

**HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICTS AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN RUGA POLICY:
WHY NIGERIAN STAKEHOLDERS ARE AT LOGGERHEADS OVER RURAL
GRACING SETTLEMENTS?**

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ABSTRACT

The occurrence of conflicts between herders and farmers with unexplainable attacks by the Fulani herdsmen in Nigerian states in recent times has become a worrisome experience; threatening the unity and security of the country with the fear of war and ethnic invasion. Attempts by the government to proffer solutions have not helped matters following reactions as well as outright rejection that posed challenge to proposed policies such as: cattle colonies, cattle routes, grazing reserves and RUGA settlements. Findings revealed that reasons for rejection, counter reactions against policies are not far from the fear of ethnic domination and suspicion among Nigerian stakeholders. The work reveals that Rural Settlement Area (RUGA) is a policy formulated amidst perceived and overwhelming ethnic prejudice. It concludes that there is need for collective and inclusive policy formulation and implementation that recognizes collective effort with modernized political economy policy for sustainable development.

Keywords: Herders, Farmers, RUGA settlement, ethnicity, conflict, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is a union of separate ethno-cultural units that occupied land terrains, a former British colony. Nigerian State is pluralistic in nature, a multi-ethnic state; a nation-state with over 300 groups of diverse ethnic groups and religious identity. As incessant inter-ethnic conflict as well as ethno-religious conflicts have been a common experience in many African countries Nigeria is in no exemption. The diversity of religion and ethnicity coupled with the complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and

instability qualifies Nigeria as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa (Blanco-Mancilla, 2002). Every ethnic group in Nigeria is dissimilar to one another based on the uniqueness of their cultures, languages, religions and value systems. Though, Nigeria's motto is unity in diversity, nonetheless, from the beginning, the country has not been able to successfully accommodate the interest of all the divergent ethnic groups within its territory.

Series of insurgencies, rebellions and public revolts have entrenched the multicultural nature of the Nigerian States: the Yoruba and Hausa Kano riot of 1953, the ethno-religious massacre in Kano, Kaduna and Plateau in the wake of sharia judicial system in 1960 and 1966. The Nigerian Civil War in 1967-1970, the census crisis, the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in the late 1980s, and the Yan Tatsine riots in the early 1980s. Other theatres of conflict included, Zango Kataf in Kaduna State in 1992, Zaria Shiites outbreak, Jos Mayhem, Kaduna religious riots, Maiduguri onslaughts, Nupe–Yoruba conflict in Kwara, Tiv/Jukun and Fulani Conflict Gwantu crisis in (2001-2003), the Boko Haram insurgency and most current conflict which has kept erupting and claimed more lives is farmers' herders' conflict. Apart from having a greater effect on the national security; its ethnic dimension and perception posts the fear of ethnic domination or ethnic cleansing.

In their assessment of the conflict, some scholars have linked Fulani ethnic based pastoralist semi-nomadic group with the deadly Boko Haram group (McGregor 2014). The Militia group was named the fourth deadliest terror group in the world and has consistently been on the list of violent groups between 2015 and 2019 in Nigeria (GTI 2016:27; GTI 2017:24; GTI 2018:17). The Herder-Farmer Conflict has claimed 3,641 lives between January 2016 and October 2018; 57 percent in 2018 alone (AI, 2018). The conflict has evolved from spontaneous reactions to provocations to deadlier premeditated attacks, particularly in Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states. Available statistics show that between 1997 and 2018 the conflict between herdsmen and farmers are pronounced in specific geographical locations in the middle belt (Plateau, Nassarawa and Benue states) while isolated incidences were recorded in few other states.

The recent outpouring of armed herders into southward states Nigeria with different reports of criminal ventures as kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry, murders and rape have are all traceable to Fulani ethnic militants. The rape of non-Fulani women by herders is identified as a growing source of conflict and prevents women from carrying out traditional and necessary roles in gathering food and water. The Fulani herdsmen infiltration in southern Nigeria has been considered a Boko Haram in different form and shape a target to infiltrate the southern part of the country which conventional Boko Haram could not penetrate; it is suggestive of insurgency (Obi 2016). Like the Boko Haram conflict, farmers, herders' conflict has already shown signs of spilling across national borders with the report that, Fulani herdsmen fleeing clashes in Nigeria's states responded to demands from their own in northern Cameroon killed people and displacing thousands as they torched schools, housing and crops (McGregor 2014).

Many scholars who had studied the cause of Herders farmers conflicts related it to ecological and resource struggle as well as breakdown of traditional mechanism governing resource management and conflict resolution (Hussein et al; 1999 Oyama, 2014;). Others have seen the dynamics of the conflict as the increasing availability of modern weapons, including the availability of automatic weapons, where powerful interests seem to support certain groups with weapons in order to advance their own causes through sponsored violence (Seddon and Sumberg, 1997; McGregor 2014). Some have depicted the violence as a continuation of ethno-religious struggle that had predate the colonial era therefore, seen the upsurge in farmer-herder violence as confluence of four developments: the ongoing expansion of land under cultivation, environmental degradation across Africa's Sahel region, and the recent rise of large scale cattle rustling (Baca 2015). Few however, have considered the government policies as well as policy formulation, and its implementation whether it prolongs or really proffering solution to the conflict. Greatest difficulties understood in addressing and resolving issues surrounding herders- farmers conflict in Nigeria occur in the politicization of the conflicts, policy as well the legal regimes and the blockages to the enactment or implementation of laws that can redress the key challenges posed by the conflict.

