes in their thousands to catch a glimpse of the outside world, but this stepping out has opened their eyes to the deprivations their kind suffer in rural areas. To these women, coming out to improve the poor living conditions of people in rural areas does not translates into being confrontational with men, the payers of their bride price regardless of any socioeconomic advancements occurring in their lives. In his work, Chukwu (2020) asserts that August meeting is not really calling for a large scale change, but a profound shift in ideas about women roles, particularly in humanizing the living conditions of their kind in rural areas. By this profound shift, Chukwu (2020) maintains that there have been more commitments to reorganize the pitiable conditions of rural women. In furtherance of this pursuit, women have recognized that men pay their bride price and by this act, they are not feminists, but womanists who still appreciate their male counterparts, majority of whom are their husbands and cannot therefore be confrontational with them even though they seek for a just and egalitarian society.

Culturally, among the Igbo people, the payment of bride price elevates the status of women and forecloses any fight for supremacy. Putting it clearly, the acceptance to jettison the quest for equality is deeply acknowledged by woman kneeling down to receive a cup of palm wine from

his father during her traditional marriage; taking a sip while still kneeling before the father and then, getting up with the covered cup of wine to search for the husband. The moment she finds the husband, she goes down on her kneel (pledging obedience) and hands over the cup of drink to him to finish up the drink. This singular conscious act forecloses any tussle for supremacy between the two. It is this recognition of the oath of obedience taken that has birthed the concept of womanism and has facilitated the smooth sail of August meeting among the people. It has been diplomacy all the way. In a nutshell, the birth of August meeting has genuinely created sustainable infrastructure for women taking the centre-stage of community development and enhancing their productivity. Above all, August meeting improves basic needs of life which include food, shelter, health services in order to alleviate the pains and frustrations of poverty in rural areas.

Writing before the emergence of August meeting, Allen (1972) observed that women in Igbo communities have long had meetings of their own, but such congregations were never in conflict with the practice of patriarchy and so, could not have been the starting point of women's political power in traditional Igbo land as postulated by Allen (1972). This is because they were merely seen, appreciated for their beauty, splendor and their ability to procreate. It is in this same strand of thought that Dine (1983) wrongly asserted that women's associations with pre-colonial and ancient roots gave women strong and powerful political voices and symbolism. Prior to the emergence of August meeting, poverty was widely associated with women and was often thought of as an act of nature. But the economic dependency of women, particularly in rural areas was an unnatural one (Chukwu, 2020). Without doubt, Igbo women have been dehumanized and their development slowed down by culture more than anything (Chukwu, 2020). All these are products of cultural history; the consequence of conscious action; not something that just happened, or governed by any sound logic, but something that was done by customs and traditions of the male dominated society to make women remain poor and deplorable against their wish (Chukwu, 2020).

August is the eight month of the year and, everyone looked forward to the celebration: the new yam festival, a foremost socio-cultural occasion among the Igbo ethnic group. It is this auspicious period that women finds appropriate to situate their massive home-coming tagged: August meeting. An intelligent strike! Aside from being the month of the foremost new yam celebration, it has become a very significant month for the celebration of womanhood in Igboland. Interestingly, schools are usually on holidays. Frankly, during August meeting, women and even those based abroad return to their family of procreation to foster community development and improve the plight of rural women. Basically, the gathering gives women the opportunity to be integrated as stakeholders into building communal projects. Also, most of the completed socio-economic infrastructures in their respective rural communities are commissioned. In a nutshell, the availability of relevant infrastructure in rural communities constitutes an essential prerequisite for the provision of social services hence, improving the living conditions of the rural poor.



A secondary school structure erected by August meeting in Ezeukwu Community, Bende, Abia State

2.2 Community Development and August meeting

Community development is not a new phenomenon to the Igbo ethnic group of south-east Nigeria because communal assistance and co-operation are part and parcel of their way of life. In recognition of this, the people view community development as a process of social change in which the people organize themselves in order to improve their well-being through the execution of projects and programmes with a maximum reliance upon their resources; and complement these resources when necessary with services and materials from governmental and non-governmental agencies. The drive behind community development has been highlighted to mean something more than social action in support of some reforms by which human beings could become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world (Biddle & Biddle, 1965). Thus, from this perspective, community development is regarded as a group method for expediting personality growth which can occur when geographic neighbors work to serve their growing concept of the good of all.

