

**SUSPENSION OF RURAL GRAZING AREA SETTLEMENT  
POLICY AND THREAT OF EVICTION BY NORTHERN  
COALITION ON WHIMPERING SOUTHERNERS IN NIGERIA  
“MUHAMMADU BUHARI’S DEMOCRATIC DISPENSATION”**

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**ABSTRACT:** The study is to examine the consequences of suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan of the federal government and threat of eviction by the northern coalition on whimpering southerners in Nigeria. This is because the persistent plague of brutal violence between nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary farmers over cattle grazing increased drastically and has become a national security threat despite the inability of the federal government to implement the already existing National Livestock Transformation plan aimed at a unanimous decision to adopt cattle ranching as the best method of livestock breeding for the nation. It is from the foregoing that the objectives of this study were drawn. Specifically, the study will investigate, ascertain, find out and examine the extent to which suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition will reduce leadership irregularity, reduce kidnapping, reduce killings and reduce palpable fear of insecurity on whimpering southerners in Nigeria. Secondary sources of data were employed largely from journals, textbooks, newspapers, web pages and government documents among others. The group threat theory was adopted as the theoretical umbrella for this discourse. The findings show that, there was leadership inconsistency. Kidnapping was on the increase. Killings of innocent citizens persisted and palpable fear of insecurity was intensified. The study recommends for social dialogue, cow herders should be disarmed or sedentary farmers’ armed in order to stop killing and kidnapping and equal opportunity should be given to the entire groups to develop.

**Key words:** Suspension, Rural Grazing Area Settlement Plan, Southerner and Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years Nigerians and successive government have been confronted with issue bordering on Fulani herdsmen restiveness given the inability of the federal government to implement an already existing policy about cow husbandry in the country. It should be noted that cow herding has always been a life for the Fulani’s in the Sub-Saharan sub-region and in Nigeria in particular

but the rate of insecurity faced by Nigerians over how cows could be raised and herded has not been a major issue of concern until in the last half of a decade.

Consequently, the issue escalated and became a threat to national survival, transformed into rural banditry, criminal gangs, killings, bombing, creation of fear that led to the destruction of livelihoods which affected national cohesion Ezezi (2019). In response to that, the Federal Government failed to implement the previously approved National Livestock Transformation plan developed by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2018 aimed at a unanimous decision to adopt cattle ranching as the best method of livestock breeding for the nation but went further to propose the controversial rural grazing area settlement plan dated June 25<sup>th</sup> 2019 as a means to address the restiveness. It is a settlement plan where animals, farmers, not just herders, will be settled in an organized place, Okere (2019). Amidst that, the uproar, huge opposition and backlash it received from suspicious groups, civil society, socio-cultural organizations and deluge of criticism led to its outright suspension on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019 by the Federal government, (Johnson-Salami 2019).

On account of that, the same nomadic herders that perpetrated the evil turned round to threaten the southerners *via* formal accusation and expressed a feeling of dissatisfaction over the suspension of Rural Grazing Area plan. In confirmation of the above view, Ogbonna (2019) opined that, the northern coalition threatened to evict southerners from the north with effect from July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2019 if the suspension of Rural Grazing Area settlement plan was not revoked. Hence the study will focus on examining the consequences of the suspension of rural grazing area plan of the federal government and threat of eviction by northern coalition on whimpering southerners in Nigeria

### **Statement of the Problem**

Those jostle of threat to evict southerners from the north gave rise to notorious challenges despite the efforts made to address the problems such as the National Livestock Transformation plan developed by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2018 that advocated ranching as the best method of livestock breeding for the nation and the inability of the federal government to implement the already existing policy about cow husbandry. Cow headers felt victimized because of cutting of their cultural ties of taking their cow along routes to different states with attractive resources. A business they have been doing for several years.