This work therefore, explores the narrative of the conflicts as well as series of government measures vis-à-vis policies formulation and the dispositions of Nigerian ethnic groups to these policies. The work adopts descriptive survey method to interrogate the selected key informants among the ethnic groups from the selected states from North central, Southeast and Southwest respectively. The selected states within these areas are: Benue and Kogi, Enugu and Imo with Oyo and Ekiti. The work interrogates the causal factors of herders' farmer's conflicts, the security and economic implications, the looming food crisis, the ethnic perception of government policies especially, the RUGA policy, its fallacious approach, and the likely economic benefits to the nation and the citizenry.

Historical relationship, and causal factors of Herdsman farmers conflicts in Nigeria

Conflict between herders and farmers has existed since the beginnings of agriculture even while their cooperation at time have been mutually benefited. The prevalence of tsetse and low settlement densities kept the incidence of clashes at a low frequency until the twentieth century (Blench and Dendo 2003).The incessant conflicts experienced in recent times between Fulani herdsmen and farmers however, was not felt only in Nigeria, but entire Sahel of West Africa in the tropics which has claimed many lives and properties.Fulani pastoralists of West and Central Africa trace much of their current political, religious, and socio-cultural identity from the eighteenth and nineteenth century jihad which sedentary them within conquered communities. The Fulani are said to originate from Senegambia, before spreading across some 20 states in West Africa and the Sahel, up to Western Sudan and the Central African Republic (Blench 1994; Shehu and Hassan 1995; Blench 2010; McGregor 2014).

The major pre-occupation of pastoralists is to take very good care of their herds. This largely involves the search for good grazing grounds in respect of pastures and water for the cattle. In the process, they resist any area that could be hazardous to the health of their herds, such as tsetse fly infested environments (Tonah, 2000).However, since the Sahelian drought of the 1970s and 1980s, and the accompanying migration of a huge number of pastoralists into the fringes of the humid forest zone of West Africa, there have been a massive increase of the incidence of farmers-herders conflict. The conflicts have borne on a large proportion of the blame on resource

scarcity, resources struggle, environmental degradation which have all led to policyplunging in the Guinea Savannah region of West African states (The baud and Batterburry, 2001).

Herder and farmer groups have very different values, customs, physical and cultural characteristics, disputes between them are frequently characterized as ethnic conflict. Thus, Farmer-herder differences in Nigeria are not only seen as resources conflict but are also sometimes represented as ethnic conflict. Pastoralists are constantly in motion from place to place searching for better grazing ground and indeed they are commonly found in various rural settlements within the northern, middle belt and southern parts of Nigeria. By the flow of their movement, they frequently trespass farmlands owned by local farmers in their host communities destroying crops and valuables which results in competing with Farmers for grazing routes. Herdsmen travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture, but against what they are known for before this period, they often move around with fire-arms with the excuse of defending their cattle (Omilusi, 2016). In the recent times they have become ethno-religious militia, transformed into brutal killers, violent wonderous, bloodthirsty, aggressive and provocative mobilized, incited, used and sponsored by their political elites, traditional, religious, military and educational leaders in particular (McBeath, 1978; Wiegenstein, 2014). The new phenomenon of Fulani herdsmen now behaves as a conquering groups or invaders, ready to inflict terror on their victims and not ready to ask for permission for land use from which the big problem lies since the farmers also are not ready to do away with their inheritance. They have been reported to be the people identified as quick resort to combat in the defense of their interest. They have the reputation of waiting for opportune moment to seek for revenge. Under such situation, they are readily prepared for conflict, and any conflict at this point becomes colossal, having direct negative impact which saw ethnic, political, economic and religious overlapping interests. The consequences are seeing in deep distrust, farmers and community members seeing herdsmen as invaders who are at a mission to claim their lands.

Nigeria Watch database (2014) recorded 615 violent deaths related to conflict, out of a total of 61,314 violent fatalities in Nigeria. The analysis that follows was undertaken with 111 relevant cases, which were reported by the press across the 36 states of Nigeria from June 2006 to May 2014. It seeks to understand the frequency, the intensity, the patterns, and the geography of such

violence, based on a study of 7 incidents in 2006, 9 in 2007, 6 in 2008, 13 in 2009, 9 in 2010, 15 in 2011, 17 in 2012, 27 in 2013, and 8 as at May 2014. In term of death toll, it has been observed that between 2016, more than 1400 people died in these conflicts (Simon, 2017). S B Morgen (2016) reported a total number of 461 incidents between 1997 and 2015, with the vast majority occurring between 2011 and 2015 in the Middle-Belt, South-East and South-South. It reported twenty-one attacks in 2016, with the number of victims standing between 526 and 820.