In spite of women's penchant for excellence as noted earlier, the development of infrastructural facilities, prior to the beginning of the Nigeria ill-fated civil war, and in the 90s, and even up to recent times, was carried out by two main groups; the Town Unions (TUs), and the Age Grades Associations (AGAs). What can be inferred from the above statement is that, no women's group was considered good enough either independently or collectively to pool resources to embark on community development projects. The exclusion of women from community development due to patriarchy created a big developmental lacuna in the creation of socio-economic infrastructure. Consequently, poverty gaps grew in many parts of Igbo land and the absence of these social infrastructures became massive, and chronic, engulfing a large proportion of the population because of the non-existence of some basic amenities which only women could have identified. While accepting that the men could do it alone, the exclusion of women due to patriarchy clearly portrayed the case of an Ostrich that ran to bury its head in the sand, and believing that no one has seen it, but unknown that its entire body is still exposed to all to see. This kind of foolery of excluding women from improving the welfare of the rural populace due to patriarchy -

maintaining male superiority is simply preposterous because the dangers inherent in the continued subjugation of women do not outweigh the advantage. Therefore, the desire to develop communities through the building, expansion, renewal of infrastructural facilities such as health centers, classroom blocks, skill acquisition centers, culverts, bridges, markets, civic halls, rural electricity, and enhancing the quality of life of the people has long been the drive of August meeting from inception. With poverty gaps growing in many parts of Igbo land, and strongly having toil on rural women, the emergence of August meeting is in agreement with the immortal words of Koffi Annan (2004), erstwhile Secretary General, United Nations, who affirmed that no development approach is better than one that involved women as central players. We can deduce from Annan's position that, the glory of any society in the present day is determined chiefly by the place of women. In other words, in any genuine and well meaning human society, by the very fact that it is functional, presupposes the existence of consciously endowed women who are actively involved in changing the old narrative of poverty among women in rural areas.

Community development cannot exist without mobilization of people to identify collective resources, felt needs, priorities and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change. This is a process that aims at connecting all sectors of the community to prompt individuals, families, and in this instance, women under the auspices of August meeting at creating an enabling environment and effecting positive change in the general well-being of the people in a given community. In recognition of this, community development is a process of social change in which the people of a community organize themselves in order to improve their well-being through the execution of projects and programs with a maximum reliance upon their resources; and complement these resources when necessary with services and materials from governmental and non-governmental agencies (Chukwu, 2010). In Igboland, communities undertake communal projects through self-help. This probably explained why every returnee is bombarded with invitation to fund-raising for projects ranging from electricity, pipe-borne water, health centers and others. Fund-raising for schools now has shifted to building maternity centers, introductory technology workshops and other basic socio-economic projects. This narrative is simply to bring the relevance of August meeting to the provision basic communal infrastructure in rural areas. In essence, changing the deplorable conditions of women in rural areas has been one of the change mantra of August meeting. It has provided women the opportunity to collaborate with other stakeholders in order to execute basic socio-economic amenities for the empowerment of rural women.



One of the researchers on top the *Eze* Bridge at Amaneze; the bridge links Ugwuoke to Alayi, Isiukwuato, Ohafia, etc., built by the indefatigable Ugwuoke women.

Since economic independence could be seen as a creative and enabling power, it is not out of place to posit that this economic independence assists women to achieve something beneficial to mankind. In this, Chukwu (2006) contends that the reason to gain economic autonomy and control over economic resources is basically to overcome the ideologies of discrimination and subordination of the patriarchal society. To this effect, Chukwu (2006) applauds the economic independence of women through August meeting. Further, he further avers that economic independence transforms the institutions and structure through which unequal access and control over resources is sustained and perpetuated. Therefore, the process to integrate women into community development is to serve as a forerunner to the birth of August meeting. With its birth, community development is made up of two essential elements which, of course, are the basis of community development: first, women participation in the efforts themselves to improve their level of living with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative, and the provision by Government of technical and other assistance in a manner which encourages initiative, self-help and self-reliance. It is in recognition of the first of these two elements above that August women meetings have embarked on one form of development project or the other in order to improve the social and financial well-being of the rural women with as much reliance as possible on their own initiatives. Since 'community development' is not only about economic progress, but the achievement of self-fulfillment goals by women being able to participate actively in structuring and restructuring their own affairs, their environment and matters that their lives depend upon daily. Based on this, the effective persuasion, diplomacy, astuteness and dexterousness employed to weaken the ever domineering power of patriarchy by women thereby helping to change the narratives. By this singular act, women have become beneficiaries of the present day global village and, are central to the maintenance and development of the collective values for a functional and stable Igbo society. Encouragingly, all the completed projects and on-going ones are through self-help efforts. Self-help efforts, the main tool adopted by August meeting involves set programs chosen by them and executed through concerted efforts of members for the welfare of the people. For all there is to say, self-help strategy has proven to be the most successful and dependable among others that have been experimented with in transforming rural communities in Igboland. The development of the resources of the community by women themselves without

