

Public Reaction to Federal Government's Farmer-Herder Conflicts through the Ruga Policy

Can One Continuously Do the Same and Expect Different Result?

Abiodun Afolabi

Senior Lecturer, History and International Studies/Chief Archivist, Unilorin Archives and Documentation Centre, (UADC), University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Olasupo Thompson

Lecturer, History and International Studies Unit, Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

Oluniyi Ademola

Lecturer, Peace and Security Studies, Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

Onyekwere Nwaorgu

Reader, Philosophy Unit, Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

Adenike Onifade

Professor, Social Studies Unit, Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

Abstract

Africa, like other developing continents, is entangled in one form of conflict or the other. To be specific, in Nigeria, one of the recent conflicts that has received attention and claimed lives, property and livelihoods is the herder-farmer conflict. The Nigerian Government has introduced several strategies and policies, yet they have all encountered a brick wall. This study examines the uproar that led to termination of the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) policy. A qualitative research method was adopted, involving literature review, media reports and interviews. Recommendations were made based on the findings.

Introduction

Africa, like other developing continents, has been enmeshed in one form of conflict or the other caused by political, economic and social inequalities such as extreme poverty; economic stagnation; poor government services; a high rate of unemployment; ethnic tensions; religious fanaticism; environmental degradation; and individual (economic) incentives to fight, among other things.¹ These issues have snowballed further into other unprecedented challenges, some of which pose serious threats to states and regional stability.² Some scholars agree on the following as causes of the incessant conflict: changing patterns of resource use and increasing competition for resources; breakdown of traditional mechanisms governing resource management and conflict resolution; overgrazing; increasing populations; lack of agricultural technology; environmental pollution; desertification of the Sahara; and urbanisation, among others.³ Another dimension of conflict is the increasing availability of modern weapons, including automatic weapons, where powerful interests seem to support certain groups (usually herders) with weapons in order to advance their own causes through sponsored violence.⁴ In both sub-Saharan and North Africa, the abuse of traditional host/stranger relationships has led to heightened conflict.⁵

In Nigeria specifically, the Fulani Ethnic Militia (a group of semi-nomadic, ethnic-based pastoralists involved in clashes with their host-farming communities) have been linked with the deadly Boko Haram group.⁶ Moreover, the Militia group has been named as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world, and it has featured consistently between 2015 and 2019 on the lists of violent groups.⁷ Amnesty International (AI) has stated that the herder-farmer conflict claimed 3,641 lives between January 2016 and October 2018, with 57 per cent of the total deaths occurring in 2018 alone⁸ – evolving from spontaneous reaction to provocation to deadlier premeditated attacks, particularly in Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states.⁹ Some of the factors that have aggravated these conflicts are environmental degradation in the north, encroachment upon grazing grounds in the Middle Belt, militia attacks, poor government response to distress calls, and failure to punish past and even present perpetrators, as well as new legislation across some of these southern states to ban open grazing¹⁰ without provision of alternatives for the nomadic herdsman. Moreover, the conflicts have led to an increase in displacements and life insecurity, loss of property, and food shortages in many parts of the country. The conflicts have also burdened law enforcement agencies by distracting them from other important missions, such as dealing with the Boko Haram insurgency.¹¹

In order to arrest this phenomenon, Nigeria, like most governments across Africa, has made efforts to resolve the conflicts arising from the farmer-herder conflict through different strategies, including expulsion, building of ranches, and local collaborations.¹² For example, the Federal Government of Nigeria has intervened through implementation of various policies, legislations and even military interventions, including Operation Cat Race and Whirl Stroke.¹³ Some of the policies and legislations include the Land Grazing Act of 1964; the Land Use Act, which grants governors the power to appropriate lands within a state; the National Agricultural Policy of 1988, which stipulates that a minimum of 10 per cent of the national territory – 9.8 million acres – be allocated to grazing reserves (though only 2.82 per cent was out of 313 reserves was acquired);¹⁴ the National Grazing Route and Reserve Commission Bill of 2011, which aimed

to provide N100 billion to herders, but could not succeed after President Goodluck Jonathan left office.¹⁵ Most of these strategies and policies have failed to yield projected results as a result of total rejection by the people or partial enforcement.