The conflicts have appeared intractable, enduring overtime and escalated because of perceived complicity, complacency and conspiracy of the people, government, and the states where they have happened. The complicity, complacency and conspiracy of the government in the conflicts were aptly captured on the inability of the government to resolve the issue of indigene and settler dichotomy; the failure of the government to revive the grazing reserves; the controversy over Nigerian land use Act, and land tenure policy which have long time, alienates the peasants; the inability of the government to come up with efficient enabling legislation to regulate grazing/transhumance practice; the inefficiency or excesses of state security apparatus in ensuring objective application of relevant public law (Okoli, 2015:423).

Theoretical Framework

Both Eco-violence, Conspiracy and Group theories are found relevant to narrate the causes of repeated conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria and they are subsequently discussed. Homer-Dixon's (1999) eco-violence theory explains the causes of the conflicts by analyzing relationship between environmental factors and violent conflicts. Environmental scarcity according to him sometimes helps to drive society into a self-reinforcing spiral of violence, institutional dysfunction, and social fragmentation. de Soysa, (2002) observed that the issue of environmental pressure as a source of conflict revolves largely around resource degradation and resource scarcity.

The theory explains that environmental scarcity can contribute to civil violence, including insurgencies and ethnic clashes. The incidence of such violence will probably increase as scarcities of crop, land, freshwater, and forests worsen in many parts of the developing countries. The affected people often migrate or be expelled to new lands. They often trigger

ethnic conflicts when they move to new areas, while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts. This is applicable to the scenario as it experienced in Nigeria where the rampaging herders move their cattle southwards during the dry and northwards in the wet season. What appeared certain in the course of these movements are destruction of farmland and crops which lead to frustration by herders who accuse the farmers of rustling their cattle, resulting in conflicts with unquantifiable consequences analyzed the reason for incessant conflict between the two.

Eco-violence theory however, has encountered many critics (de Soysa, 2002; Seter and Theisen, 2013; Agbese, 2017) based on different reasons and more importantly, the peculiarity of Nigeria's experience which lies in instances where the land is available for the herders, yet they often clash with their hosts. de Soysa, (2002) identified several other factors which mediate the effects of environmental pressure. These are intervening variables ranging from cultural conceptions of the environment, nature and degree of social cleavages, the availability of social capital, nature of institutions, skills and ideological propensities of leadership and groups, among others. Seter and Theisen (2013) noted that the role of environmental scarcity in violence is often obscure and indirect. On this note the configuration of the conflicts, and the nature and degree of attacks and killings ascribed to the herders that seldom suffer any casualties, it is wrong to describe them as clashes. Agbese (2017) argued that the attacks were unprovoked; especially when the attackers chose to strike at night when there is no evidence that those attacked ever faced the attackers or that they had a chance to fight back as in the cases of Plateau State and Agatu community in Benue State. Thus, while the eco-violence theory attempted to establish nexus amongst resources, conflicts and security issues yet, it does not explain in full the contemporary causal factors, sustenance and escalation of herders-farmers' conflicts, especially, in Nigeria. This gives reason for adding the conspiracy theory.

Conspiracy theory embodies three principles: nothing happens by accident, nothing is as it seems, and everything is connected (Barkun's 2003). Conspiracy theory is the conviction that a group of actors meets in secret agreement with the purpose of attaining some malevolent goal (Bale, 2007). Sunstein and Vermeule (2008) argue that some events or practice are explained by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who have also managed to conceal their

role. Conspiracies typically attempt to usurp political or economic power, violate rights, infringe upon established agreements, withhold vital secrets, or alter bedrock institutions. It has been observed that powerful people work together in order to withhold the truth about some important practice or some terrible event. Therefore, conspiracy between interested parties or some covert but influential agency (typically political in motivation and oppressive in intent) is responsible for an unexplained event in the society. Conspiracy theory has been variously linked to a crisis of trust in government and government apparatus, to the undermining of democratic deliberation, a weakening of the state's capacity to govern and even to the growth of violent extremism (Bartlett and Miller, 2010); as well as group polarization (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). Various cases of conflict in Nigeria involving the Fulani pastoralist and farmer therefore, consist of acts of conspiracy among the stakeholders.

The group theory conception removed the veil of rhetoric that obscured the actual operation of government behind abstractions like 'the national interest'. (Garson 1978). The theory posits that individuals are important only when they are part of or on behalf of group interests (Dye 1981:5; Dye & Ziegler, 1990). Public policy is the product of the group struggle therefore, what may be called public policy is the equilibrium reached in the group struggle at any given moment, and it represents a balance which the contending factions or groups constantly strive to win in their favour (Anderson, 1997). The theory elucidates how each of the various groups in a given 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 emphasizes a group as individuals that may, on the basis of shared attitudes or interest, make claims upon other groups in society. According to Fox et al. (2006:12), public policy may derive from interest groups who continuously interact with policy makers to influence the policy making process. On this account, group theory may be surmised as: turning to aid from government in order to increase its personal or private purpose; 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 (Baskin, 1970:73-75). Public policy usually reflects the interests of dominant groups and most time those group either as a tribe or ethnic group that dominate the political power.

