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FROM RURAL GRAZING AREA (RUGA) TO NATIONAL LIVESTOCK TRANSFORMATION PLAN (NLTP): A MERE CHANGE OF NAME OR REINCARNATION

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Abstract:
Political and social instability in numerous African countries has exacerbated conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders, driven by resource competition and environmental degradation. In Nigeria, the escalation of farmer-herder conflict has led to widespread displacement, increased food prices and security challenges. Government interventions such as the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) and National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) policies have faced scrutiny, prompting a comparative analysis to evaluate their effectiveness and public reception. This study examines the RUGA policy and its alternative, the NLTP, in Nigeria using historical methodology and secondary data, including interviews and national newspapers. RUGA policy was introduced in 2018 to mitigate farmer-herder conflicts; the policy encountered significant opposition due to perceived socio-political implications and a lack of stakeholder consultation. It is argued that it favoured the Fulani ethnic group and could exacerbate ethnic tensions, eliciting mixed public reactions. In contrast, the NLTP aimed to modernise livestock management and enhance productivity through a phased transition from open grazing to ranching. Despite its comprehensive approach focusing on stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, humanitarian relief and economic development, the NLTP also faced scepticism, with some perceiving it as a rebranded RUGA policy. Findings from the study underscored the significant public debate and resistance both policies generated and emphasised the complexities of addressing farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. The study concludes that inclusiveness of stakeholder engagement, transparent communication, and addressing underlying socio-political concerns are necessary. It advocates for a balanced approach to promote sustainable livestock management practices across ethnic groups.

Keywords: Farmer, Herder, Nigeria, NLTP, RUGA

Introduction

Several African countries were entangled in contention, leading to notable political and social imbalances, including financial stagnation, impaired administration, unemployment, ethnic tensions, and corruption (Stewart, 2002). These issues, in turn, gave rise to additional significant challenges, posing genuine threats to individual states and regional stability (Thompson, Afolabi & Abdulbaki, 2018). In the context of conflicts, particularly farmer-herder conflicts, prevalent studies often presumed a causal link between environmental scarcity and the perpetuation of violence. Most

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discourse in this area centred on the competition for water and land resources (Brunnschweiler & Bulte, 2009). However, an alternative perspective posits that farmer-herder conflicts should be understood as a social phenomenon intertwined with the intricate ecological, economic, political, and social interactions inherent in the everyday realities of arid and semi-arid environments (Bukari, 2017).

The escalating conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria during the first half of 2018 resulted in over 35,325 deaths (Apikins, 2020, p.230). According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) in 2019, this crisis claimed more lives among ordinary citizens than the feared Boko Haram insurgency. Since the heightened brutality in January 2018, an estimated 300,000 people fled their ancestral homes, leading to significant displacement and vulnerability in the frontier states of Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba (Olawale & Idris, 2021). This situation adversely affected crop cultivation and animal farming, increasing food costs. The interplay of environmental corruption and violence stemming from climate change, rapid population growth, the Boko Haram insurgency, and armed crime, such as cattle rustling, compelled herders from the northern regions to migrate southward in search of arable land and water. This migration resulted in recurrent conflicts with farming communities (Afolabi, 2021, p.). The resultant violence placed a substantial burden on the country's security forces, diverting their attention from crucial missions such as combating armed banditry and the Boko Haram insurgency. A Global Index report highlighted that the recent intensification of the farmer-herder conflict led to a 500 per cent increase in deaths (Global Index, 2019). This underscored the severity of the situation and its far-reaching consequences on human lives and national security.

According to the International Crisis Group (2018), various factors contributed to escalated conflicts in Nigeria. These included environmental degradation in the northern region, encroachment on grazing grounds in the middle belt, inadequate government responses to distress calls, and the failure to hold past and present perpetrators accountable. Additionally, the enactment of new legislation in certain southern states, which banned open grazing without providing alternatives for nomadic herders, further intensified these conflicts. The consequences of these conflicts were far-reaching, leading to increased displacements, heightened life insecurity, loss of property, and food shortages in many parts of the country. Notably, these conflicts also posed challenges for law enforcement agencies, diverting their focus from addressing the Boko Haram insurgency (International Crisis Group, 2018). The interconnected nature of these factors underscored the situation's complexity. It emphasised the need for comprehensive approaches to address the root causes and mitigate the impacts of the conflicts in Nigeria.

