

**RUGA SETTLEMENT INITIATIVE: A PANACEA FOR CONFLICT BETWEEN
HERDSMEN AND FARMERS IN NIGERIA.**

Abstract

Recent killings and destruction of lives and property by a particular tribe known as the Fulani have been in the spotlight for some time. Their actions against the farmers have rendered so many homeless and incapacitated. This situation is appalling, as every passing day brings in fresh news about the destruction carried out by the group. This necessitated the ruga program, aimed to address issues related to livestock management promote agriculture and reduced conflict between farmers and headers. The federal government of Nigeria believed, it will drastically reduce conflict between the farmers and the herdsmen and in extension become economically beneficial. This study adopted the critical analysis method and the findings revealed that the ruga program though with its benefits will not survive due to widespread criticism and disagreement. The perceived benefit varied depending on different sperspectives but overall, the intent was to modernized livestock farming practices and enhanced food security.

Keywords: Ruga, Fulani, Headers Hausa, and Farmers

INTRODUCTION

Since the fourth Nigerian republic's founding in 1999, farmer-herder violence has killed more than 10,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands more (Ahmed, 2015) it followed a trend in the increase of farmer-herder conflicts throughout. Much of the western Sahel, due to an expansion of agriculturist population and cultivated land at the expense of pasture-lands; deteriorating environmental conditions, desertification and soil degradation; population growth; breakdown in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of land and water disputes; and proliferation of small arms and crime in rural areas. Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defense forces and ethnic and tribal militias, which have engaged in further violence. The majority of farmer-herder clashes have occurred between Fulani herdsmen Farmers, exacerbating ethno-religious hostilities. It is wise as we proceed in this study to recall that, the primitive cattle industry is controlled and managed by the nomadic Fulanis. It has been their way of life from the beginning. They have been in this profession for hundreds of years. The Fulanis are said to have migrated to Nigeria about the 6th and 7th century ad (stride and Ifeka, 1973). Iloeje (1972) is of the view that the Fulani people are nomadic herdsmen, who are believed to have come to Nigeria from the North as invaders at different periods from the 13th century to the 19th. Some Fulani are still nomadic and others live a sedentary life. However, the issue of migration from the North probably suggests that they came into the country either from Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, or even the Senegambia region. All these suggest that they are immigrants. It is postulated that the original home of the Fulani may have been the Senegal River valley and the eastern Guinea area, and they expanded eastwards from about the 12th century (kajubi, Lewis; Taiwo, 1974). Indeed, there are two classes of Fulani known after their settlement in Nigeria. These are the "those with cows" Fulani who still retain their tall, slim features and light complexion. Others are the "town" Fulani who have since learned to live with the Hausas in towns and even intermarry with their neighbors. The Fulani with cows lives in temporary tents made of cow hides or grass-easy to set up and equally easy to dismantle. This is practical because they are nomadic pastoralists who are always on the move. This is also a confirmation that the cattle industry in Nigeria began between the 12th and the 19th centuries, and has been heavily controlled, and managed by the nomadic Fulani. In the Northern parts of

Nigeria, they exchange their cattle and milk and cheese for instance, for agricultural products from their hosts. The Fulani in this way supply 90 percent of Nigeria's beef and cattle hide (kajubi, Lewis, Taiwo, 1974).

However, struggle over grazing land and scarce resources have over the years resulted in perennial and growing violent conflicts in terms of frequency, intensity, and geographic scope. Underpinning the escalation in the frequency of conflicts in Nigeria is a confluence of environmental and demographic forces, especially desertification caused by climate change and population explosion. Expectedly, with the depletion of arable land for subsistence farming largely as a result of increasing urbanization and the adverse effect of climate change, especially along the Lake Chad basin, there is increased struggle between herdsman and farmers – leading to violent confrontations and conflicts, deaths and forced displacement, as well as the destruction of agriculture and livestock. The persistent attacks in Benue state have had a spill-over effect on the neighboring state of Nasarawa. In January 2018, the news agency of Nigeria reported that over 18 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were in 11 camps in Nasarawa State. This situation necessitated the idea by the Federal government of Nigeria the formulation of the “Ruga Settlement”. The implementation of rural grazing area (ruga) settlements, the latest plan by President Muhammadu Buhari-led Administration to put an end to a recurring conflict between nomadic herders and farmers has been met with considerable outrage from Nigerians. The needless loss of lives and massive destruction of property caused by the open grazing of cattle is said to be one of the effects of poor leadership, which is seen as a major problem in the country. The public outcry against the atrocities of armed herdsman across the states of the federation has been unabated, compelling Nigerians to call on President Muhammadu Buhari-led government to proffer a permanent solution to the crisis.