Nigerian Government politics, policies and the RUGA policy

In the attempt to curtailing the re-occurrence of tragedies between herders and farmers in Nigeria, several interventions have been in place at different levels; both at state and national level. In fact, numbers of grassroots initiatives have tried to address the problem. The first which was from state was the Benue passage of anti-open grazing law made and fixed with its implementation effect from 1st November 2017. Both Taraba and Ekiti states had replicate Benue, other states like Anambra, Bayelsa, Imo, Jigawa and Niger have taken some measures on conflict resolution mechanism. In Jigawa state under Governor Sule Lamido, a permanent, grazing reserves and water pumping windmills was provided at well-thought strategic locations. The Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law No 7 of 2017 prohibits open movement of livestock in search of pasture and to provide for the establishment of ranches and for other matters connected to it.

At national level was the recommendation made in 2014 conference where delegates from the conference recommended that nomadic cattle rearing should be stopped; the delegates recommended that cattle ranches should be established across the country (Amzat et al, 2016). On this note, President Goodluck Jonathan's in 2014, formed up an inter-ministerial technical committee on grazing reserves, proposing strategies to end the conflicts. Concurrently, a political committee was also set up on grazing serve which was chaired by the then governor of Benue state, (Gabriel Suswam) with the committee demand the release of sum N100 billion (\$317million) by Central Bank of Nigeria for the construction of ranches in all the 36 states in the country. With the defeat of President Jonathan in March 2015 general election, the implementation was interrupted (Eromo 2016).

On his assumption of office, President Muhammadu Buhari in his inauguration speech in May 2015, stated among other things that he was going to end; the Boko Haram insurgency and the perennial violent clashes between the Farmers and Herders. Having this in mind, he directed the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to formulate a comprehensive livestock development plan including measures to curb farmer-herder clashes. On August 2015, a FMARD committee recommended short-medium and long-term strategies,

including development of grazing reserves and stock routes (ICG 2017: 10). There was a move by Senator Zainab Kureto make the Federal Government enact a law to allow the establishment of a National grazing reserve commission. The bill which was titled *National Grazing Reserve (Establishment)*, Bill 2016, was designed to empower federal government to establish at least one grazing reserve in each of the 36 State of Nigeria (Odefowokan, 2014). This bill which had passed the second stage, was rejected because it is against the intent and purposes of the Land Use Act while at the same time, seeing to have override public interest.

In attempt to affect the incessant conflict in January 2016, the National Grazing Reserve (establishment) Bill was sent to the National Assembly for consideration. Part of this Bill read that, Grazing Reserves would be the property of the Federal Government and could not be alienated by the President (PLAC, 2016: Part III, 15). Other parts of the Bill give power to the Commission to acquire lands for the use of grazing routes from states. Audu Ogbeh, Minister of Agriculture, revealed that President Muhammadu Buhari's directive was to establish 30,00 hectares of grazing reserve within six months (*Vanguard*, 2016). This policy could not be implemented due to the oppositions mostly from governors of southwestern states who were opposed to key into the policy suggesting the contradiction of the policy to Land Use decree of 1978 where all land situated in the territory of each state in the country is vested in the Governor of the state (Mabogunje 2009). It was considered an attempt without consent of the governors or State Legislations, and seen contradicts the Land Use Act of 1978, which grants power to the Governors given common slogan; to attempt to Islamize or Fulanize Nigerian states.

With the outright rejection of grazing reserve; on January 2018, the Federal Government proposed another policy tagged, "Cattle Colony". Chief Audu Ogbeh, defined the "cattle colony" as a step-in policy taken further to solve the problems between the herdsmen and farmers by designating vast tracts of lands in each state as herding grounds. Designated cattle colony is to be designed that Herdsmen would use as a settle place to feed their livestock and hence, avoid the disturbance of fertile agricultural lands that belong to farming communities. It was supposed to prevent the herders from being attacked by the cattle rustlers, who are generally rampant in the north. The minister further stressed that 16 states in the country had accepted to the policy and enjoined others to join, stating that states and local governments could refuse to host a 'cattle

colony' within their borders (Orji 2018; ICG 2018:23). Each colony was to cover 5,000 hectares (about 25km by 20km) and would be 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 (Yusuf and Buhari 2018).