Numerous political and practical strategies were proposed over the years to address farmer-herder conflicts, encompassing expulsion, ranch construction, and local collaborations (Olaniyan, Michaels & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015). Notably, the Federal Government of Nigeria intervened through various approaches, legislative measures, and military interventions, as evidenced by operations like Operation Cat Race and Whirl Stroke (International Crisis Group, 2018). Among the legislative measures and policies implemented were the Land Grazing Act of 1964, the Land Use Act, which

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empowered governors to allocate lands within a state, and the National Agricultural Policy of 1988. The latter stipulated that a minimum of 10 per cent of the national territory, equivalent to 9.8 million acres, should be designated for grazing reserves. However, the implementation of this policy fell short, with only 2.82 per cent of the intended 313 reserves being acquired (Dyer, 2008). During the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, a noteworthy proposal was put forth in the form of the National Grazing Route and Reserve Commission Bill in 2011. This proposed bill aimed to allocate N100 billion to support herders, but it did not come to fruition after Jonathan left office (Ibrahim, 2012). Regrettably, most of these strategies and policies failed to achieve their intended outcomes, primarily due to either outright rejection by the populace or insufficient enforcement measures. This highlighted the critical challenges and complexities of resolving Nigeria's farmer-herder conflicts.

In examining the potential solutions and challenges of the farmer-herder conflict, the policies enacted by the Federal Government of Nigeria have emerged as a subject of considerable scrutiny. Specifically, the RUGA and National Livestock Transformation Plan policies were introduced to mitigate the recurring internecine conflicts between farmers and herders. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the dynamics of conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria, as evidenced by works such as those by Adeoye (2017), Bagu (2017), and Anastasia (2018), and various responses have been explored in the scholarly discourse (Ogboru & Adejonwo, 2018), a discernible gap exists in the academic investigation concerning the comparative analysis of these policies and the public reactions elicited by their formulation to address the underlying conflicts. Against this backdrop, this study aimed to evaluate whether the National Livestock Transformation Plan represented a reincarnation or merely a nominal alteration of the RUGA policy. In addition, the study explored the reactions and responses of the public to these policies, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their efficiencies and public reception.

The article is divided into five sections: introduction and conclusion. The next sub-topic provides a background on the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA). The assessment of Nigeria's response and reactions towards the policy subsequently follows this. The next section examines the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) as an alternative to the RUGA scheme and the people's reaction to the policy. Lastly, a thorough assessment is made to evaluate the process of both policies using comparative analysis to establish reincarnation or a mere change of name or policy. The article adopts historical methodology and relies on secondary data sources from textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, internet documents, and individual commentaries on the farmer-herder conflict. The researcher also relied on interviews and national newspapers (Punch, Tribune, Daily Trust, Daily Post, This Day, Sahara Reporters, Premiumtimes, and Vanguard) to get adequate information as regards public reactions and counter-reactions to the policies.

Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) Policy

The term "RUGA" originates from the Hausa language, denoting 'Cow Settlement or Colony.' Additionally, it serves as an acronym for the English expression "Rural Grazing Area" (RUGA) (Vanguard, 2019). In July 2018, the Federal Government of Nigeria formally announced its

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intentions to implement the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement program. This initiative was conceived as a pre-existing solution to address the persistent conflicts between farmers and herders (Apikins, 2020). The RUGA program policy was designed to be implemented in each of the 36 states within the federation, reflecting a comprehensive approach. Subsequently, the president approved implementing this policy program in May 2019 (Samson, 2019). The objective of the RUGA programme was to mitigate the challenges associated with farmer-herder conflicts; this marked a concerted effort by the government to address this longstanding issue through a nationally coordinated initiative.