waiting for outside help implies in more ways than one that, the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy (FLS; 1st-7th July, 1985) was after all, no fluke.

Thus, August meeting activities have dispelled and upped the place of women in the Igbo ethnic group. Earlier than now, Captain Thomas Sankara, the late President of Burkina Faso, foresaw the innate abilities in women and predicted that someday, they women would be propelled in no distant time to free themselves from the pangs of discriminations and subjugations. Sankara's remarks in one of his numerous motivational speeches (1986):

We say that women should not rely on men and should not expect condescension from them. The development and the liberation of women of our country, the women of Africa, of women as a whole, will not come about as an act of charity. It will depend on their will and their determination to struggle and, therefore, their grasp of the social contradictions that oppose women....

From all intents and purposes, one could hold that Sankara's motivational address was directed at Igbo women urging them to ensure that, the attitudes, beliefs, customs and traditions of their ethnic group change in their favor in order to make them very resilient in transforming their immediate rural communities.

3. Methodology

Methodology is an efficient manner of studying a given research that is being carried out scientifically and quantitative and qualitative techniques. This study adopted the qualitative technique. Aside from this, the study adopted the descriptive and survey research designs as appropriate to gather data for the study. The primary source of data collection was through structured questionnaires with closed ended questions; focus group discussions and in-depth-interviews were also employed. It also sourced additional data from secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, and the Internet to understand how August meeting and its change mantra for economic self reliance has improved the deplorable conditions of women in rural areas.

4. Results and Discussion

The present research was conducted to assess August meeting and its change mantra for economic self reliance with the intent of improving the living condition of rural women in the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria. It adopted survey research, and gathered data from questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis concerning the deplorable plight of rural women. A sample of five hundred (500) respondents was selected using purposive sampling technique. It is imperative to state that the structured questionnaire consisted of questions that focused mainly on the achievability of the change mantra of August meeting in Igboland considering the strong of patriarchy Since human behavior is complex phenomenon that cannot be treated under controlled conditions, researchers' efforts and experience to get reliable and correct information by observing and creating atmosphere of harmony, and friendliness were impressive. Researchers spent 5 months in the field for the purpose of data collection. During the research work and interviewing, many difficulties were faced. For data collection, after sorting out the questionnaires, a total of 425(85%) out of five hundred (500) respondents properly filled questionnaire and returned.

In the first research question, only four hundred and ten (410) respondents representing 96.5% emphatically responded. For the second research question, 400(94.1%) maintained that the firm grip of patriarchy is gone for good, while on the third research question, 405five (95.3%) respondents wholly agreed with the change mantra of August meeting. Detailed analyses of the findings were presented beneath.

The first research question that investigated how August Meeting and its change mantra improved the economic independence of women showed that out of 500 questionnaire administered, only 425(85%) properly filled questionnaire were returned and analysed. Four hundred and ten (410) respondents representing 96.5% emphatically agreed that August Meeting with its change mantra has altered the narratives of rural women; they mentioned basic socio-economic amenities such as health centers, classroom blocks, skill acquisition centers, culverts, bridges, markets, civic halls as some of the community developmental efforts of August meeting that have improved the economic independence of rural women. According to discussants in the focus group discussion, the initiation and execution of these verifiable projects as mentioned earlier was in agreement with the immortal words of Koffi Annan (2004), erstwhile Secretary General, United Nations, who affirmed that no development approach is better than one that involved women as central players. From Annan's position, we could deduce that the glory of Igbo society today is strongly associated the exploits of August meeting. Without any doubt, the economic self-reliance for women in the present day Igbo society is significant for the reason that their capabilities and resourcefulness in regards to community development has been laudable. From the foregoing, it is obvious that whenever August meeting is talked about, emphasis is usually on improving the status of women, particularly their socioeconomic prospects, understandably and rightly too, in the context of opening up opportunities for them to excel in areas where they had previously failed. The ingenuity of August meeting has globally been applauded as rural women have economically, educationally, socially and even legally been widening the scope of their socio-economic activities and showing competence in all their undertakings. On the other hand, fifteen (15) respondents representing 3.5% vehemently disagreed with the position of the majority, but with all these eye-catchy projects initiated and executed by August meeting, it obviously calls for further interrogation as to why there was this dissenting report. Perhaps, this will make an interesting reading