The word **RUGA** means a settlement where herders are found, particularly Fulani. The federal government of Nigeria has started to establish 'ruga settlements' for herdsman in 12 of the 36 states as a pilot scheme for a nationwide program designed to curb farmer-herder clashes.

Presidential spokesman, Garba Shehu confirmed that 'ruga settlement', is part of the federal government policy "to settle migrant pastoral families, simply means rural settlement in which animal farmers, not just cattle herders, will be settled in an organized place with provision of necessary and adequate basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, road networks, vet clinics, markets, and manufacturing entities, that will process and add value to meats and animal

products." ruga settlement" that looks to settle transient peaceful families essentially implies rustic settlement in which creature ranchers, not simply dairy cattle herders, will be settled in a sorted out. The announcement additionally featured that beneficiaries will incorporate all people in creature farming, not just Fulani herders

To this end, the administration has gone to considerable lengths to disclose to Nigerians and the overall population, what the President Buhari-drove organization looks to accomplish by building up the settlement.

2 Statement of the problem

Nigeria in the past recent time has witnessed a strong contention between the herdsmen and the farmers. This strong heated contention has recorded a significant loss of lives, as the contention metamorphosis into a bloodbath between these two groups in the country. The public on this basis called on the federal government of Nigeria to find a mutual landing spot for both groups in other to put to halt the bloody situation which has seen the country labeled as a wrong place for living and investment. This strong outcry by the public necessitated the origin of ruga, a government-sponsored initiative deliberately undertaken by the federal government, to douse the tension between parties and as such provide lasting solutions to the incessant killings between herdsmen and farmers. It is therefore based on this initiative that this study was found credible to be undertaken to critically examine the Ruga settlement initiative.

3 Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the solving power of ruga, in the ongoing and previously encountered conflict between herdsmen and farmers.

4 Research questions

The following research questions guided the findings of this study:

1. What are the visible benefits of ruga implementation in Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges impeding the implementation of ruga in Nigeria?
3. What is (are) the most effective method of implementing ruga in Nigeria?

5 Significance of the study

Ruga initiative is thought by the Federal Government of Nigeria to be the urgent strategy, to douse the tension between the farmers and the herdsmen. This study will provide in clear terms the opinions of the public concerning the initiative. This will assist the government in addressing

the opinions of the public and possibly review their policy and consider its termination or public-suggested method of implementation.

6 Description of the study

The study was undertaken to examine the potency of government-adopted conflict resolution strategy, between herders and farmers in Nigeria. This study is limited to some Nigerian states and opinions are focused on two states in Nigeria they are Zamfara state and Kano state.

7 Definition of terms

Ruga: A term adopted by the federal government of Nigeria as an acronym for rural grazing area. Where Fulani are found living.

Farmers: A group of individuals who plant and harvest crops for private and public consumption.

Fulani: A tribe in Nigeria often associated with the Hausa tribe.

Herdsmen: A group of individuals who specializes in rearing cows as a way of the job.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the conflict

The movement of herdsmen and subsequent clashes with farmers and host communities in recent times has heightened insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the north-central region and by extension in other parts of the country. The driving force of the clashes is the competition for available resources, especially grazing land. It seems that the government has abandoned the grazing reserve system created by the northern region government in 1965. Then, the government created over 417 grazing reserves in the north.³ Under the grazing reserve system, the government provided space, water, and vaccinations for the livestock while the herdsmen paid taxes to the government in return. However, the discovery of oil and subsequent exploration and export made Nigeria an oil economy, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, the grazing reserve system was abandoned due to the neglect of the agricultural sector as the mainstay of the country's economy.