Historically, establishing the RUGA initiative dates back to 1956, a period concurrent with Nigeria's final stages of colonial rule. According to Senator Ita Enang, the Special Assistant to the President on National Assembly Matters, the 2019 Federal Government Budget allocated N2.258 billion for investment in the RUGA program (Apikins, 2020). Senator Enang asserted that members of the National Assembly supported the RUGA policy as they comprehended its significance and had duly approved funds for its execution. He further emphasised that beyond financial considerations, the RUGA budget aimed to foster cattle breeding to address the nation's production needs and achieve self-sufficiency. However, Ademola (2020) argues that the RUGA policy was not designed with the intent to conquer, Islamize, Fulanize, or colonise any segment of the population, as previously suggested. Advocates for RUGA, as affirmed by its spokespersons, perceive it as a mechanism to mediate the longstanding and contentious conflicts between ranchers and herders in the country. The National Economic Council (NEC) endorsed the RUGA approach for review and consensus (Apikins, 2020). This decision by the NEC underscores the formal approval and recognition of the RUGA initiative at a high level of governance.

The establishment of ranches within the framework of the RUGA Policy is confined to gazetted grazing reserves. The policy outlines the imperative acquisition of 15,000 hectares of land in each federation state to execute the RUGA initiative. Furthermore, each state is required to contribute financial resources to co-fund the RUGA Project, leading to the diversion of a portion of the state's limited resources to support the program. The primary beneficiaries of the RUGA Policy are pastoralists, with a specific emphasis on migrant non-resident Fulani, indicating a potential increase in the Fulani population across the Federation upon full implementation of the policy (Yusufu, 2019). Notably, Garba Shehu, the president's spokesperson, stated that the envisaged settlement in the designated area would be for herders and animal farmers. He put it as follows:

> The concept of "Ruga Settlement," designed to accommodate migrating pastoral families, denotes a rural settlement model in which animal farmers, encompassing not only cattle herders but also other livestock rearers, are intended to be resettled in a systematically organised location equipped with essential amenities (Oge, 2019).

The Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) concept is perceived to yield various advantages. These include a significant decrease in conflicts between farmers and herders, enhancement of animal welfare regarding quality and hygiene for beef and milk production, job creation, access to credit facilities,

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mitigation of cattle rustling, and the establishment of rural settlements, among other benefits. The implementation of RUGA would enable both animal farmers and cattle herders to inhabit designated areas equipped with essential and sufficient infrastructure. These areas would provide necessary amenities such as schools, hospitals, veterinary clinics, markets, and other facilities designed to process and add value to meat and animal products (Oge, 2019).

The RUGA policy emerged amidst controversy and was disavowed due to its perceived socioeconomic and political ramifications. Several state governors disclaimed awareness of the RUGA decision, a sentiment echoed by Vice President Professor Yemi Osinbajo, who asserted that RUGA had not been deliberated upon in the National Economic Council (NEC). Likewise, some governors affiliated with the NEC maintained that the RUGA policy was never broached during their convened sessions. Consequently, the RUGA policy lacked thorough consultation with stakeholders, leading to widespread rejection by the Nigerians.

The RUGA scheme encountered strong opposition from various quarters, with notable entities such as the Benue State government, Southern and Middle Belt Governors, and socio-political groups actively advocating for its discontinuation. Critics perceived the initiative as a strategic manoeuvre by northern entities to assert formal control over land in the southern and middle belt regions, raising concerns about potential ulterior motives. This opposition was framed within a broader context, with some asserting that it aligned with an alleged agenda by the Fulani president to Islamize the country, as discussed by Oluwasanmi (2020). The dissenting voices drew upon historical precedents to substantiate their concerns. They highlighted instances in which Fulani Muslims settled in specific areas, subsequently disseminating their religious beliefs, establishing emirates, and appointing emirs. Importantly, these emirs were granted official recognition as the legitimate traditional rulers of the communities where they settled, often disregarding pre-existing conventional structures. Arowosegbe (2019) provides insights into this historical pattern, emphasising the emergence of these emirs despite the numerical minority of Fulani Muslims within such communities. The critics argued that these historical occurrences underscored the potential risks of the RUGA scheme and contributed to the fervent opposition against its implementation.

Public Reactions to the Federal Government's RUGA Policy

Following the policy proclamation, a spectrum of responses emerged nationwide, characterised by diverse tones, perspectives, and ideologies. These reactions encompassed both subtle propagandistic undertones and overt threats. Illustratively, in July 2019, Abdul-Azeez Suleiman, the spokesperson for the Coalition of Northern Group, issued a cautionary statement highlighting that the deliberations surrounding the acceptance or rejection of the policy were generating unease among herders, predominantly of Fulani descent (Ezeri, 2019).

