

RUGA: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE SOUTH EAST REGION

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Abstract

The idea of Ruga Settlements for herders came into public consciousness in the last week of May 2019, an attempt by the federal government to solve the current reoccurring dangerous clashes between the farmers and the herdsmen of Fulani extract. Horrifying tales of these gruesome attacks and their divisive consequences remains fresh in the minds of millions of Nigerians and have continued to threaten the unity of the country, hence the idea and need for a paradigm shift in nomadic lifestyle in Nigeria, a programme geared towards removing nomads from the streets, from wandering across towns and communities. A 10-year plan to end nomadic lifestyle with its attendant security challenges, linked to kidnapping and killings. But contrary to the foregoing belief, it is obvious that the state of insecurity in the country has continued on the rise; the Ohaneze Ndigbo, governors of the south eastern states and the Middle Belt have at different forums reacted to the nefarious and dangerous activities of these herdsmen, and several other reactions from well-meaning Nigerians. These ultimately led to the suspension of the Ruga Project which was already awarded. Therefore, it is in the light of this development that this paper attempts to unravel the socio-cultural implications of the proposed Ruga project in the South East Region of Nigeria. This study recommends among others that government should adopt an all-inclusive government policy with several stake holder involvements at the early stage of policy development, with massive campaign and awareness to educate the masses on any future development programme before its implementation. Government should also adopt both traditional and modern conflict management strategies in Nigeria.

Keywords: *RUGA, Settlements, herdsmen, Socio-cultural, Implications.*

Introduction

The federal government perceived attempt to grab lands across the 36 states of Nigeria for the very purpose of grazing has been met with resistance by Nigerians owing to the nature of its introduction as a policy initiative. On May 21, 2019, barely a week before President Buhari first term cabinet was dissolved, the then Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Audu Ogbah disclosed that the President has approved the RUGA plan. The rural grazing was approved by the president to curb open grazing of animals that continue to pose security threats to farmers and herdsmen (Toromade, 2019). These settlements as proposed will provide farmers with water for their pastures, schools for their children, security and several other basic amenities such as good road networks, markets and manufacturing activities that process and add value to meat and animal products from several farmers not just the herdsmen or herders.

The government however hoped that RUGA will put an end to nomadic lifestyle of herdsmen who are usually but not exclusively from the Fulani extracts. The provision of these cattle markets will bring an end to herdsmen having to transport their cattles mostly by foot, which is the likely medium of clashes and communal conflicts across the nation. According to the Permanent Secretary of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mohammadu Umah, each state with RUGA settlement will have six locations for the settlement of herders and other interest groups in rearing animals. Some states have been designated as pilot states with shown interest: Sokoto, Adamawa, Nasawara, Kaduna, Kogi, Taraba , Katsina, Plateau, Kebbi, Zamfara and Niger (Adeniyi, 2019).

The federal executive council at its meeting of May 8, 2019 approved the award of contract for the construction of 8 Nos. Ruga Infrastructure with Sanitary Facilities (Red Brick Structure) each in Taraba State to the tune of N1666, 336, 380.00 (One hundred and sixty-six million, three hundred and eighty naira). This consequently generated uproar as to why such contract was awarded without any buy-in being sought by the federal government; it is only consensus that could have created a sense of ownership which could then lead to its sustainability. It was evident that even within the federal executives; there was no agreement among important stakeholders. There were also controversies as to the Ruga establishment and the old Ranches already in existence in some parts of the country. The ‘Gaa Okanla’ Fulani settlement in Kwara-Ilorin, which dates back to more than a hundred years ago, other settlements exist in sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina states. These types of settlements also exist in South east; there is a major settlement of Fulani herdsmen in Adada-Nkpologu-Adani-Iggah axis with other minor settlements in Awgu-Nkanu-Abakalki axis all in Enugu State. They have lived peaceably for years. Government under the a World Bank assisted Livestock Development Project (SLDP 1987 – 1995) established two Ndama Cattle Ranches in Adada town not far from Iseyin , Oyo State. There are also the Obudu cattle Ranch in Cross River State established by Paul Unongo, a two-time minister of the federal government. The question is, if such a scheme worked in the past, what eventually led to their collapse and why will they not be resuscitated, rather than outright establishment of another settlement under the guise of a new name to the advantage of a particular ethnic group. The blatant insincerity of the government and incoherent policy formulation and implementation has been called to question.