While most of the 16 states that volunteered their lands for the project were mostly from the North-west, those from the south rejected it. Some of the reasons for rejections were that; there are limited lands and they see this as a new Fulani imperialistic act through which the presidency would place the south at mercy of Fulani invasion. It was seen as a way to provide government's subsidy for Fulani herders, and that it was a far-fetched solution to the incessant clashes (ICG 2018: 25). As a matter of sensitizing the public on the importance of the policy and the intention of the government, President, through his Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Chief Femi Adesina, while reacting to a question on attachment to ancestral land urged those against the policy to rethink; noting that, they are better off living with the ranches and colonies than dying through the repeated conflicts. He stated that:

Ancestral or no ancestral attachment? You can only have ancestral attachment when you are alive. If you are talking about ancestral attachment, if you are dead, how does the attachment matter?" (Femi Adesina, 2018).

In furtherance of government efforts to proffering solution to the conflicts, National Livestock Transformation Policy was announced on 19 June 2018. This was target at encouraging a gradual switch from open grazing to a modern ranching. The government announced that it would run from 2018 to 2027 as a multifaceted intervention to modernize livestock management, improve productivity and enhance security. Under this initiative the states (Adamawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara) were selected as the pilot states, with 94 ranches to be established in clusters of four at 24 locations spread over those states. Monies worth about 179 billion was also planned into the project. The project was rejected even by the Fulani ethnic group. One of the representatives of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, the Fulani Socio-Cultural Association; Mr. Saleh Alhassan while responding in the interview argued that they had rejected it on some grounds which include: fear of most landowners in the southwest who would not lease out their ancestral lands to the herders, he stressed further that

cattle breeds are not ranching-friendly as, open grazing remain their culture (Ajaja and Alagbe 2018).

As a continuation to the nomadic school educational policy, the Federal government under the Commission for nomadic education added additional role to the commission to promote, educate and pass information to the Fulani extract with provision of a Fulani Radio, dedicated to the group. The government had budgeted 1,399, 811, 307 for the commission. Other allocations were also added under the Ministry of Agriculture for livestock production which comprises of grazing reserves among other things. For instance, the allocation for the national Grazing Reserves Development was decimated to engulf N6, 903,882,142 pn 2019 budget (FRN 2019:313). This among others are found by other stakeholders as authoritative allocation of resources in favour of Fulani extraction otherwise, while a similar project worth of same amount has not been projected for the farmers?

On March 2016, Audu Ogbeh, made it known to the public the plans of federal government to import and cultivate good and nutritious grasses from Brazil, reiterated that such initiative would had end the clashes between the herders and farmers. He argued further 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,” (NAN, 2016).

The proposed plan was echoed by the Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Senator Abdullahi Adamu that:

The plan became imperative as the importation of grazing pastures for cattle at designated places across the country would bring an end to the lingering crises between herdsmen and their host communities (Opejobi, 2016).

Within its task to put last solution to the conflict, on 25 June 2019, the Federal Government came up with the idea of RUGApolicy. The Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) was proposed to be piloted in eleven states namely: Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasarawa Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba, Katsina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara and Niger with another unnamed state. The settlements were supposed to comprise grazing areas and villages with some basic infrastructure a school, a health center, and a veterinary. The Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural

Development, Mohammed Umar, announced that the settlements will house nomadic herdsmen who breed animals. The RUGA settlement areas were supposed to accommodate them and their livestock, which would make it easier to identify the grazing routes of the herders and would allow for fewer conflicts with the settled farmers.

The policy was perceived by other ethnic groups to have been endorsed by the pro-north ethnic groups, which including the pressure group, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) given assumption that, RUGA is from Hausa language. Amidst of this, the spokesperson for the Presidency, Garba Shehu, express the intention of government that:

The Federal Government is proposing (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 (Okere 2019:36).

In similar vein, Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mohammed Umar stated further that:

We felt that to do away with herders-farmers' conflict, we need to settle our nomads and those who breed animals. We want to put them in a place that has been developed as a settlement, where we provide water for their animals, pasture, schools for their children, security, agro-rangers. We also felt that we need to develop cattle markets whereby you don't need to be transporting animals through very long distances. We will also bring in investors that will set up modern centers where cattle breeders can slaughter their animals. When we do that, a lot of other things will come up. We are going to change their lifestyle, take them away from our streets and from wandering in the bush and develop districts, hamlets and towns and in the next five to 10 years you will never see a nomad moving about, wandering or kidnapping. And this will end all these security challenges (*Pulse News 2019*)¹

¹Umar is the permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mohammed Umar [FMARD] 7 things you should know about Buhari's controversial RUGA settlements in pulse news online

The settlement was purposed 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.