Additionally, certain Muslim factions in the nation's southern region were urged by the governors of the southern states to endorse the policy. Senator Walid Jibrin, who serves as the leader (Sarkin) of the Fulani community in Nasarawa State and concurrently holds the position of Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the opposition party, advocated for the support of the policy by southerners, including the Igbos and Yorubas. He posited that such endorsement would contribute to fostering

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peace and security within the country, among other anticipated benefits (Punch, 2019). He succinctly puts it thus:

> Members of the Fulani community express their appreciation to the Federal Government for introducing the RUGA project in the nation. Our Fulani brethren and I wholeheartedly endorse and support this initiative. The RUGA project encompasses various components, such as the establishment of hospitals, educational institutions, water supply facilities, and electricity provision, each anticipated to significantly enhance the well-being of pastoral communities (Punch, 2019).

Moreover, assertions from certain members of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) contended that Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian hailing from the southern region, was overseeing the policy. However, this claim was later refuted by the Vice President's office (Akinkuotu, 2019). The policy, nonetheless, provoked a wave of adverse reactions within the general populace, particularly in the southern part of the country. The interview reveals that the available land in Yorubaland is currently inadequate for agricultural cultivation, let alone allocating portions of it to Fulani herders. Such an allocation is perceived as a relinquishment of Indigenous territory to guests, and it raised concerns about the potential manipulation of individuals' territories. It is suggested that if the government were to pursue such a policy, it should be contingent upon stringent conditions to regulate the activities of Fulani itinerant herders effectively.[7]

Furthermore, the RUGA policy was anticipated to exacerbate ethnic tensions in Nigeria, given the country's diverse multi-ethnic composition. The concern stemmed from the perception that the policy disproportionately favoured the Fulani ethnic group, potentially leading to an increased Fulani presence in all 36 states. This raised apprehensions, particularly among individuals in Yorubaland, who harboured concerns that the Fulani community might continuously seek additional land, akin to the character Oliver Twist's insatiable demands. The prevailing belief was that the policy found feasibility due to the presidency being occupied by a member of the Fulani ethnic group, without adequate consideration for the interests of other ethnicities in the nation. A pertinent question arose during the interview: Would the government extend similar interventionist policies to benefit a Yoruba or Igbo individual in northern Nigeria? (Interview with Mufutau, 2021). Sharing similar fears of insecurity and ethnic chauvinism. One of the interviews revealed that:

> Some perceive the RUGA settlement initiative as a controversial method of acquiring land that would benefit Fulani leaders. The repercussions of this approach are evident in the current situation where these nomadic herders, lacking permanent settlements, are causing havoc in their host countries. Instances of violence, including slaughtering of the local population, as well as engaging in criminal activities such as robbery and kidnapping, have been reported. For example, in the vicinity of Gbongan villages, efforts were made to cultivate arable crops to secure a food source for a family. However, introducing these nomadic herders and their cattle resulted in the wanton destruction of crops without

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> accountability. The current scenario raises concerns about the potential exacerbation of such issues if these herders were granted permanent settlements. The overarching question is the possible impact on the affected communities and their livelihoods.[6]

The implementation of such a policy is feared to have implications for the potential disintegration of Nigeria, as it is perceived to promote Fulani hegemony at the expense of other ethnic groups. Notably, a significant portion of Fulani herders faced challenges in their homelands (Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea), prompting them to migrate in substantial numbers due to the perceived safety of Nigeria. This influx may exacerbate the farmer-herder conflict, potentially leading to a more significant crisis. It is important to highlight the cultural practice in Igbo land known as "Ama Hausa," where land is allocated to the Hausa community. However, the Federal Government's current approach appears to be a clear imposition of terms on other ethnic groups.[10] Similarly, another scholar puts it thus:

> The viability of RUGA implementation in Nigeria is contingent upon sustainable funding mechanisms rather than complete government financing. Proposals include providing loan facilities to herders to establish ranches and ensuring a balanced financial responsibility. The nomenclature "RUGA" does not adequately encompass diplomatic and social integration aspects. Examining the correlation between an Igbo individual and a Fulani surname raises questions regarding the broader sociocultural implications. Furthermore, clarity and precision are imperative in navigating conflicts to mitigate potential ambiguities.[1]