Many studies have examined the conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria,¹⁶ as well as various responses,¹⁷ but insufficient attention has been paid to public reaction to policies formulated to address these conflicts, particularly the recent Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) policy. Against this backdrop, the study pays special attention to recent Federal Government policies and to how the general public reacted to these policies. This study is germane for many reasons; first, it enables stakeholders to understand the reasons for continued squabbles between nomadic herdsman and farmers. Secondly, it will assist stakeholders, including policymakers and lawmakers, to properly understand the context in which inclusive policies are made. Finally, it will help to explain how group dynamics affect policies, no matter how well-intended.

The study is subsequently divided into five parts. These are the introduction, which provides the problem statement and contending issues; the second part is the theoretical framework, which offers a theoretical clarification for the policy as well as the causes of the farmer-herder clashes; the third explains the making of the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) policy; the fourth explores the public reactions that greeted the Federal Government's introduction of the RUGA policy and finally, the fifth part is the concluding remarks, a summary of the entire findings, analysis of the issues raised from the study as well as charting a way forward for future policy formulation by government and other stakeholders.

Theoretical Clarification

A good number of theories have been constructed to explain the causes of the farmer-herder clashes. One of these relates to environmental resources, particularly the Eco Violence Theory.¹⁸ However, the theory has been criticised because of the ambiguity of the environmental factor as a conflict trigger,¹⁹ and the vagaries of the dynamics of such conflicts.²⁰ Moreover, the peculiarity of Nigeria's situation lies in instances where land is available to the herders, yet they still clash with their hosts.

Another dimension is an allegation that the Nigerian Air Force²¹ drops weapons for nomadic herdsman or bandits,²² hence, the adoption of the conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theory dates back to the post-World War II era. A common definition of conspiracy theory is the conviction that a group of actors meets in secret to attain some malevolent goal.²³ Despite the view that belief in such theories is pathological,²⁴ large portions of the population in believe conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories have been variously linked to a crisis of trust in government and its apparatus, to the undermining of democratic deliberation, a weakening of the state's capacity to govern, the growth of violent extremism,²⁵ and group polarisation.²⁶

Van Prooijen and van Vugt provide five typologies of conspiracy theories. Firstly, conspiracy theories make assumptions about how people, objects or events are causally interconnected. Secondly, they stipulate that the plans of alleged conspirators are deliberate.

Thirdly, a conspiracy theory always involves a coalition, or group of actors working in concert, rather than an individual. Fourthly, conspiracy theories always contain an element of threat, such that the alleged goals of the conspirators are harmful or deceptive. Finally, a conspiracy theory always carries an element of secrecy and is therefore often difficult to invalidate.²⁷

One may ask if these five typologies agree with the situation of the farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. While this will be subsequently proven, we adopted the group theory to explain the RUGA policy, it being a public policy in itself. The theory is believed to have existed as far back as the nineteenth century.²⁸ For Garson, 'the group conception removed the veil of rhetoric that obscured the actual operation of government behind abstractions like "the national interest"'.²⁹ The theory posits that individuals are important only when they are part of or act on behalf of group interests.³⁰ Some scholars state that conspiracies typically attempt to usurp political or economic power, violate rights, infringe upon established agreements, withhold vital secrets, or alter bedrock institutions. According to the group theory of politics, public policy is the product of the group struggle.³¹

What may be called public policy is the equilibrium reached in this group struggle at any given moment, and it represents a balance that the contending factions or groups constantly strive to win in their favour. Many public policies do reflect the activities of groups.³² This means that this theory attempts to analyse how each of the various groups in a society tries to influence public policy to its advantage at the policy formulation level. It conceives the society as a mosaic of numerous interest groups, with cross-cutting membership. The theory emphasises that a group as consists of individuals that may, based on shared attitudes or interest, make claims upon other groups in society. According to Fox et al., public policy may derive from interest groups who continuously interact with policymakers to influence the policymaking process.³³ Hence Baskin concluded that the group theory may be surmised as: turning to aid from government in order to increase its personal or private purpose; a way of seeking the authority's attention to make their demands safe and sustainable; achievement of government control through dominance in number, technique and intensity.³⁴ Above all, it posits that public policy usually reflects the interests of dominant groups. In this case, while the Fulani are not a dominant group, the political elites and the present leader are of Fulani extraction.