Consequently, grazing reserves that were under a neglected agricultural sector could not be sustained. It received little or no attention from succeeding administrations. As a fallback, herdsmen began to resort back to their traditional and seasonal grazing routes which had been interrupted or interfered with by industrialization, urbanization, demographic, and other natural

factors. This then led to clashes and conflicts between farmers and host communities. These conflicts have been on the increase in recent times and now constitute one of the major threats to Nigeria's national security.

To address these challenges, the federal government in June 2015 constituted a strategic action committee to look into the issue and make recommendations that would help government address the problem. A major stakeholder in this effort, the umbrella body in the cattle rearing business, the MIYETTI ALLAH cattle breeders association (macban), agreed that the effect of climate change and desertification was a major causal factor leading to trans-human movement from north to the south annually.⁴ since climate change and other associated factors are beyond what farmers or herders could address, there is need for concerted efforts by the government, private sector, regional bodies, and the international community at large to come together to address these challenges.

Theoretical underpinnings

There are many theoretical explanations for the causes and nature of the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria. The conflict is best described with the use of social conflict theory. The theory sees social life as a competition and focuses on the distribution of resources and power which are not evenly endowed by nature. Proponents of the theory view society as a gathering of people with diverse needs and interests with limited resources to meet their needs. This creates inequality that generates social conflict and social change. Karl Marx is considered the father of social conflict theory.

8 Social conflict theories

Looks at struggles for power and control in society as a major causal factor of conflict. Conflict occurs when two or more actors oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social powers to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them. The quest for dominance and power becomes the currency rather than consensus. Based on this premise, governments at local, state, and federal levels have not been able to address the contending issues between herdsmen and farmers or assist them in reaching some consensus.

Triggers and enablers of the conflict

Several factors combine to escalate the conflict among the identified actors. Some of these include climate change and environmental degradation, depleting arable land for farming, and lack of political will to tackle the challenges.

Climate change

The climate is a critical factor in the activities of herdsmen and farmers. The changing climatic condition, generally referred to as global warming, is no doubt taking a toll on the survival of herdsmen and farmers' businesses. The desert encroachment from the Sahara towards the Sahel region and other associated climatic conditions have continued to affect the livelihood of herdsmen as they push further south in search of available space, pitching them against farmers and host communities. This global phenomenon is currently affecting many parts of the world with attendant consequences – including the herdsmen-farmer conflict.

Depleting space for farming

Constant urbanization and demographic shifts in the present-day world have increased the tendency and likelihood of farmers to move further afield for farming activities. At independence in 1960, the Nigerian population stood at about 35 million people. However, 58 years later, it has leaped to over 180 million people and the growth is expected to persist in the near future.⁶ Population increase of this magnitude also means a geometric increase in the demand for food products as a basic human need. This also implies an increase in the quest for farming space for farmers. Conversely, industrialization and urbanization have continued to claim all available land, leaving little or nothing for farmers' survival. The continued movement of herdsmen southwards in search of pasture for their animals has pitched them against farmers, eventually leading to conflict and destruction. For example, farming along the Benue River accounts for over 20 000 tons of grain annually. This same area is also fertile ground for herdsmen to feed their cattle. Thus, farmlands within the river bank areas are the most affected by the movement of the herdsmen – resulting in several clashes.