The Middle Belt Forum responded to the RUGA initiative by endorsing the stance of Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom, expressing opposition to the program. The forum strongly objected to RUGA, asserting its implementation would worsen security challenges. Dogo, the Middle Belt Forum spokesperson, emphasised that RUGA is not considered a viable solution to address the prevailing violence in Nigeria and is unlikely to contribute to peace. He put it thus:

> The speaker does not support the notion of RUGA, particularly in the context of violence aimed at acquiring land from the local population. The speaker firmly rejects such actions, deeming them wholly unacceptable, particularly in the middle belt region. There is a belief that perpetrators seek to coerce acceptance of their demands through acts of violence. However, the speaker asserts this strategy will not succeed (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

Sociocultural groups in the southwestern region of Nigeria, including the widely recognised Afenifere group, have characterised the RUGA initiative as a perceived strategy aimed at recolonising the nation. Okere (2019) notes that these groups express concern that, with the current discourse on local government autonomy, the RUGA settlements could be transformed into local governments exclusively for the Fulani community in the future, leading to a widespread rejection of the proposed agenda. Similarly, the Igbo cultural group views RUGA as an initiative driven by

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President Buhari to establish his ethnic relatives across all regions of Nigeria (Okere, 2019). Additionally, Professor Wole Soyinka's evaluations of President Buhari's actions characterised his effort to confer undue advantages upon his ethnic group and grant immunity to herders who have committed acts of violence with impunity. This critical perspective highlights concerns about the potential misuse of the RUGA initiative for ethnic and political purposes. Referring to the herders, he averred:

> The perpetration of violence without moral restraint, coupled with the displacement of agriculturists who are pivotal contributors to the nation's food supply, underscores a pressing concern. The encroachment of cattle onto farmlands exacerbates the existing challenges, prompting the introduction of the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) initiative. Urgent and thoughtful management of the RUGA initiative, prioritising imagination and humanitarian considerations, is essential to avert potential social unrest. A society where the interests of cattle supersede human life reflects a developmental stage that warrants immediate attention (Okere, 2019).

Following widespread criticism, President Muhammadu Buhari suspended the implementation of the RUGA Settlements project on July 3, 2019. The rationale behind this decision was its perceived incompatibility with the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). In contrast to the RUGA, the NLTP focused on ranch development in states willing to participate, subject to certification by the National Economic Council (NEC), chaired by Vice President Osinbajo.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP)

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) was introduced by the Minister of Agriculture, Audu Ogbeh, and subsequently endorsed by the National Economic Council (NEC) (The Cable, 2021). Initiated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), a nationwide dialogue commenced in 2017, culminating in a one-week stakeholder workshop. On June 19, 2018, the National Livestock Transformation Programme (NLTP) was formally declared, outlining a phased transition from open grazing to ranching and emphasising stakeholder engagement (NEC Report, 2019). The plan underwent finalization and received NEC approval in January 2019. Its official inauguration occurred on September 10, 2019, at the Gongoshi Grazing Reserve in Mayo-Belwa Local Government Area, Adamawa State, officiated by Vice President Professor Yemi Osinbajo (Punch, 2019). Due to implementation delays, the agreement was reassessed, extending its duration from 2019 to 2028. Positioned as a comprehensive intervention, the NLTP aims to modernise livestock management, enhance productivity, and bolster security.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) represents a collaborative effort between the federal and state governments, along with active engagement from farmers. The implementation strategy follows a value chain approach, emphasising the involvement of various stakeholders, including pastoralists, farmers, private sector entities, civil society organisations, traditional and religious institutions, academic and research institutions, and farmers' and traders' cooperatives (Voice of Nigeria, 2019).

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The National Livestock Transformation Plan outlines a new path based on three pillars, which are as follows:

1. Provide a roadmap for modernising livestock production through a combination of nomadic breeding and ranching to serve a modernised dairy and beef processing industry;

2. Develop a plan for resettling and addressing the dislocated population in key conflict zones to enable them to become a part of the agriculture modernisation process and

3. Provide a peaceful dialogue and reconciliation mechanism in affected communities to help them achieve a harmonious future. As a result, the plan is a comprehensive strategy that addresses all aspects of animal husbandry, not just cows (NEC Report, 2019).