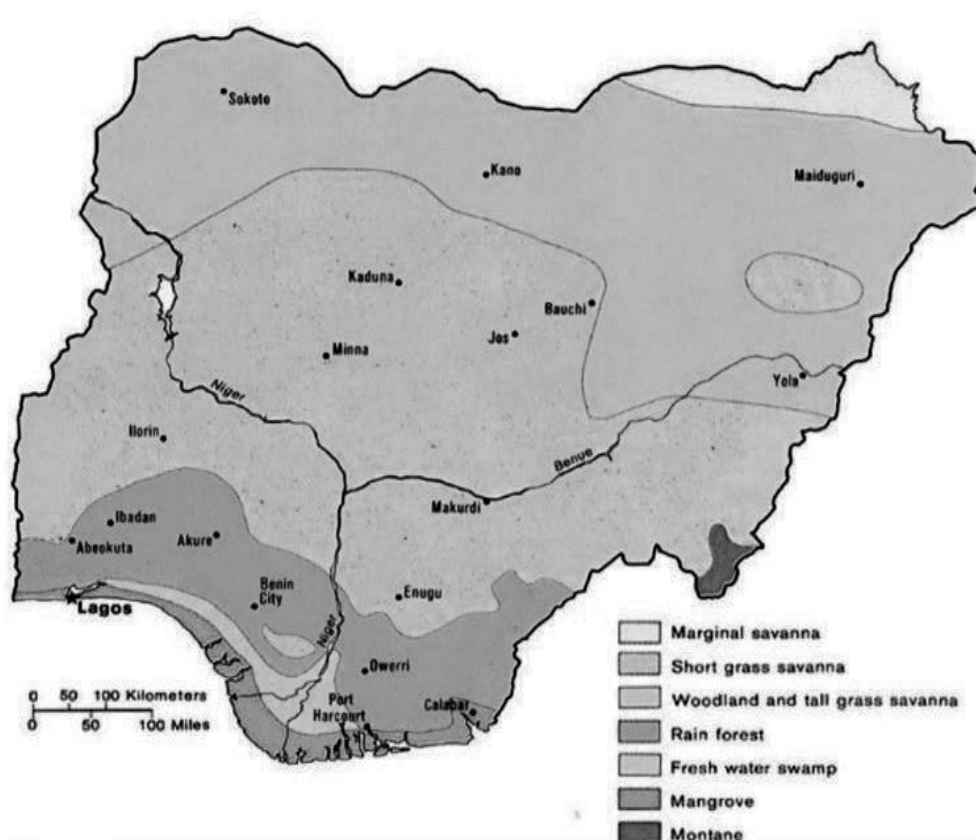
Method and Area

The study was carried out in Ede, Osun State, and Abeokuta, Ogun State between July and August 2019. The two study areas are located in the south-western part of Nigeria. The two study areas are homes to the Yoruba speaking people in the region. The people in these areas are predominantly farmers who have coexisted with the nomadic herdsman and have also experienced cooperation and conflict with the itinerant herdsman. For convenience, we purposively interviewed eight farmers in Ede, Osun State. In Abeokuta, we purposively chose informants who are either farmers or agricultural extension officers, particularly from the Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (FUNAAB). The target groups were selected

for convenience, their experiences and their encounters with the nomadic herdsman. The researchers interacted with the non-literate in their various linguafranca. Pidgin English was the language adopted whenever considered necessary, and this method enabled respondents to understand the questions and give appropriate responses. While most of the informants gave their names, a few did not do so – and we tagged them as ‘key informants’. To get responses from across the country, we relied on some national newspapers (Punch, Tribune, Daily Trust, Daily Post, This Day and Vanguard), which all echoed the reactions and counter-reactions of the general public to the policy.

The map below is instructive. Apart from revealing the vegetation of the country that has endeared herders to these areas, it also shows the disproportionate partition of Nigeria.