The second research question sought to find out how the change mantra of August meeting has freed women from discrimination, subjugation and oppression. From the field work, out of the four hundred and twenty five (425) respondents, 400(94.1%) maintained that the firm grip of patriarchy, a conscious action designed to subjugate them has been weakened by the diplomatic approach adopted by August meeting. With the group's utter rejection of muscle power, the activities of August meeting, especially with women in Diaspora a new place for women in the entire Igbo society has been created. Seminars and workshops organized by the group has created the opportunity for women to know everything they need to know about womanhood and how to chart new courses of action to achieve their felt needs (Anyaegebu & Iguh, n.d). The gathering gives women the opportunity to be integrated into their community development projects, and having women as stakeholders and not as mere observers. If truth be told, August meeting is majorly dominated by *Alutaradi* or *Umunwanyialualu*. The drive behind the group according to Chukwu(2020) was the motivational work of Boserup (1970) which provided the launch pad for women to congregate and championed a common cause to free their kind from all shackles of patriarchal bondage. In agreement with the majority views, (Chukwu, 2020) averred that the emergence of August meeting has halted women being culturally socialized to place emphasis their experiences and attainments on the attachments they have with men.

The third research question examined how the change mantra of August Meeting has made possible the provision of basic socioeconomic amenities such as bore-hole water supply and maternity hospitals in the rural areas. Findings from the field, out of four hundred and twenty five (425) respondents, four hundred and five (95.3%) respondents wholly agreed that the participation of women through the August women has improved and alleviated the pains and frustration of poverty amongst rural women. While dissenting with the majority report, 20(4.7%) argued that most of the developmental efforts of August meeting were the handiwork of their husbands. Based on this, they

disagreed with respect and dignity accorded members of August meeting. But on a more critical analysis, it will amount a disservice to claim that women do not have the requisite to gain employment and earn a living without men. Despite the minority report which could easily be dismissible, it is evident that the impact of August meeting has demonstrated that the development of most socio-economic infrastructure which hitherto were neglected have nowadays been taken over by August meeting. From plates 1, 2 and 3, it is very obvious that August meeting has indeed carved a niche as a pace setter in the building, renewal, and expansion of infrastructure in the rural area. As at today, there is certainly no rural area today in the entire Igbo ethnic group where the impact of August meeting has not been felt. From discussants, one project at least, such as access-bridge, market sheds/stores, canopies and plastic chairs for renting, manual bore-hole water facility, child and maternal care units, oil mill and cassava grinding and garri processing factories, skill acquisition centers has been completed and put into effective use to improve the lot of the rural areas.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

After the analyses of data, the researchers agree that the emergence of August meeting with its change mantra has repositioned women economically strong and independent. This is good news because when a man is economically strong; only an individual is improved, but when a woman is empowered economically, a generation is empowered. Through August meeting, rural women nowadays have become part and parcel of the decision-making arm in their different communities. As a matter of fact, August meeting has exerted much influence in the development of many strategies that have changed the poverty narrative associated with rural women. From this perspective, August meeting has re-engineered women in their concerted efforts to establishing various communal projects and programmes. Today, there is a higher degree of self-confidence and assertiveness women exhibit. They, as discussants during the focus group discussion, expressed satisfaction at the new social order created, a new future for the general well-being of rural women. Based on the stated findings, and in line with this, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Members of August meeting should be very vigilant and condemn any deviant behavior that is inconsistent with their change mantra in order to change the ugly narratives of Igbo women in rural areas. All concerted efforts of August meeting should be holistic in its engagement to tackle contemporary societal challenges rural women face.
2. Since the widespread poverty foisted upon rural women is not something that just happened, or governed by any sound logic, but something that was done by customs and traditions to make women remain poor and deplorable against their wish. Therefore, August meeting should continue to ensure women are empowered in its entirety. Above all, they should ensure peace and love reign in their communities and learn to keep their dignity intact so as to give womanhood the pride of place it deserves.
3. Furthermore, members of August meeting should endeavour to develop ways to protect the sanctity of the marital institution, especially the rising cases of divorce and separations. In addition, August meeting should reconsider the role of women as home builders. Through the meeting, women must shift attention to girl child education as a means to empower more women to become intellectually independent and financially self-reliant.
4. Since education will go a long way in equipping women economically, International organizations such as the United Nations, African Union and others should support August meeting to improve the status of women, particularly in rural areas.