Given that, there has been persistence of insecurity and *threat directed to the lives and properties of peaceful Nigerians of southern extraction especially the Igbo businessmen and women in the 19 states of the northern states in diverse areas. This unfortunate scenario has been linked to challenges of insecurity of leadership, irregularity of leadership, mixed messages, lack of consideration of the interest of all the states, and display of nepotism by the Federal government. Unfortunately, ethno-religious suspicion overtook harmonious and peaceful co-existence. Even there was general loss of lives and properties. All the government did was habitual forming of committees to investigate the root cause and lacked the ability to implement the reports of the committees. Following that, mistrust was built among the northern nomadic herders and southern famers who have co-habited together for several years.*

Beyond that, it raised some expression of doubt, suspicion, anxiety, palpable fear, and the desire for self protection because people were astonished as to why rural grazing plan was not cancelled out rightly instead of the option of suspension since the federal government said it was voluntary. Given that, the general feeling was that it could be re-introduced in future. Furthermore, it was capable of causing anarchy and a real threat to the nation. Even the antecedents of cattle herders were a sufficient pathway to destruction of farmlands, genocide, kidnapping, killings, rape and murder that gradually laid to rest the settlement of rural grazing area plan.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective was to examine the consequences of suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition on whimpering southerners in Nigeria. Specifically, the study is to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition will reduce leadership irregularity on whimpering southerners.
2. Investigate the extent to which suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition will reduce kidnapping of whimpering southerners.
3. Find out the extent to which suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition will reduce killings of whimpering southerners.
4. Examine the extent to which suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition will reduce palpable fear of insecurity on whimpering southerners.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent does suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition reduced leadership irregularity on whimpering southerners?
2. To what extent does suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition reduced kidnapping of whimpering southerners?
3. To what extent does suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition reduced killings of whimpering southerners?
4. To what extent does suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan and threat of eviction by northern coalition reduced palpable fear of insecurity on whimpering southerners?

## **CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATIONS**

### **Suspension**

Suspension is when something such as rural grazing area settlement plan is stopped officially from continuing or happening for a period of time. Again, it could mean making someone to leave a place or stop doing something for a period of time Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2010). It signifies the act of delaying rural grazing area settlement plan for some time, until the federal government decides to take a decision on the policy Hornby (2015). In a nut

shell, the Federal government has not taken the right or unanimous decision on the rural grazing area settlement plan. Thus, it gave rise to its delay.

### **Rural Grazing Area Settlement Plan**

The term Ruga emanated from the Hausa language which connotes cow settlement Odumakin (2019). Similarly, it connotes Rural Grazing Area. It will house animals, farmers, not just herders and all amenities and comfort provided Toromade (2019). In another dimension, it is perceived as the same thing as cattle colony which implies a centre or market for the sale of cattle and beef products. Furthermore, it was simply rebranded RUGA settlement by the democratic government of President Muhammadu Buhari Rine (2019).

### **Eviction**

It means when a landlord decides to legally remove a tenant from his rental property. This could happen when there is a breach of agreement Irby (2018). In that context, there has to be a notice that specify the number of days given to a tenant to correct the existing problem that caused the threat of eviction. If the tenant defaults, the matter goes to court Chen (2018). Furthermore, eviction means a loss or deprivation a possessor of something suffers. This could be in bits or whole of his right of property. Someone can be evicted through physical removal from a premise or disturbance of a person's enjoyment or comfort in an environment by disrupting the amenities and services that gives life to the environment. For instance, when someone is disconnected from all the utilities he or she enjoys in his or her premises.

### **Southerner**

The term southerner connotes a native or inhabitant of the south of any specific region such as Nigeria. It also means a person born in or that lives in the south of a nation Collins English Dictionary (2009). Nigeria is made up of six geopolitical zones. It is further divided into three zones in the North and three zones in the South. The South in Nigeria is made up of South-East, South-West, and South-South geopolitical zones. The South-South zone comprise of the following states; Rivers, Cross river, Delta, Edo, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa. South- East embodies Imo, Ebonyi, Anambra, Enugu and Abia states. South-West encompasses Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun and Oyo states Azad, Crawford, and Kaila (2018). In summary, the three zones make up the southern zone in Nigeria and any citizen of the states under the aforementioned zones is regarded as a southerner.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Understanding Rural Grazing Area Settlement Plan in Nigeria**