RUGA or NLTP

Despite several attempts by the government to distance the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) from Rural Grazing Area (RUGA), settlement Initiative proved abortive, the obvious is that there exist similarities between them. Just like NLTP, RUGA promotes ranching as the forum for cattle rearing in the country (Toromade, 2019). Furthermore, the general secretary of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association(MACBAN), the umbrella body of the herdsmen, Baba Uthman Ngelzarma reveals that “This Ruga settlement model is a component part of the livestock development and transformation that is being implemented under the office of the Vice President, though this was refuted by the vice president, that Ruga is different from the National Livestock Transformation plan (Oghifo & Okoh, 2019).

However, RUGA is not covered in the National Livestock Transformation Plan, the NLTP is a N179 billion 10 year initiative (2018 – 2027) that champions ranching as the way to promote cattle rearing in Nigeria (Toromade, 2019). The plan was presented by the National Economic Council (NEC) in June 2018, and it recommends that cattle herders are expected to be registered with cooperatives for the purposes of the ranching scheme. Those cooperatives will then be able to get rental agreements for land from state governments, and also be able to benefit from ranch resources on terms like loans, grants and other subsidies. The funding plan from both the federal government and state governments is expected to last for the first three years in the pilot phase for a total of N=70 billion while private sector interests and investments for the 3rd and 10th year is expected to be excess of N=100 billion.

The NLTP has 13 states already in the process of its implementation to transform livestock production system in Nigeria. The states include Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba, Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Kogi, Kwara, Ondo and Edo. These states are at various stages of its implementation process.

The Failure of the Ruga Project

The public outcry against the atrocities of the armed herdsmen across the country has been unabated, and as a result, the RUGA settlement idea and vision was greeted with criticisms. The Nobel Laureate, Prof Wole Soyinka in a statement adjudged that the RUGA policy could cause explosion in country if not handled with care. He further reiterated that cattle herders have acted with a sense of impunity, killing without any compunction, cattle menace to farmers crops, driving farmers to hunger by the incessant destruction of farm lands, and creating shortage in food production. Then with the introduction of RUGA settlements for these so called ‘perceived enemies’ to co habit side by side with these farmers will be suicidal.

‘Any country where cattle take priority over human life is definitely at an elementary state’ (Soyinka, 2019)

Others are of the opinion that RUGA is about animal husbandry, there is hardly any part of the country where there are no abandoned ranches which can be revived other than awarding contract on a project at a time the nation’s peace has become more fragile without in-house consensus and wide consultations with critical stakeholders. The deceitful manner in which the implementation was being handled made it difficult to counter the wide spread argument of its one sided benefit to a particular ethnic group. Therefore, some analysts see RUGA as an attempt by the leadership to place the Fulani ethnic group where he belongs above others; hence it was dead on arrival.

In some parts of the nation, some argue that RUGA is an attempt to grab state lands and handover to the Fulani herdsmen for future domination of the acquired territories. Despite the above arguments against RUGA, the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG) has called for its implementation against the outcry of southern leaders as it will put an end to persistent farmer-herdsmen clashes.

A professor of Sociology and also a former National Commissioner of INEC, Prof Lai Olurode in an interview with Sunday Punch stated that RUGA was rejected for lack of discussion and public involvement

‘the RUGA concept was never discussed with the people, so people saw it as a way of government wanting to seize their land, and later cede them to his people’.. we are in a democracy not military rule.’ (Makinde & Nnodim, 2019).

He further reiterated that Nigeria has had enough ethnic conflicts since civil war, why add RUGA to it. He however called for the resuscitation of southwest O’dua Investments with ranches all over in 1960s until it was destroyed by military intervention. O’dua Investments had settlements with ranches in them. The Lead Director, Centre for Social Justice , Eze Onyeekpere also in an interview wondered why Buhari government is allegedly determined to commit such huge resources of the nation into developing the private businesses of herdsmen who he said are mostly foreigners (from Niger, Chad etc). He further stated that Nigerians have not been well informed of the public purpose in the private business of cattle rearing because land would eventually be acquired by governors under Land Use Act, land can only be acquired for overriding public purpose, therefore, “what is the public purpose in cattle rearing”. The federal government on RUGA plan is indirectly endorsing the notion that ‘violence pays’ so whosoever commits murder, arson and undue violence will be compensated with peoples’ land instead of being punished.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of Alienation:

Historically ‘Alienation’ is one of the greatest societal problems even till the present day. This concept has gained popularity in the context of the general appraisal of man situation in the society. However, sociologists, Public Administrators, and other social scientists have since used the Alienation concept in several studies, thereby building upon Karl Marx work on Alienation. These scholars differ in one important

aspect from Marx. The term alienation was Karl Marx's major concern not only in his book 'Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 but also in his entire writings. Marx gave a Dialectical and Materialistic interpretation of the term alienation. For Marx, the problem of class divided society where one section of people has been exploited by another section. The theoretical basis of alienation within capitalist mode of production is that workers invariably loses the ability to determine life and destiny when deprived of the right to think of themselves as the directors of their own actions; to determine the character of said actions, to define relationships with other people; and to own those items of value from goods and services produced by their own labour ([wikipedia](#), 2019).

Narrowing this down to present situation in Nigeria, the ruling capitalist class have resorted to a system of near dictatorship, taking unilateral decisions concerning the product of man's labour of which man is alien to. On the other hand, most contemporary sociologists writing on alienation draw on Marx's work; Seeman, (1959), Blauner (1964), Shepard (1977), but in contrast to Marx, focused on subjective work on alienation, which is alienation as perceived by the worker (Kanungo 1981).

Therefore, in this study the focus will be on Policy alienation rather than work alienation, linking alienation to the world of policy implementation not work itself. Seeman (1959) broke down meanings in Policy alienation into five alienations viz ; powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self estrangement.

Powerlessness is a person's lack of control over events in their life. In a pluralistic society such as Nigeria, the Igbos feel powerless in a state where they have no control over the means of their labour or the resultant product of their labour, thereby leading to the next issue meaninglessness which is the inability to comprehend the relationship of their contributions to the larger purpose. The Nigeria citizens have been rendered powerless amidst several governmental policies, hence the public outcry against RUGA. People felt that implementing these policies is meaningless to the general purpose it was meant to serve as it does not deliver any beneficial outcomes for the society. The resultant effect will be estrangement from these policies. In conclusion as Marx envisaged, continued exploitation of this underclass would create great resentment. Eventually the proletariat would lead a revolution against the capitalist class, which is where the Nigeria society of the present day is heading towards as the masses would no longer tolerate the oppression and marginalization from the ruling class.

RUGA as Perceived by South Eastern States

According to Ogundare (2019), the Southern and Middle forum has described the establishment of cattle rearing settlement for herdsmen as a move to colonize Nigeria. The idea is provocative as it seeks to colonize Nigeria under the guise of promoting cattle rearing which is a private business. The last four years have witnessed series of killings by Fulanis with government turning blind eye and using the instrumentalities of the state to defend and shield them from investigations and prosecutions.

The South East governors have also called on the herdsmen across the country to adhere to the following guidelines for cattle rearing across the south eastern territories.

- Do not bring cattles to the region on foot again; all cattles must come in trucks, not bush paths
- No available lands for in south east for RUGA, denies donating any land for RUGA
- No peaceful herdsmen will be chased out of the state while urging easterners in the North not to panic over their security.

An investigation by the Guardian across the zone revealed a sustained effort to discourage RUGA initiative through outright ban on the sale of large expanse of lands by individuals or mandatory receipts from state before transactions are made.

Anambra State: Local security outfits in the area also reported to be tracking developments on the sale of land. The whole idea according to the community leader is to ensure they deal with people who want to take away the little lands remaining for their generations.

Abia State: The state government restricted the size of land that may be sold over the counter to just 5 hectares as additional lots must now be approved by the relevant government agencies. This measure

according to the immediate commissioner and Attorney General Justice Uche Ihediwa is sought to prevent land owners from selling large swathes of land that may be used for “unauthorized projects like cattle settlements (Saharareporters, 2019).

Enugu State: In Uzo Uwani local government in Enugu State, efforts have been made by the government and local government area Chairman after a bloody bath allegedly perpetrated by the herdsmen 3 years ago to end indiscriminate sale of lands for the perceived purpose of cattle grazing.