The policy aims to expedite the transformation of Nigeria's agricultural system, aligning with the federal government's objective of attracting N2 trillion to the national economy through the livestock sub-sector. The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), proposed by the National Executive Council (NEC), allocates a budget of N100 billion for its implementation. The funding structure involves the federal government covering 80% of the cost while participating states contribute the remaining 20% and provide land for the project (The Cable, 2021). Seven states, namely Adamawa (APC), Benue (PDP), Kaduna (APC), Nasarawa (APC), Plateau (APC), Taraba (PDP), and Zamfara (APC), situated at the forefront of the farmers-herdsmen crisis, are targeted under this initiative. Additionally, non-frontline states, including Katsina, Kano, Kogi, Kwara, Ondo, and Abuja, have also been identified. The plan outlines the establishment of 94 ranches distributed in clusters of four across 24 states, as approved by the NEC in January 2019 (Johnbosco, 2019).

The NEC-approved National Livestock Transformation Programme (NLTP) is a comprehensive initiative with an estimated cost of approximately $179 billion. The program encompasses conflict resolution, humanitarian relief for victims of communal conflicts, early recovery for internally displaced persons (IDPs), human capital development, cross-cutting issues, and economic development (Voice of Nigeria, 2019). To ensure effective planning, coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and financial management, establishing a robust program management structure is crucial for the NLTP. The responsibility lies with the Project Coordination Secretariat (PCS) in the Vice President's Office, which oversees program management, provides overall policy guidance, strategic direction and review, and approves annual work plans and budgets. Despite some reported dissatisfaction with the NLTP, it has performed better than the RUGA initiative. Amidst challenges such as impending famine, rising unemployment, and rural-urban migration, the NLTP's enhanced employment and food security projections present compelling prospects (Ibekwe & Onyewuchi, 2020).

Public Reactions to the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP)

Upon introducing the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) policy, diverse reactions emerged nationwide, encompassing both positive and negative sentiments. Citizens expressed

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varying perspectives, with some contending that the NLTP resembles the suspended RUGA policy. For instance, Ben Gathers reacts thus:

> The government's potential rebranding of the initiative is recognised as a mere alteration, as the essence, akin to the RUGA program, persists. The primary concern remains the allocation of land to Fulani herdsmen, with a lack of interest prevailing, irrespective of the nomenclature employed, including the proposal of the "Heaven's Livestock Initiative".[2]

The divergence between RUGA and NLTP prompts the government to elucidate the initial design rationale behind RUGA and the subsequent alterations, particularly the incorporation of farmers and other livestock business owners, following public criticism. Clarification on this matter is essential for transparency and public understanding.[4] Also, another reaction put it thus:

> The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) serves as the updated nomenclature for the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) initiative. Harmonious coexistence has prevailed with the authentic Fulani community over an extended period. Within the framework of the NLTP, a discerning stance is advocated against violent elements within the Fulani community, external bandits, and those within the Fulani fold who betray the shared values of peaceful cohabitation.[11]

A sentiment expressed from the South-South region asserts that the government's prioritisation of cattle over citizens is evident. This policy is anticipated to escalate tensions among ethnic groups. The inquiry arises regarding the disproportionate focus on a substantial policy for the Fulani community. The respondent posits that the government's emphasis appears to be more directed towards the welfare of cows rather than human life and well-being.[3]

Farmers and herders are thought to be unable to coexist peacefully while benefiting economically at the same time. Imogu Joseph believed that:

> The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) has not gained widespread acceptance, hindering the cohabitation of herders and farmers in a mutually beneficial and peaceful economic environment. Successful implementation of the NLTP necessitates states to delineate their primary focus on either farming or cattle rearing. The simultaneous coexistence of both activities in every state mirrors an alternative approach resembling the previously proposed Ruga settlements.[5]

The assertion that there is no distinction between the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) and the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), both overseen by the Vice President's office, has been noted (This Day, 2019). The Office of the Vice President (OVP) response team has affirmed this observation. The NLTP, spearheaded by the Vice President and endorsed by the National Economic Council, involves collaboration with all state governors, who also bear responsibility for its implementation (OVP Response, 2021). The policy has received widespread approval, underscoring