Fig 1: Map showing the vegetation of Nigeria



Source: Security.org

The Making of the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) Policy

At President Muhammadu Buhari's inauguration in May 2015, he stated among other things that he was going to end the perennial violent clashes between the farmers and herders. He soon directed the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to formulate a comprehensive livestock development plan including measures to curb farmer-herder clashes. In August 2015, a FMARD committee recommended short-, medium- and long-term strategies, including the development of grazing reserves and stock routes.³⁵ However, this could not be implemented due to the opposition from the people and most governors who were expected to key into the policy.

Later the government came up with a proposal to establish cattle-grazing colonies. The Federal Government sent the National Grazing Reserve (establishment) Bill to the National Assembly for consideration in January 2016. Part of the Bill stated that grazing reserves would be the property of the Federal Government and could not be alienated by the President.³⁶ Other parts of the Bill give power to the Commission to acquire lands for the use of grazing without consent of the governors or state legislation. This, however, contradicts the Land Use Act of 1978, which grants power to the governors, who in turn hold land in trust for the citizenry. The Bill was rejected by most states in the southern part of Nigeria and widely regarded as promoting an Islamist or Fulanisation agenda.

In March 2016, the then Minister of Agriculture, Audu Innocent Ogbah, proposed to import nutritious grasses from Brazil, believing that such an initiative would halt the clashes between the herders and farmers. He posited that 'there is no way you can keep cows without good grass to feed them and the grass must have a minimum of 18 per cent protein, trace elements and amino acids; then the cow will give you good meat'.³⁷ The idea was backed by Senator Abdullahi Adamu, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. Senator Adamu stated that the plan was imperative in order to bring an end to the lingering crises between nomadic herdsman and their host communities.³⁸ However, when the bill was presented before the entire House, it was rejected because the Land Use Act was exclusively a state government prerogative.³⁹

In January 2018, the Federal Government proposed the cattle colony – the designation of vast tracts of lands in each state as herding grounds. Agriculture and Rural Development Minister, Ogbah, opined that nomadic herdsman would use the designated cattle colony to feed their livestock in order to avoid disturbing fertile agricultural lands that belong to farming communities. It was supposed to protect the herders from attack by cattle rustlers, who are generally rampant in the north. Minister Ogbah further stressed that 16 states had accepted the policy, and he enjoined others to join, stating that states and local governments could refuse to host 'cattle colonies' within their borders.⁴⁰ He further stated that each colony was to cover 5000 hectares (about 25km by 20km) and would consist of a cluster of ranches, with resources and facilities, including grass, water, veterinary services, mills for converting agro-waste to livestock feed, schools, hospitals and markets, all secured by agro-rangers.⁴¹ But while most of the 16 states that volunteered their lands for the project were from the north-west, the ones in the south rejected it. Some of the reasons for their objections were that they had limited lands, that it was a new

Fulani imperialistic move through which the presidency would colonise the south, that it was a way to provide government's subsidy for herders, and that it was a far-fetched solution to the incessant clashes.⁴² The Presidency, through the Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity, Chief Femi Adesina, charged those opposed to the policy to rethink, noting that they were better off living with the ranches and colonies than dying through the persistent conflicts.⁴³ Yet, the initial stand of the people, especially those from the southern part, did not change on the proposed policy.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan was announced on 19 June 2018, involving a gradual switch from open grazing to ranching. The government announced that the plan would run from 2018 to 2027 as a multifaceted intervention to modernise livestock management, improve productivity and enhance security. Under this initiative, some states including Adamawa (All Progressive Congress [APC]), Benue (APC), Ebonyi (People's Democratic Party [PDP]), Edo (APC), Kaduna (APC), Nasarawa (APC), Oyo (APC), Plateau (APC), Taraba (PDP) and Zamfara (APC) were selected as pilot states, with 94 ranches to be established in clusters of four at 24 locations spread over those states. Monies worth about 179 billion were also planned for the project. Nonetheless, the targets rejected the plan. The representative of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore Fulani Socio-Cultural Association, Mr Saleh Alhassan, rejected it on the grounds that included the following: fear that most landowners in the south would not lease out their ancestral lands to the herders, cattle breeds were not ranching-friendly, and open grazing is their culture.⁴⁴ Most of the people and governors of the pilot states, especially those from the south (Benue [APC] and Ebonyi [PDP]) argued that they lacked sufficient land for ranches.⁴⁵