RUGA Policy and ethnics prejudice

Out of all policies attempt to proffering solution to herders- farmers problems in Nigeria, RUGA is found to be most criticized one. The policy had experienced different oppositions that federal government has no option, but to suspend the policy. Immediately after the announcement of the policy, there were public uproar as reactions and counter-reactions to the policy. While some were subject to propaganda, some wereof threats. A spokesman for the Coalition of Northern Group, Abdul-Azeez Suleiman, for instance on July 2019 categorically gave a warning statementon debateswhether to accept the RUGA policy or not that:

While we warn all state governments that stand against the implementation of the RUGA Initiative to desist and give peace a chance, we place President Buhari and the Federal Government on notice that they must completely stop this raging madness within 30-days beginning from today, Wednesday (Erezi, 2019)

In a similar vein, another respondent from southwestern state was of opinion that, the policy would have created ethnic tensions and that since Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country, he wondered why only the Fulani were considered for such huge project. He furthered that such policy would only increase the population of the Fulani in these 36 states where Government wanted to introduce the policy referring to the experience of Fulani invasion in Ilorin, Kwara state. He queried government thinking; and whatis going to be the intake of other ethnic groups in this policy? Would government also make a policysimilar to this in favour of farmers among other ethnic groups in Nigeria (In-depth interview with a key informant; Elder Tijania Farmer, from Saki, Okeogun Area of Oyo State)).

Sharing similar fear of insecurity and ethnic invasion, another respondent puts it thus:

The RUGA project by its design is a seductive way of taking peoples lands away from them to serve the interest of the Fulani headsmen. When they have not been given permanent settlement in their host states, the manner and pattern of their infiltration into other states in southwest revealed there is a secret agenda to occupied our land not to even talk about the havocs they have caused on the

people farms and numbers of death. (In-depth interview with Elder Alaribe, a cashew farmer from Enugu 20th September 2019)

He explained that policy would not do anything good than further the ethnic sentiment since the policy has already been noted to promote Fulani hegemony at the disadvantage of other ethnic groups.

A respondent from Benue state demonstrated his fears of the belligerent nature of the Fulani herdsmen based on the different encounters in the state. Given to his experience and encounters as a local administrator; he described Fulani as someone that an average southerner would never trust when considering the recent damage, they have suffered (Solomon Odey, is a Local Farmer, from Agatu community in Benue state; 10th September, 2019).

Another respondent from Osun state referred to the RUGA policy as another partition in Nigerian states by Fulani ethnic group especially, with President Muhammadu Buhari as their kinsmen. To him, Buhari is only trying to complete the unfinished work of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804 when Hausa lands were being occupied.

Analysing the historical antecedent of Fulani ethnic group, a respondent said that:

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 problem to the people. (Imam Adeyemi, Cleric/Farmer, 76 years, Allahu Lateef Central Mosque, Sawmill, Ede, 11 August 2019).

He suggested that, rather than making RUGA settlement compulsory, and mandated project for all states, it should be optional for any states that interested in such livestock economic project noting that policy still have a laudable benefit notwithstanding.

According to the National President of Miyetti Allah Kautel Hore, Alhaji Abdullahi Bodejo, he reiterates that the Fulani herders can relocate to Sambisa forest and that Fulani did not even asked for RUGA:

Nobody requested for RUGA settlement in the first place. The Fulani already have their RUGA. What is the meaning of RUGA? "Is it not a place where you

have the Fulani houses? So, we already have RUGA but I do not know why all the confusion about all the issues concerning the Fulani in this country. This is because we have grazing reserve areas and people are not talking about it. They initially talked about the cattle colony and from there, they now started talking about RUGA. They said they wanted to settle the Fulani in one place but did anybody tell them what they wanted to do? Nobody had any meeting with them on the issue of RUGA but I noticed that there are now desperate people who claim to be Fulani leaders by all means (Abdullahi Badejo, October, 2019)²

Fulani people according to him are being chased away in the Southeast and other places as if they are not Nigerians. What caused these things is the issue of RUGA while the Fulani being chased away do not even know about the RUGA policy.

A respondent from Enugu State queried Federal Government thinking of RUGA policy of granting peoples' land to non-indigenes without their consents considering that it has been established that most of the Fulani Herdsmen are not Nigerians, but migrant. He puts it thus:

In the last couple of weeks, Nigerians mounted a sustained serious resistance to the unpopular 'RUGA' policy and its implementation by the 'Fulani Government' of President Muhammadu Buhari. Hear them again; it is now e-Registration for illegal immigrants!! Who are these illegal immigrants? The obvious answer is, the promoters of, and the numerous cross border Fulani herdsmen currently terrorizing Nigerians in their ancestral homes as allowed by Muhammadu Buhari's government (In-depth Interview 2019).

His opinion is borne from the beliefs that most of the Fulani Herdsmen did not fare well in their original homelands as Senegal, Gambia and Guinea, and since they have found Nigeria a fertile ground coupled with the porous border they have decided to occupy.

Similarly, another respondent condemned the policy while referencing the culture of the Fulani which transhumance, his beliefs is that they will still go about grazing outside the settle area whenever there is shortage of the facilities provided or what happens when the grasses within the RUGA is exhausted? He further stated that, the policy has a political undertone and if government is sincere, such settlement in a particular state should have been done for indigenes who intend to rear herds and not for non-indigenes:

²Abdullahi Badejo is the National President of Miyetti Allah Kautel Hore Socio-cultural organization of Fulani cattle breeders in Nigeria.