The idea of establishment of cattle colonies was first conceived by the Federal government in the first democratic dispensation of President Muhammadu Buhari. Similarly, the Federal government in May, 2019 got a license for a radio station alleged to be for the education of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers. That received a lot of criticism from different people. As if that

was not enough, in June 25<sup>th</sup> 2019 the Federal government in her dilly dallying attitude announced the plans to put into existence Rural Grazing Area settlement across the nation. The government submits that it was to address the incessant security threat that sprang up from open grazing which constituted nuisance round the nation Okere (2019). The term Ruga emanated from the Hausa language which connotes cow settlement Odumakin (2019).

Worthy of note is that, it was to house farmers and animal. Such provision of cattle markets will stop the incessant clashes between stakeholders. Again it will attract investors and make available about 2000 jobs for the unemployed. Surprisingly, eleven pilot states indicated their interest. They include Kebbi, Adamawa, Sokoto, Kogi, Plateau, Zamfara, Nasarawa, Katsina, Niger, Kaduna and Taraba states. This led to a nationwide outcry. Unfortunately, it was not included in the National Live Stock Transformation Plan which embodied ₦179 billion and ten 10 year initiative (2018-2027). This plan was supposed to introduce ranching as a good measure to pull out of the conflicts of herdsmen and farmers. The Federal and States government were to fund the plan for the first 3 years to the tune of ₦170 billion. The private sectors will take over from the third year till tenth year at the cost of ₦100 billion. Funny enough, Ruga settlement is very similar to National Live Stock Transformation Plan. However, the plan was kept in an obscured position with lack of interest from the Federal government. Cooperatives will be introduced where herders will register with it and the cooperative will get agreements for land from the State government Toromade (2019).

Again, it was meant to provide adequate basic amenities such as hospitals, schools, road networks, veterinary clinics, markets and manufacturing entities that will process and add value to meats and animal products. The rebranded Ruga was made in such a manner that everybody in animal husbandry who has interest can be a beneficiary of the plan Venity (2019). More so, the plan has about six remarkable goals such as conflict resolution, humanitarian relief and early recovery, justice and peace, economic investment, human capital development, youth research and information and strategic communication among others. Worthy of note is that the Ruga settlement plan is voluntary. Interested states were expected to come up with a development plan that will be in consonance with the programme of the Federal government The Punch (2019). Given that situation, the suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan came on the heel of its inconsistency with the National Economic Council agreement. In line with the suspension, the northern coalition felt grieved and threatened to evict southerners within 30 days from the north if the Federal government failed to revoke or reverse the suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan Erezi (2019).

### **Theoretical Framework Employed**

The study is anchored on Group Threat Theory propounded by Herbert Blumer and Hubert M. Blalock Junior in the 1950's and 1960's were the leading proponents of group threat theory. It is a sociological theory that says the larger the size of an out-group, the more the corresponding in-group perceives it to threaten its own interest. That will lead to the in-group members having increased negative attitude towards the out-group. In-group is a small group in the society whose members share the same interest, language and try to keep other people out. The out-groups are those who do not belong to any group ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)).

**Tenets of the Theory:** Group Threat Theory has the following tenets;

- 1) There must be interest of the society or group at work.
- 2) There is perceived threat among groups.
- 3) There are behavioural responses for both groups and individuals and
- 4) There is usually a competition between groups.