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its well-considered nature. However, concerns persist regarding the typical Nigerian challenge of effective implementation. Timely and rigorous follow-up is imperative. The unprecedented commitment of the government to address longstanding national crises is noteworthy, marking a departure from the past when Nigeria felt isolated internationally. The success of the policy hinges on its impartial implementation, free from ethnic or political biases.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) extends beyond cattle, encompassing domesticated animals within an agricultural framework that are raised to produce labour and commodities, including meat, eggs, milk, leather, and wool. Under this plan, state governors are empowered to enforce regulations about farmer-herder interactions. For instance, state governments may allocate land for cattle and, in return, collect taxes and development levies to provide veterinary services. Additionally, herders are required to be remunerated for these services.[9]

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) policy is a theoretically equitable arrangement benefiting all stakeholders. However, the realisation of its success hinges on the intricacies of the policy and its execution. Drawing parallels, the administration's imprudent implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy is cited as an example, resulting in an unwarranted recession in the country's economy. Consequently, premature celebration or endorsement of the NLTP's efficacy is cautioned.[8]

Debating Transformation: Reincarnation or Change of Name

This sub-chapter aims to ascertain whether the transition from the RUGA program to the NLPT represents a reincarnation, a rebirth or a mere nomenclatural alteration. The study establishes a comprehensive background to support the subsequent analysis. Despite governmental endeavours, the NLPT policy has encountered criticism primarily centred around its perceived limitations. Critiques emphasise that the NLPT document exclusively addresses cattle, raising concerns that it might be a strategic rebranding of the RUGA program. Adejo argued that "livestock" has a holistic definition, yet the NLPT focuses on cattle (Femi, 2019).

RUGA, an acronym for Fulani or cow settlement, distinguishes itself from the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) despite sharing common features such as voluntary participation, a ranching model, and land allocation. A significant disparity exists in the consensus underlying the creation of the NLTP. While some governors, including Samuel Ortom of Benue, openly criticised the RUGA settlement scheme, the NLTP explicitly outlined provisions for establishing ranches in the country. Notably, it emphasised non-support for any policies or terminology aimed at expropriating land from the people of Benue (The Cable, 2021).

The NLTP program asserted its intention not to be exclusive to cows, emphasising that States had the liberty to select any animal to implement the livestock plan. However, in Adamawa, the primary focus of NLTP implementation has been on cattle. Despite the Vice-President's clarification that NLTP is distinct from RUGA, the association of its launch by the Ministry of Agriculture raises concerns, as it may be perceived as a strategy to acquire land for herder settlements. Analysing the policy documents, it is challenging to convincingly argue that the NLTP policy is not predominantly

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designed for herders. The textual and contextual analysis suggests a potential evolution toward a revised RUGA agenda (Femi, 2019).

Nigeria has witnessed heightened concerns, notably in the Southeast, South-South, Southwest, and North Central regions, where there is a perception that the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) might serve as a covert means to implement the controversial RUGA initiative. Despite the NLTP's ostensibly inclusive nomenclature, its policy articulation and execution are construed as aligning with RUGA under a different guise.

This analysis contends that the NLTP document is exclusively centred on cattle, neglecting other livestock categories, which suggests a potential rebranding of the RUGA initiative. Livestock, encompassing domesticated animals raised primarily for food, includes poultry such as chickens, turkeys, ail, and ducks, as well as ruminant animals like cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, rabbits, and, in certain northern regions of Nigeria, donkeys, camels, and horses. Chickens, cattle, goats and sheep are the predominant livestock species (Edward & Samuel, 2020). Consequently, the National Livestock Transformation Plan may inadequately address the farmer-herder conflict in the country and face challenges due to its potential association with the RUGA policy.

The RUGA and NLTP policies have sparked controversy, eroding public trust in certain government initiatives addressing pertinent issues. These policies have exacerbated divisions and segmentation within the nation, surpassing the pre-amalgamation state. The decision to launch a project exclusively in Hausa, catering to a specific ethnic group, constitutes a stark affront to inclusivity in Nigeria's multi-ethnic context. RUGA and NLTP epitomise longstanding impunity, underscoring the leadership's insensitivity in introducing such policies within a federal system of government. Despite any attempt to dress it up, the NLTP inherently implies ethnic dominance and conquest as it endeavours to establish territories for Fulani herders nationwide (Apikins, 2020).