REFERENCES

- AIPP [2014], “Indigenous Media, Freedom of Expression and Right to Information” ASEAN Scenario, Thailand: AIPP Printing Press.
- Allen, V. (1972). ‘Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo women. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*; 6(2)
- Anyaegebu, M I & Iguh, N.A(n.d). Mothers’ Summit: The Igbo Women Model and a Nexus for National Development
- Carmon, D. (2013). “Women’s Empowerment: Education as a Tool for Achieving Equality. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Womens-empowerment-Education-as-a-tool-for-achieving-equality-329260> on 12/01/2023.
- Chiazor I.A., Ozoya M.I., Udume M. & Egharevba M.E(2016): Taming the Rape Scourge in Nigeria: Issues and Actions. *Gender & Behaviour*, 14 (3), pp.7764-7785
- Chukwu, C. C (2020). Lecture Monograph on August women and Community development.(Unpublished)
- Chukwu, C. C (2020). The Impacts of Gender Education on Female Entrepreneurship: Breaking the glassceilings for a prosperous new Nigeria. *Brazilian Journal of Biological Sciences*, 7(15), pp. 101-117.
- Chukwu, C. C & Ignatius S.U (2020). Violence against Women as an Obstacle to Women’s Productivity in Patriarchal Societies: A Challenge to Recreate Contemporary Nigerian Society. *Brazilian Journal of Biological Sciences*, 7(15), pp.79-100
- Chukwu, CC (2010) Igbo Women and Community Development: A case study of Abia North Senatorial District, Abia State, Nigeria; A PhD Thesis submitted to Graduate School, Sociology development, University of Calabar, Nigeria
- Chukwu, C. C (2016). *Fundamentals of Sociology: An Introduction*. Lagos: Serenity Publishers
- Chukwu, C. C & Chegwe, Azuka (2015). *Simplifying B.Sc Project Writing for Undergraduates: A Streamlined Process from Choice of Topic to Final Submission of Projects*. Lagos: Serenity Publishers
- Chukwu, C.C, Scent, G AT, Emeka, JO, Obi, CU & Kalu, E O(2014). Violence against women in Igboland, South-east, Nigeria: A critical quest for change. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*; 6(2), pp.49-58
- Chukwu, C. C; Okonkwo, G.A & Emenike, K.O (2013). *The History and Culture of Old Bende and the Emergence of Umuanna*. Lagos: Serenity Publishers
- Chukwu, C C(2006). *Socio-Cultural Practices as Obstacles to Women Empowerment in Nigeria: A case study of Bekwarra, Ogoja and Yala Local Government Areas of Cross of River State, Nigeria*; An M.Sc Dissertation submitted to Graduate School, University of Calabar, Nigeria
- Dine, G.U. (1983). *Traditional Leadership as Service among the Igbo of Nigeria: Anthrotheological Approach*. Rome: Pontifical Universita Lateranense.
- Nyong, S. F & Archibong, E. P(2018). Women community managing roles and contribution to Social development in Akpabuyo local government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Thought*, 07(02) pp: 459–468
- Odoemena, A.C(1997). ‘Oji Ezinihitte Cultural Festival Legend and Legacy. Unpublished B.A.Long Essay, Department of History, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria
- OlaedoUwalaka. (2006). Oral interview on August Meeting at Mbaise Secondary School, August 18
- August Meeting (2008). NzukoNdi Igbo <http://www.igboezue.com> (Accessed 20/1/2023), p.1
- Scent, G.A.T; Chukwu, C C; Obuzor M E & Nwagba, B O (2020). The Impacts of Patriarchy on Women Police Officers in Nigeria: The need to abolish gender discrimination. *International Journal of Gender and Women’s Studies*. 8(1), pp. 39-54