### **Application of the Theory to the Study**

Group threat theory is apt for the study because people's threat perceptions arise when there is intergroup competition for material, financial resources and when the interest or position of the group is put in question by the arrival of newcomers. The in-group responds to the threat *via* showing anti out-group attitudes and prejudices. Once there is a perception that the majority group's or in-group interest is threatened, there is bound to be more negative attitude. It was displayed when the Federal government rolled out a rural grazing area settlement plan as a means to address Fulani-Herdersmen restiveness against the previous policy of establishing cattle ranches Ibrahim (2019). It reoccurred when the Federal government offered palliatives to herders-farmers clashes until the need to find a lasting solution arose. That led to a proposal to establish cattle colonies. In the same context, Callens, Meuleman and Valentova (2015) explained that when an individual's self-interest is at stake, the perceptions of group threat develop more easily. Similarly, the threat of eviction by northern coalition on whimpering southerners would heighten the vulnerability of further attacks if not handled with care because southerners don't belong to the group of northern Fulani Ozoh and Dinwobi (2018).

Similarly, it was the competition for group interest that gave rise to the perceived instigation of diverse reactions such as the President funding his brother's private business from the Federal government's coffer. There was perceived threat to lands, lives, gender violation, child education, safe environment, healthcare, indigenous people among others IHEME (2018). That in turn, would produce destructive behavior leading to fear and want. Again, the perception of fear of insecurity as a result of the threat of eviction by northern coalition on southerners gave rise to a contradiction of interest and mutual suspicion between the stakeholders in different communities.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper employed qualitative method both in data collection and analysis specifically, secondary sources of data were employed largely from journals, textbooks, newspapers, web pages and government documents among others. The data were analyzed through historical and interpretative methods.

### **DISCUSSION**

There was no conformity to the rules and expectations of the citizens by the federal government because the previous plan aimed at a unanimous decision to adopt cattle ranching as the best method of livestock breeding for the nation was suddenly short changed with rural grazing area

settlement plan against the wishes and decisions of the masses. That made the plan incapable of being justified. Given that situation, the bible speaking in Matthew chapter 7 verse 7 says “ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Verse 9, or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Verse 10: Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent?” In line with the scripture, the President represents the father of the nation and the citizens are his children. In that vein, the movement of cattle’s from the north to the south and across the border into Nigeria was outlawed by the National Livestock Transformation Plan under the auspices of National Economic Council. In addition, it endorsed the establishment of ranches with all the necessary facilities needed to make it a reality. Surprisingly, the federal government deceitfully announced to the nation the suspended rural grazing area settlement plan which represents the serpent that has bitten them. To assure the accuracy of the previous submission, (Dimkpa 2019) submits that the failed ideas of ranching, cattle colonies, rural grazing area settlement plan and its suspension were conspicuous evidence of the irregularity or inconsistency displayed by the Federal government. Again, the northerners revealed in their speeches that they have enough land to embark on the settlement plan and suddenly turned to insist on spreading the rural grazing area settlement plan across the 36 (thirty six) states of Nigeria not minding the fact that, the southerners declined on the obnoxious settlement plan *abinitio*. More so, there was a display of tremendous lack of adequate interest on the face of the nation’s insecurity that seeks to breed division because the government failed to stage counter attack on cow herders. Perhaps, the President kept mute because they are his brothers since they are of Fulani extraction. To substantiate the above view, Olukosi (2019) submits that, there was a similar threat in 2017 when the northern extraction issued an ultimatum to southerners to leave the north because of the activities of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the south-east. The law enforcement agency could not counter that threat. In a similar incidence, the northern coalition boldly regurgitated a similar threat in an attempt to evict southerners from the north, compelling the Governors’ to embrace the settlement plan with 30 days ultimatum. Again, the government was adamant despite the fact that; it is lawful for every citizen to reside wherever he or she pleases. Assuming the southerners become evicted from the north, the northerner would automatically be evicted from the south as well leading to further division of the nation.