Lack of political will

The government at all levels has demonstrated a near absence of needed political will to proffer lasting solutions to the conflicting claims of different actors in the ongoing conflict between the herdsmen and farmers. Political leaders have failed to invoke appropriate legislations to be backed by action that would define rules and limits for parties involved in the conflict. At the regional level, the economic community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a protocol for

trans-human movement, though the framework is yet to be fully implemented at national levels. Lack of political will remains a hindering factor among member states. The political will to implement this protocol and other frameworks remains an enabler of the conflict. The federal government, in the past, has made efforts to regulate and control pastoral activities, but it appears that adequate political will is needed to enforce laws. For instance, the government is perceived from some quarters, especially by opposition parties, as being sympathetic to the activities of the herdsmen. This perception is likely because the president is Fulani, the same ethnic group that dominates the cattle business. Citizens, especially from the most affected states expected the federal government to deal with the herdsmen-farmer conflicts in all parts of the state with the same vigor and determination it showed in similar internal security issues in other parts of the country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey design. According to Olaitan and Nwokwo (2010) stated that, the survey research design is one which the entire population or representative sample, is studied by collecting and analyzing data from group studies through the use of questionnaire. Survey design usually adopted qualitative research methodology. According to Joseph (2013) qualitative research methodology is the process of naturalistic inquiry, that seeks an in-depth understanding of the social phenomena within their natural setting's human behavior, especially by feelings perception or opinion and the reason that governed the behavior. Qualitative research method was considered to be appropriate, this is because the purpose of the study is to gain a thorough understanding of the perception of the people about the plan of Ruga settlement initiative, as a way to addressing conflict between farmers and herdsmen in affected areas. Research design adopted for this study was case study. According to Frank (2009) a case study design selects small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals, as the subject of the study. Participants from this study were recruited through descriptive survey method. Caleb (2007) descriptive survey is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. This offered a room for participants, to explain their mind on how they feel about the ruga program.

Data collection procedure

The researcher visited the affected communities to observe the reaction of both groups toward the conflict and to understand the role played by both groups. Unfortunately for the researcher,

the semi-structured interview had to be conducted with one-sided information about the conflict due to difficulties in getting the Fulani to share their take on the issue. But the researcher was able to visit other neighboring communities where stories were told about the conflict. The researcher was unable to interview the Fulani while on the field.

Data analysis

For the collection of requisite relevant data for the study, the interview was employed. It involved the drawing of a set of questions, based on the objectives and research questions of the study. The method afforded us opportunities of explaining some aspects not so clear to some interviewees/respondents like the less informed or enlightened. The views and opinions expressed by the interviewees were therefore subjected to critical analysis. In doing this, descriptive statistics elements were found effective and used. The procedure led to the appropriate interpretation of data about the research questions, hence reflecting the findings and attitudes of the respondents to the research subject.

Study area

The study area for the research is some selected states of Northern Nigeria that want to implement Ruga Ruge: “Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba, Katsina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara, and Niger,” Aree 11 in number and the governors of these states are coming to the **federal ministry of agriculture and rural development**, to learn how the ruga settlements will be implemented. These are the states that have fully shown their interest. But unfortunately, people are talking about this as if the federal government is planning to grab land in the states. “That’s not true. The plan is mainly for these ready states and the federal government had a discussion with the governors concerned. Some of the governors came here and they promised to provide land because they have seen the benefits they will derive from the initiative.

Findings

The project was not a privilege, but a right for those in business.

Cattle herders are Nigerians and their business is legitimate, hence it is their civil right, not a privilege, for the country to support and provide them with an enabling environment for doing

business, irrespective of their tribal or geographical affiliation. From this assertion, we can deduce that the Northern group assumes that the implementation of ruga is a right, not a privilege, and hence they are entitled to it. The question now is what kind of right is it? Where in the constitution is it stipulated that ruga is the sole right of the Fulani herdsmen? This is a challenge to the implementation of the program. This is because to the south, ruga is not a right and if it is to be given a status, it should be a privilege.

Benefit only the Fulani-speaking ethnicity

Is the realization that while it caters to the livelihood of cattle herders, it neglects farmers whom many believe to be the main victims of the conflict?

Human Rights Writers Association (HURIWA) criticized the federal government for its opaque nature of working out a highly discriminatory settlement policy to benefit only the Fulani-speaking ethnicity amid ballooning poverty, crises of underdevelopment, and lack of economic opportunities which afflict the over 350 ethno-tribal communities that makeup Nigeria. The rights group said the development of private businesses should be private sector-driven just as it asked the government to approach banks and other funding agencies so credible stakeholders needing bailouts to set up farming settlements including herders and farmers. It said they should be assisted with soft loans repayable over some time and guaranteed by the Nigerian state. “this is a much more transparent form of providing funding lifeline than the discriminatory allocation of taxpayers’ money to one ethnicity only because the president is Fulani by biological affinity,” according to the ministry of agriculture and rural development, Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba, Katsina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara, and Niger have shown interest in the ruga initiative.