The policy has something very good and important but the content of the policy and the period of the proposed policy is counterproductive. If the policy is truly meant to ending herdsmen/farmer clashes and prevent cattle rustling the government should have allowed private individuals to get involved in the acquisition of land and the business of ranching. (In-depth interview with a respondent from Kogi State).

Representatives and the leading figures of Socio-cultural groups in the southwestern southeast Nigeria, the popular Afenifere and Oodu People Congress groups were not left out of the discourse. The Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yoruba land, and the leader of Oodua People Congress; Chief Gani Adams, queries how some Herdsmen go about carrying sophisticated weapons unchallenged by the security forces if not because they are being supported. He argued that:

How can ordinary Fulani herdsmen be holding AK 47? In our findings, the AK 47 rifle goes for about N1 million and with many bullets. We are looking beyond ordinary Fulani herdsmen... We have realized 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 (Chief Gani Adams, 2019).

Speaking during the in-depth interview Mr Yinka Odumakin, the secretary of Afenifere said that:

The government must not commit the nation's resources to the private business of individuals. The plan according to him is a systematic approach to turn the communities into RUGA settlements for the Fulani ethnic group across the states in the future. Nigerians voted for ranching at the 2014 constitutional conference as a way out of this crisis and that those ranches should not be the business of government. Individuals should set them up because the owners of these cattle are billionaires but those who are moving the cattle are just their labourers (Yinka Odumakin, July 2019).

Like Afenifere position, the National Publicity Secretary of Ohanaeze Ndigbo in an interview said that ranching remains the way out, but the ranches should be built in the north where the cattle are:

Our position on RUGA is that it should be cancelled and not suspended. Suspension is like keep-in-view. Some of the actions of the government are laughable. We want RUGA to be cancelled. If we must do ranching, let them do it in the north where there is a large expanse of land lying fallow. (Secretary, Ohaneze Ndigbo)

The National Secretary of the Niger Delta group, Dr Alfred Mulade, advised the government to steer clear of the issue, and anyone, who wished to set up ranches, should be free to do so.

Government according to him should steer clear of it, because cattle rearing is purely a business venture just like any other business. If the herders feel they need to do ranching, they could buy land in any part of the country. The government cannot force anything down the throats of the people. The group's Coordinator, the Taraba Volunteer Group, a civil society organisation Mr Joseph Terence, and Legal Adviser, Mr Nierus Johnson appreciate President Muhammadu Buhari for listening to the voice of reason and suspending the proposed RUGA but said:

RUGA settlement was clearly against the import and the provisions of Section 42 (1) b of the 1999 Constitution as amended which provides for equal treatment for all communities and citizens. "Rather than spend huge sums of money to benefit only a community in the name of RUGA settlement, such funds should be used in alleviating the sufferings of millions of Nigerians in IDP camps (Joseph 2019).

Professor Wole Soyinka while responding to the folly nature of RUGA policy describes President Buhari's gesture as a deceitful way to a lot of undue favour to his kinsmen and at the same time encourage herders' men who have murdered with impunity. Describing the Herdsmen and the kinds of nefarious acts he stated that:

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 at an elementary stage (*Punch Newspaper, 2019:36*).

As the aftermath of all backlash on RUGA settlement, vice president, Professor Osinbajo later announced that Government had suspended the programme on the ground that it was not in accordance with the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). Just as RUGA, was the NLTP policy to develop ranches in willing states and which had the certification of the National Economic Council (NEC)³ and chaired by the Vice President, Professor Osinbanjo. Even as at when RUGA policy was suspended, Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum (SMBLF) has already raised an allegation against federal government claiming that there is a surreptitious plan by the Federal Government to repeal the Land Use Act, and take over the control of lands in the

³ The NEC comprise of the Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, 36 state Governors; Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Boss Mustapha; the National Security Adviser, Babagana Monguno; Chief of Staff Abba Kyari and the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Godwin Emefiele.

country from state governors. This they said, was to enable the government to subsequently implement the suspended RUGA project (*The Tide Newspaper*, 2019).

Several questions from different quarters were being raised why the FG is not going ahead with RUGA in some northern states that have accepted the policy if the whole idea was not about land-grabbing in the South and Middle Belt states. The political gladiators and pressure group are of the view that the Federal Government's support for local government autonomy was hinged on the RUGA scheme to allow "aliens" to take over allotted land under the programme. The Secretary of Christian Association of Nigeria CAN in the 17 Southern States, Dr Joseph Ajujungwa said:

The suspension of the programme by President Muhammadu Buhari may not be its end, said there was every indication though it is claimed that it has been suspended, the underground work is still going on. Every Southerner should be watchful, even as we pray, we do not need to keep quiet; they are experts in underground work. We do not have land to give to anybody as a grazing field or colony and we call on the South-East governors to maintain their stand that they do not have such a place. Do you know what it means to give 10 hectares of land to herdsman? (Dr, Ajujungwa, July, 2019)⁴.