Some have perceived the RUGA policy as indicative of a pursuit of territorial acquisition, dominance, and conquest. Similarly, the NLTP has faced accusations of being RUGA under a different guise. Public reactions suggest that both initiatives are deliberate policies designed to favour the empowerment of the Fulani ethnic group, emphasising cattle rearing over crop farming. This perceived bias raises concerns about hidden agendas, as there is a lack of apparent justification for the federal government's extensive involvement in the nationalisation of the cattle business through these programs. Refer to the table below for a comparative analysis of RUGA and NLTP policies.

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Table 1: Comparative Table of RUGA and the NLTP

RUGA	NLTP
There was no consultation with stakeholders before the decision was made and approved. The people whose lands the federal government intended to annex were completely ignored.	The National Economic Council convened a stakeholder committee comprised of governors and ministers (NEC).
The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) came up with the concept for RUGA.	The NLTP is the result of extensive consultation and collaboration with communities, the state government, private organisations, and cattle herder representatives.
Ranching is one of the RUGA program's policy options.	NLTP allowed full ranching of cattle in the settlement.
RUGA was not in conformity with legal requirements for the compulsory acquisition of lands due to the Governor that was left out. State governors have the power to make compulsory acquisition of land under the *Land Use Act.*	The NLTP policy was carried along by the state's governor in the acquisition of land, in which seven frontline states and six front line states were ready to allocate land for the program.
RUGA is a general plan monitoring by the federal government to execute.	Under NLTP each state decides what works for their state as well as monitoring how it works

Source: Authors compilation

Conclusion

This research centres on assessing the RUGA and NLTP policies, examining whether they represent a substantive shift or a change in nomenclature or policy approach. To conduct an impartial analysis, the study critically examines the origins of both policies and assesses the responses of Nigerians, seeking to address the underlying issues contributing to tensions between farmers and herders in the country. The available evidence indicates that, despite the federal government's efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict between farmers and herders, the root problems persist. The RUGA initiative, marked by controversy and ethnic tension, transformed into the NLTP scheme. While the NLTP, encompassing the concept of "livestock," is a comprehensive framework, the necessary mechanisms for its successful implementation are yet to be fully established. It is essential to note that this submission does not purport to provide an exhaustive analysis.

Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that the NLTP holds significant potential in addressing the farmer-herder conflict and can catalyse positive changes in Nigeria's agricultural system, contingent upon effective management by each state. The study underscores the need for sustained efforts in policy implementation and management to fully harness the potential benefits of the NLTP in resolving the existing challenges in the agricultural sector. It recommends that future policies reinforce this collaborative model by engaging all affected communities, including local farmers and herders, and allowing each state to tailor solutions to its unique circumstances. This will ensure the interventions are context-specific and culturally sensitive, reducing tensions.

Endnotes

[1]Oral interview conducted Dr Thompson Olakunle, lecturer, FUNAAB, Abeokuta 3rd December, 2021.

[2]Oral interview conducted with Alhaji Mufutau Yusuff, civil servant/farmer, 52 years old, Erin Osun, Osun State, 14th November, 2021.

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[3]Oral interview conducted with Bogghom David, farmer/civil servant, 56years old, Barkin Ladi Plateau state, 29th November, 2021.

[4]Oral interview conducted with Ibrahim Isiaku, farmer/civil servant, 46 years old, Nasarawa State, 16thNovember, 2021.

[5]Oral interview conducted with Jukun Messiah, farmer/civil servant, 46 years old, Bokkos. Plateau State, 28thNovember, 2021.

[6]Oral Interview conducted with Matthew Aderemi, cocoa farmer, 69 years old, Itesiwaju Community, Ede South, 15th November, 2021.

[7]Oral Interview conducted with Olakunle Akanbi, retired civil servant/farmer, 65 years old, Aanuoluwapo Community, Erin Osun, Osun State, 20th November,2021.

[8]Oral interview conducted with Uchenna George-Nkemmacho, Civil servant, Imo State, 46years, 18th December, 2021.

[9]Oral interview conducted with Umar Shuaibu civil servant, 46 years old, Kano State, 11thDecember, 2021.

[10]Oral interview conducted with Waheed Yusuff Akao, farmer, 48 years old, Agiremu compound, Erin Osun, Osun State, 14th November, 2021.

[11]Oral interview conducted with Yakubu Ikekhua, farmer, 42 years old, Numan, Adamawa State, 14th November, 2021.

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