Not done with the plan to create grazing lands, the Federal Government created the Nomadic Education Commission. Part of the role of the commission is to promote, educate and pass information to the Fulani by proposing a Fulani Radio, dedicated to the group. The government budgeted N1399 811 307 for the commission. Meanwhile, some allocations were also added under the Ministry of Agriculture for livestock production and grazing reserves among other things. For instance, the allocation for the National Grazing Reserves Development was N6 903 882142.⁴⁶

Subsequently, on 25 June 2019, the Federal Government announced it had proposed the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA).⁴⁷ The policy was supposed to be piloted in eleven states, namely: Sokoto (PDP), Adamawa (PDP), Nasarawa (APC), Kaduna (APC), Kogi (APC), Taraba (PDP), Katsina (APC), Plateau (APC), Kebbi (APC), Zamfara (PDP) and Niger (APC) (with another unnamed state added).⁴⁸ The government stated that it would create settlements across the country for nomadic herdsmen in the next five years in order to end open grazing, adding that 12 states had already shown interest in the programme. It received the endorsement of the pro-northern groups, including the pressure group, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN). The spokesperson for the Presidency, Garba Shehu, stated that:

The Federal Government is planning this (RUGA) in order to curb open grazing of animals that continue to pose security threats to farmers and herders. The overall benefit to the nation includes a drastic reduction in conflicts between herders and farmers, a boost in animal protection complete with a value chain that will increase the quality and hygiene of livestock, in terms of beef and milk

production, increased quality of feeding and access to animal care and private sector participation in commercial pasture production by way of investments.⁴⁹

Furthermore, the settlement was supposed to provide basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, road networks, veterinary clinics, markets, and manufacturing entities that would process and add value to meats and animal products.

Public Reactions to Federal Government's RUGA Policy

After the announcement of the policy, reactions and counter-reactions to the policy came from all parts of the country but comprising different tones, perspective, or notions. While some of these embody subtle propaganda, a few contained threats. For example, in July 2019 the spokesman for the Coalition of Northern Group, Abdul-Azeez Suleiman warned that the debates on whether to accept the policy or not were already causing discomfort for the herders, who were mostly of Fulani extraction.⁵⁰

Some Muslim groups from the south also requested the southern states governors to accept the policy. Even the opposition party's Board of Trustees Chairman, Senator Walid Jibrin⁵¹ urged the southerners, including the Igbos and the Yorubas, to accept the policy because it would promote peace and security in the country, among other things.⁵² He succinctly puts it thus:

That is why I and we Fulani commend the Federal Government for introducing the RUGA project in the country. I and our tribe (Fulani) have embraced the programme. RUGA project includes the provision of hospitals, schools, water supply and electricity, among other facilities, which will have a direct bearing on the lives of the herders.⁵³

Moreover, some members of MACBAN also alleged that Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian from the south, was in charge of the policy, although this was later denied by his office.⁵⁴

However, the policy received a lot of negative reactions from the general public especially from the southern parts of the country. A respondent feared that the land in Yorubaland was insufficient for farming activities, let alone granting Fulani itinerant herdsmen part of it and consequently surrendering their patrimony to visitors. He believed that this could be a way of taking over the people's lands, and that if government had to embark on the policy, it should be predicated on stringent conditions to constantly keep the Fulani nomadic herdsmen in check. He submitted that such a settlement should have been thrown opened to private individuals who wished to sell their lands and that it should not have been handled by the government on behalf of the Fulani. He concluded that checks and controls were needed due to the security risk posed by the nomadic Fulani herdsmen.⁵⁵

Another respondent stated that the policy would have created ethnic tensions. Since Nigeria was a multi-ethnic country, he wondered why only the Fulani were considered for such largesse.