The Ruga program is the fact that it did not capture public opinion.

According to the South East Governor’s Forum, they insist that the only deal it had with the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) was that, when the federal government revamped grazing reserve in the North, all the cattle rearers in the South would take their cattle there and rely on the grasses grown in the South. The chairman of the forum and governor of Ebonyi state, David Umahi, in a statement by his spokesman, Emmanuel Uzor, said there was no plan for a ruga settlement in any part of the Southeast and South-South. According to him, the Southeast is purely agrarian with limited landmass for farming and therefore cannot accommodate ruga. Again the program failed to carry the South along with the program. Hence,

the South perceives a forceful move from the North to take over their lands. In essence, the program was more autocratic than democratic.

The program benefits only the Fulani/North in the long run.

According to the Southeast Governors forum as represented by the chairman, Mr. Umahi said members of MACBAN and the South East would achieve symbiotic trade of cow and grass had it been the reality program was for the benefit of all. According to the statement, which read: "Umahi was the chairman of National Economic Council sub-technical committee on farmers and herdsmen clash and he toured the states of Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Adamawa, Zamfara and two other states where he made in one of his recommendations to the federal government for revamping of grazing reserve in the South where all the cattle rearers in the South will take their cattle to and rely on the grasses that are grown in the South". "The way it works is that the herdsmen will bring down their cows to the southeast and sell us as meat while they will load the grasses which are grown here in the same trailer with which they transported their cows to feed their cattle in those grazing reserve which should be made comfortable for them."by this herdsmen are expected to embrace anti open grazing by returning to the ranches in the North and do their business on the trade by barter basis of selling cows to the south and buying grass to feed their cows in the north", he said. Again ruga program failed in this aspect.

Is the perception of an irresponsible government that introduced it

The people of the South over time during the administration of President Buhari coupled with their lackadaisical attitude towards herders and farmers clashes perceive the government as irresponsible in extending the program. According to the Southern and middle belt leader's forum after reviewing all the arguments about the Ruga settlements, it concluded that the plan was "repugnant, repulsive and provocative". It alleged that the Ruga settlement initiative was a subtle attempt to "colonize the rest of Nigeria under the guise of promoting cattle rearing

Conclusion and Recommendations

Struggle over grazing land and scarce resources have over the years resulted in perennial and growing violent conflicts in terms of frequency, intensity, and geographic scope. Underpinning the escalation in the frequency of conflicts in Nigeria is a confluence of environmental and demographic forces, especially desertification caused by climate change and population explosion. Expectedly, with the depletion of arable land for subsistence farming largely as a result of increasing urbanization and the adverse effect of climate change, especially along the

lake chad basin, there is increased struggle between herdsmen and farmers – leading to violent confrontations and conflicts, deaths and forced displacement, as well as the destruction of agriculture and livestock, this situation gave birth to the implementation of rural grazing area (ruga) settlements. The program has been suspended owing to the outright rejection by Southern Nigeria. This is because of the perception of the region and the method of implementation.

Based on the findings as highlighted in the fourth chapter, I recommend the following:

- The government should be responsible enough to educate the North, describing the Ruga program not as a right but as a national privilege. This is because the lands they are clamoring for are state land and not federal government properties.
- I applaud the government on its suspension of the Ruga program; however, it needs to be reviewed as the program is discriminatory. The farmers are the most affected and the herdsmen are the most benefit from the program. This is not right and depicts ethnic injustice.
- The government should turn this program into an all-inclusive program, it should not be North against the South or the reverse. Both regions should be carried along and their differences must be respected.
- The government should be responsible and take immediate action concerning the issue of insecurity, especially the Fulani herdsmen incidences.

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