Ebonyi State: The Chairman of south east governors Forum has disclosed through his press secretary that there is no plan to establish RUGA settlement in any part of the south east region. That the zone is purely agrarian with limited landmass for farming and cannot accommodate Ruga establishment. (Uzodinma, 2019)

Socio-Cultural Implications of RUGA in South East Nigeria

1. **Rise in ethnic and religious conflicts:** The conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers have over time been intensified. With the introduction of RUGA, these conflicts may assume another dimension leading to religious violence between Christians and Moslems, not just typically involving disputes over land for grazing. It is on record that Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in ethno-religious conflicts which has continued to claim innocent lives across the country. With the introduction of RUGA in states that are predominantly Christians, which may trigger religious conflicts between them and the minority religion who are foreigners.
2. **Hike in cost of available land:** The land Use Act of 2004 provides that all land comprised in the territory of each state (except land vested in the Federal government or its agencies) solely in the Governor of the state, who would hold such land in trust for the people and would henceforth be responsible for allocation of land in all urban areas to individual resident in the state and to organizations for residential, agricultural, commercial and other purposes while similar powers will with respect to non-urban areas are conferred on local governments (Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990). RUGA entails allocation of enormous expanse of land for grazing. This might create scarcity in available land within state as government may begin to revoke some land ownership rights to accommodate needs. Prices of land for use by both individuals and organizations may witness hikes. In anticipation of this, some communities in the south east have begun closing land sale gaps to forestall the sale of public land through the back door. The Apex Igbo cultural organizations Ohaneze Ndiigbo had earlier called on traditional rulers, town union presidents, communities and individuals to resist any move by the federal government coax them into parting with lands for so-called industrial ventures (in form of RUGA), due to its far reaching socio-cultural implications; a ploy to deprive indigenes of their land.
3. **Demographic change:** The federal government may as a result of the RUGA project alter the demographics, being the population dynamics of specific states with the influx of person who no one is sure of their nationality. This could invariably create more social problems arising from demographic changes to include; more demand chasing few goods and services; demand will be greater than the supply leading to hunger and scarcity of basic amenities with resultant inflation. Again most importantly, there may be future conflicts as to original owners of the land, taking the case of the Australian Aboriginal people gaining recognition for their rights on land held under lease in the Northern Territory of Australia became a major battleground. The influx of the white foreigners of the British descent who annihilated almost the entire population.
4. **Increase in Criminal activities:** A social political Igbo organization has warned that RUGA establishment is a recipe for genocide. The south east region has witnessed several nefarious activities involving the herdsmen in the recent times. There have been cases of killings of innocent people with particular reference to the killing of Rev Fathers, kidnapping along high ways, armed robbery etc. While the attack by the Boko Haram set have lingered for years due to the failure of successive governments, another wave of attacks are now being carried out by armed herdsmen of

Fulani origin across the country and make peace elusive especially in the southern and middle belt region, yet government is making plans to establish settlements in these states. A case of one living side by side with a perceived enemy.

5. Destruction of farmlands

There have been numerous accounts of farms being destroyed by cattle that had either strayed or deliberately brought to graze. The frequency of these attacks has continued to rise with farmers having to abandon their farm lands across the country, counting several losses in terms of crops and investments. Udemezue & Nwalieji (2017) have recorded the effects of cattle menace on farm land in Anambra State; Data indicate the degree of damages done by cattle in the study area which range from loss of fertility, environmental pollution with cattle defecations across lands and environments. This massive destruction of crops in several eastern states has led to substantial decrease in output with serious implications on food security.

Conclusion

Given how fragile peace has become in Nigeria, introducing a controversial policy without in-house consensus and wide consultations with critical stakeholders was always going to a problem. That we are faced with severe economic challenges that require modernization of old modes of production becomes very important. The approach to the problems associated with changing security in our country becomes critical at a time when an atmosphere of ethno-religious suspicion has replaced the previous harmonious co-existence. Therefore, it is wise to have anticipated that whatever its merits, implementing 'RUGA settlements' scheme demands more than just awarding contracts immediately. Given the foregoing analysis, it was no surprise that the process had to be suspended (July 3, 2019) under prevailing circumstances, a continuation of RUGA project will mean opening new spaces of conflict with its dire consequences.

Recommendations

- That Government should resuscitate existing ranches which have been moribund to serve same purpose purported under the RUGA Scheme.
- That in future development initiatives, wider stakeholder consultation and public awareness is important, by so doing representatives of the people will not feel alienated by policies of the government.
- The Miyetti Allah group in collaboration with government agencies should adopt good strategies that are geared towards the elimination of dangerous and evil herdsmen among them.

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