Such a policy would only increase the population of the Fulani in these 36 states where the government wanted to introduce it. He feared that the Fulani would prove to be akin to Oliver Twist, because they would demand more land. The respondent believed that this policy had only been possible because the Fulani has one of its own as the president. He asked: 'What about the interest of other ethnic groups in Nigeria? Would government also intervene with a policy like this in favour of a Yoruba or Igbo man in northern Nigeria?' He asked the Yoruba to reject the policy.⁵⁶ Sharing similar fears of insecurity and ethnic chauvinism, another respondent put it thus:

The RUGA settlement is a cunning way of taking peoples lands away from them to serve the interest of the Fulani headmen. Now that they have not been given permanent lands in their host states, think about the havoc they are wreaking on the people and their farms. They massacre their hosts, and also engage in robbery, kidnapping and other ungodly acts. I planted arable crops so that my family can have something to eat around Gbongan villages; these people took their cattle there and destroyed everything with impunity. Think of what will happen if they are given a permanent settlement?⁵⁷

He further noted that such a policy could lead to the disintegration of Nigeria since the policy aimed to promote Fulani hegemony to the detriment of other ethnic groups. He advised the Fulanis to take their cattle to the northern region where they belonged; after all, cattle were not given to people free of charge.

Similarly, another respondent feared the belligerent nature of the Fulani, considering that examples of such aggression abounded across the country. He warned that the Fulani should not be trusted, as they could turn against their hosts. Sharing his experience as a local hunter, he averred that the Fulani had perpetrated actions that an average southerner would never dare to do in the north. He advised the Fulani to return home to the north to continue their activities there.⁵⁸ By way of contrast, another respondent referred to the 'unfinished agenda of 1804', opining that the fears of the Yoruba-speaking people had always been premised on full awareness and understanding of the history of Yoruba-Fulani relations, in that the Fulani had taken over Ilorin from the Yoruba. He noted that not all Fulani were aggressive and that some Yoruba people were also involved in the cattle business by proxy. But the Bororo Fulani had been behind the various acts of violence in the country. He suggested that the RUGA settlement should not be made compulsory, but that states that wanted to embrace it should rather volunteer their participation. He believed that if this voluntary participation proved beneficial, others would embrace it.⁵⁹ Echoing the fear of an historical antecedent, another respondent averred as follows:

A king in Ilorin is called Emir and not Oba as it is in Yorubaland. The question of history will always repeat itself. Also, their activities in the recent times would convince the people of their ulterior motives. RUGA can only be likened to neo-colonialism. If allowed, the Fulanis will use the opportunity to establish themselves in large numbers in several areas of Yorubaland where they would later become a problem to the people. If RUGA is imposed on Nigerians, it will backfire.⁶⁰

He further noted that the idea of RUGA was a premeditated concept, which a few cabals were attempting to impose on the entire country. He pointed out that in the Hausa language the term RUGA meant the settlement of some people on a specific landmass. He concluded that this could only be a way to advance the interest of the Fulani at the expense of others.

Furthermore, respondents from Abeokuta shared similar views. For instance, a female respondent questioned how the Federal Government could come up with a coercive policy that would make people relinquish their ancestral land to non-indigenes, especially considering that it had been established that most of the Fulani herdsmen were not Nigerians.⁶¹ Another scholar opined that most of the Fulani herdsmen did not fare well in their original homelands (Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea), but since they felt that Nigeria was soft ground, they had decided to come en masse. 'In Igbo land, we have a concept for where we allocate to them called Ama Hausa, but the one the Federal Government is bringing represents a clear imposition of their terms on others'.⁶² Similarly, another scholar puts it thus:

RUGA cannot work in Nigeria for as long as government intends to fund it. Government can make loan facilities available to herders who want to build ranches but should not fund it outrightly. The name itself does not reflect diplomacy and social integration. How does an Igbo man relate with a Fulani appellation? That's by the way anyway, but in conflict, all ambiguity must be avoided.⁶³

An agricultural extension expert suggested that three scenarios be addressed. He spoke on the culture of the Fulani, which centres on pastoralism, the grass itself, and the political undertones. For him, since the Fulani were nomadic by nature, they would continue to graze their livestock outside the settlement. Secondly, he asked what would happen to the grasses within the RUGA if they were consumed by the Fulani herds. Finally, he warned that RUGA was a political act by the government, because such settlement in a particular state should be for indigenes who intended to rear herds, and should not be for non-indigenes.⁶⁴ A respondent shared a similar idea: 'the President only wanted to satisfy his ethnic group and not Nigerians'.⁶⁵ However, a lecturer at Lagos State University shared a contrary opinion:

I think it has some importance but the content of the programme is somehow faulty. It is a way to get out of the herdsmen/farmer clashes and prevent cattle rustling, but the government should allow private individuals to get involved in the acquisition of land and the business of ranching.⁶⁶

An agricultural extension officer stated that RUGA would have been the solution, but it had been politicised, and the Federal Government planned to pay a huge sum to all state governments that embraced it. He further submitted that by the time most of the southern state governors saw the financial benefits that would accrue to those who embraced participation, they would fall over themselves to queue up for the policy.⁶⁷ A female agricultural extension officer rejected the above view, noting that her people (referring to the south-east) had kicked against the policy.⁶⁸ Aladekomo Adeniyi, who is from Osun State but resides in Lagos, stated that RUGA was simply 'a secret to dominate other ethnic groups'.⁶⁹

Socio-cultural groups in the south-western part of Nigeria, including the popular Afenifere group, described RUGA as a plan to re-colonise the country. 'Now that they are talking of local government autonomy, the plan is to turn the RUGA settlements to local governments for the Fulani in the future. So we reject the agenda; we don't accept it'.⁷⁰ The Igbo cultural group described it as a quest by President Buhari to plant his kinsmen in all parts of Nigeria.⁷¹ In a similar vein, Professor Wole Soyinka described President Buhari's gesture as an attempt to give undue advantage to his kinsmen and provide immunity to herders who had murdered with impunity. Referring to the herdsman, he averred:

They kill without any compunction, they drive away the farmers who have been contributing to the food solutions in the country, the cattle eat their crops and then you come up with RUGA. I think that there is going to be trouble in the country, if this RUGA thing is not handled imaginatively and with humanity as priority. Any country where cattle take priority over human life is definitely at an elementary stage.⁷²

Some selected newspaper editorials rejected the policy.⁷³ For Obaze, the manner in which the policy was incorporated into the budget without the consent of the governors and the Ninth National Assembly (Legislature) suggests that there could be some truth in the allegation of an Islamisation agenda; it serves only those engaged in cattle business; it is a preferential policy, which only serves a particular interest. He suggested that the President may also have vested interests,⁷⁴ hence he does not pass the litmus test.⁷⁵ For Onyekpere, while the policy appeared to be an opportunity to create a value chain, increasing beef production and job opportunities among other things, attempts by the Federal Government to use its power and goodwill to forcefully acquire land in any state of Nigeria for nomadic herdsman is what he, like many other Nigerians find objectionable.

This unequal treatment of Nigerians has been further exacerbated by the way the Nigerian state and its agencies have handled the marauding members of the group, especially through non-prosecution of its members for the destruction of property, disturbance of the public peace, and murder, among other vices. Hence, a Yoruba cultural leader who is also the Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yorubaland, Chief Gani Adams, queries how some nomadic herdsman go about carrying sophisticated weapons, unchallenged by the security forces and how they are being supported by a few powerful people. He puts it succinctly:

How can ordinary Fulani herdsman be holding an AK 47? In our findings, the AK 47 rifle goes for about N1 million and with many bullets. So, we are looking beyond ordinary Fulani herdsman...We realised that there are some forces behind them in three phases. Those who strike in the bush, those who issued statements to back them up and those who are strategists, who give instructions to those who strike and those who issue statements.⁷⁶

Consequent upon the backlash, Professor Osinbajo stated that Government had suspended the programme on the ground that it was inconsistent with the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). Unlike the RUGA, the NLTP was a policy to develop ranches in willing states that

had also obtained certification from the National Economic Council (NEC)⁷⁷ chaired by the Vice President, Professor Osinbanjo.

Concluding Remarks

The study is an analysis of the Federal Government of Nigeria's resolve to end the perennial clashes between herders and farmers through the introduction of the RUGA policy. The policy was announced in June 2019, whereas allocation for the policy was already contained in the 2019 budget proposal. Ideally, when the policy was announced, it was supposed to provide soothing relief to communities as well as the herders who have also been attacked by armed bandits and cattle rustlers. However, this was not to be. Rather, while the policy was generally embraced by some people, including politicians from the north, it was generally rejected by most people in the south and the middle belt. What was the reason for the rejection of this policy which sought to douse tension between the farmers and herders, but which instead has degenerated into the loss of thousands of lives and displacement of millions of people?