While government has overlooked and indeed ignored the essential stages of good policy making as: agenda setting, policy formulation, adoption and implementation; Nigerians stakeholders have equally failed to understand that the livestock economy is not an economy of a Fulani herder.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conflict, as well as the escalation in conflicts between the herders and farmers in Nigeria is complex multi-dimensional. It is established that apart from the dominant factors such as climate change, migration, population growth; the herder's farmers conflicts have enjoyed more attention from numerous factors as ethnicity, religion and policies somersault. It is evident that the conflicts have mutated into events that are driven more by non-ecological factors such as the fragility or outright lack of unity of ethnic nationalities in the country than they are by the ecological factors. From the findings, different regimes and government have made different

⁴ Ajujungwa is the CAN Secretary for the Seventeen states in Southern Nigerian States

attempts as concern the policies mediate on the incessant conflicts between farmers and herders. RUGA policy and other previous attempted policies were announced to give relief to the farmers host communities as well as the herders who have also been faced with attacks by bandits and cattle rustlers.

It is observed that infusion of ethno-religion and political affections appear to have befuddled the understanding of the underlying character of the pastoralist, farmers conflicts given the audacious armed banditry, robbery, kidnapping, and cattle rustling allegedly perpetrated by the arms bearing herders. This is aligned with Scholars work over the yearsthat among other factors the fear of domination, marginalization, ethnicity and religion remains the major problems of the Nigerian Federal System (Nwaorgu 2013; Nwaorgu, 2015; Osaghae and Suberu 2005; Osaghae, 2019; Nnoli 1978; Nnoli 1995). This historical mistrust of the herder between the ethnic groups, have brought about the slang of Fulanization, Islamization agenda with the fear of taking over their ancestral land and fear of non-vacation if the lands are needed by their coming generations among others.

This has further revealed the fear of domination, and conquest which is the central point of Nigeria Federalism especially, from the way most respondents perceived the policy of RUGA. This is confirmed that even while the RUGA policy had been declared suspended, the apprehension and suspicion of an ethnic domination remained pervasive. The ethnic suspicion seems to predate independence era and rather than farming the pastoralists farmers violent conflict appropriately as a contestation over valuable resource use, there have been growing tendency towards dressing it with the toga of ethno-religious uprisingwherefarmers and their allies felt tomobilize to protect their interest in case of any reprisal attacks. Farmersregard the reprisal attacks as means of reducing the population of the farmers who in most cases are Christians.

This study found out that RUGA policy though come with good intention; it was rejected for the obvious reasons, which had been given over the years considering the ethnic complexity. More importantly, the Federal Government had gone beyond introducing the policy, but have already budgeted into 2019 budget, huge sum of money without due consultations with the major

stakeholders in the states. It seems clearly that the federal government sommersaulted its policy fashion from agenda setting to implementation. Such policy rigmarole does not conjure confidence. It undermines trust, it raises more question than it proffers solutions. The hasty and clandestine attempt by the Federal Government and its RUGA policy had led to apprehension and slogan such asfulanisation or islamization.

Essentially, policy experts agree that public policymaking is a process and not a one-off event; it is thus characterized as a dynamic, complex, and interactive system through which public problems are identified and countered by creating new public policy or by reforming existing public policy (Obaze, 2019). Where any policy is contrived to advance sectional or vested interests, that policy ceases to be in the common interest. And that is exactly where Nigeria finds itself with the controversial Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA) herdsmen settlement. The folly and falsities of that policy are deep-seated and very polarizing. Like every other policy. Every public policy ought to meet of three definitional premises or a combination of two to efficiently regulatory, distributive or redistributive. The RUGA policy does not in any sense meet any of these parameters. With the RUGA policy, if the policy makers carryout their duty with transparency, there would be more cooperation from stakeholders. Where the affected land owners is ready to cooperate by collecting adequate compensation (in cash and or kind by relocation to other places to acquire farmland) and releasing their land for establishment ofRUGA, as well as engage in other value chain business activities as anticipated by the policy, there would be peace and economic development in the affectedstates and Nigeria as a whole. When the states are prepared to carry out more impact assessment and provide the services required there is tendency to reap more positive result from RUGA policy.

To this end this study made some recommendations based on the findingsthat:

- A new policy framework on the farmers-herder's conflicts should be developed which will be both comprehensive and mutually beneficial to both groups. There must be a consultative process that listens to the concerns of all stakeholders in developing the new framework, so that the outcome would have national ownership. This is important because given how fragile peace has become in Nigeria, introducing a controversial

policy as RUGA without in-house consensus and wide consultations with members of stakeholders will always pose a problem.

- The suspicion coupled with deceitful way the of RUGA policy was being handled made it difficult to counter the argument of those who insist there was a sinister agenda behind it. Whatsoever policy to be put in place, it should be inclusive and develop through a plan for a transitional period during which new systems would be put in place.
- The government should take advantage of a sustainable ranching model (SRM) that will tackle the problem of open grazing which is the traditional method of grazing. The creation of a sustainable ranching model will attract investors willing to invest in the model and the effect of climate change to grazing, and bring solution to solving the root causes of the conflict that is caused by change in climate and increased in population.

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