The study found that the herder and farmer, despite the long years of conflicts, have also enjoyed some long years of cooperation. However, violent altercations between the herders and farmers have been exacerbated by so many factors including, desertification of the Sahara, modernisation, and population expansion, among others. These factors have led to physical confrontation between farmers and herders, claiming the lives of about 4000 in Nigeria between 2016 and 2018 alone. The Federal Government initiated so many plans – legislation, military operations and even police action – to address these incessant clashes. Yet, these efforts have yielded no fruitful result, especially from major stakeholders in the south.

RUGA was initiated in 2019 to address incessant conflict and help modernise the culture of open grazing, which has denied the herders access to basic education, healthcare, and security. However, RUGA was rejected for the obvious reasons that have been given over the years. Nonetheless, what this study found, which is consistent with previous policies, is that the Federal Government went beyond introducing the policy by budgeting huge sums of money without due consultation with the major stakeholders in the states. For example, it found that while most people in the north accepted the policy – including the Board of Trustee Chairman of the major opposition party, the PDP, (being a Fulani man) – most people in the south rejected it vehemently. Sadly, these policies were usually announced or proposed without due consultations with the stakeholders, especially the State House of Assemblies. This hasty and surreptitious attempt by the Federal Government to incorporate the southern states into its RUGA policy led to apprehension and slogans such as 'vote APC, vote for herders' among youths in the south before the 2019 general elections.⁷⁸

To further buttress these points, the interviews confirmed that while most people from the north, especially the cattle breeders and their elite group of politicians, embraced the policy, most people in the south outrightly rejected it. Their reasons included insecurity, mistrust of the herders, historical antecedents, the Fulanisation agenda, the Islamisation agenda, fear that their ancestral land was being taken over, and fear of non-vacation if the lands were needed by their

future generations. Ultimately, all these boils to fear of domination, which is the central point of federalism. However, one of the key features of true federalism is a desire for unity. Most people in the south perceive noble ideas emanating from the Federal Government; however, the manner in which these policies are usually announced show that major stakeholders were not taken on board. Not only that, RUGA favours a particular ethnic group, namely the Fulani whose population does not match those of the major ethnic groups in the country. The admonition by the presidency (and even by the Fulani) that people in the south must embrace RUGA, and the manner in which it was cloaked in secrecy at first until its details were announced, are two of the features that justify our adoption of conspiracy theory and group theory for the study.

Though the RUGA policy was suspended, the apprehension and suspicion of an ethnic domination is pervasive. This ethnic suspicion seems to predate the independence era. In a paper delivered in Lagos recently, an elder statesman and distinguished retired professor of History, Banji Akintoye, held that a particular small group (referring to the Fulani) had come up with an ambitious agenda aimed at planting itself by force into the homelands of virtually all other nationalities across the face of Nigeria.⁷⁹ This explains why such policies that are non-inclusive will continue to encounter brick walls.

Quite aside, three issues have been identified in the study: firstly, Hausa/Fulani-dominated states quickly embraced the RUGA policy. Secondly, most of these states are Muslim, and thirdly, they are mostly controlled by the ruling party (the APC). Similarly, those that rejected the policy were mainly the southern states from Christian-dominated areas. They are also non-Hausa-Fulani and they are mostly in opposition parties, such as the PDP. In other words, the issue of ethnicity, religion and politics cropped up. Over the years, scholars have argued that fear of domination, marginalisation, ethnicity and religion remains a major anomaly of the Nigerian federal system.⁸⁰ Hence, it appears that no matter how the Federal Government tweaks its policies, as long as it favours a particular ethnic group, despite some inherent merits, and the appropriated spaces are seen as those of the Christian south, it will encounter a brick wall.

In conclusion, the study made some recommendations based on findings: Firstly, government at the centre must adopt an inclusive and open policy, where all lives matter. Secondly, the Federal Government must entrench the rule of law and separation of powers, which are both some of the key necessities of good governance. Thirdly, all stakeholders must come together to forge a common course for Nigeria's unity through a national dialogue on what system is best and workable for a sustainable Nigeria so that all fears of marginalisation and domination can be allayed, and finally, while true federalism must be promoted, government must make concerted efforts to strengthen state institutions.

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