In consonance with the above view, the heart breaks that beclouded the Christendom between 2013 and 2016 were the kidnapping of some priests. There was none in 2017 and was regurgitated in 2018. Following that, five members of Redeemed Christian Church of God from Abia state while on transit to the camp for a Christian convention were abducted. They were whisked to an unknown place between Ogun and Ondo states (Chukwuma, 2019). The worry was intensified because kidnappers were allowed to go unpunished. The wanton killing of people and willful destruction of farmlands, kidnappings, raping and banditry since the inception of the Presidents in 2015 by the nomadic herders have never been tried in any law court for their criminal activities. It was substantiated when Okoli (2019) opined that, the highest rate of kidnapping recorded in Nigeria has persisted despite measures such as the police anti-kidnapping squad introduced in 2000 employed to curtail it. That was as a result of weak sanctions and deterrent mechanisms of the government. Thus there was loss of thousands of lives and enormous amount of money even as some were injured. In the same vein, the president is a Fulani and most of the people at the helm of affairs of the federal security agencies were of the

northern Muslim. As a result of that, the president barely condemned nomadic Fulani attacks on farmers or any other person, (Ikpeembe, 2021).

Consequently, it gave the cow headers the effrontery to attack and kill innocent people more since there was lack of political will by the government and its agencies to arrest and punish the nomadic Fulani offenders on countless attacks and killings they perpetrated on innocent citizens. In confirmation of that, Daily Trust (2019) revealed how hoodlums suspected to be nomadic Fulani herders killed Rev Fr. Paul Offu on 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 2019 in a cold blood on his journey to the Agbudu Road Agwu Local Government Area, Enugu State. That led to a protest by good spirited Nigerians as a mark of their displeasure thus leaving the people in fear. Obviously, in 2014, over 1169 deaths were recorded among the Christian population in the north and generally in the south. Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba towards the north to Kaduna recorded 3641 deaths between 2015 and 2018. In the south, Ekiti, Delta, Anambra, Taraba, Edo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Ondo, Rivers, Osun and Ogun were also affected by the onslaught. Remarkably, over 2000 1,700 people were killed in 2018. That figure is more than the total killings of innocent citizens in two previous years and has claimed more lives six times more than the Boko Haram, (Njoku 2019). Despite the magnitude of atrocities committed by the nomadic herders, it did not attract prosecution and punishment from the Federal government. They became the evil tribe that has irretrievably destroyed the image of the federal government leading to loss of credibility and dignity.

Stretching further, there was an overlap between insecurity and fear as they coexisted and made citizens feel incapable of handling the situation. The mere fact that, the Federal government deceitfully wanted the 36 states to give out their ancestral land, their only inheritance to their killers raised fear and suspicion. Flowing from that direction, the Fulani seized the opportunity of the previous establishment of Ruga settlement plan in the old Local Government area of Kaduna state in 1987 to take over the land, expanded and the Kachia grazing reserve grew into a Fulani territory (Laduga). It was further transformed into a Fulani community where they have a district head and are seeking for emirate. In the same vein, the threat for additional establishment of rural grazing area settlement plan by the Federal government will be tantamount to outright dominance of Nigeria by the Fulani's. Beyond that, in the 2019 general election, about two electronic capturing machines were sent to that Local Government for the purpose of voters' registration, accreditation of voters and casting of votes, (Akinkuotu, 2019). By implication, the northerners used them to increase their chances of winning the previous and probably the future elections in Nigeria. Similarly, it was also revealed in the month of June 30<sup>th</sup> 2018 that nomadic headers renamed 54 local plateau communities taken over from indigenes. The above scenarios fear and suspicion in the minds of people when rural grazing area settlement plan was announced, (Ikpeembe, 2021).

In the same perspective, the Federal government played some tricks and deceits in order to actualize his intensions or advance his faith. Even as a Fulani and adherent of Sharia laws, (Nwakanma, 2019) they have inexplicable and disgusting attraction to the cow such that they make love to the cows for ritual purposes. Obviously, sexual intercourse between man and cow is despicable, unnatural, bestial, immoral in the sight of God and a bond between the nomadic Fulani's and the cow. That gave rise to their relentless effort in protecting the cows hence several



people refused to consume cow meat, (Adewale, 2019). Against that backdrop, fear and suspicion intensified because their secret bond with the cow would make life so unbearable for the southerners. Again, several people were voluntarily displaced because of fear of being killed or maimed. In like manner, Ishola (2018) made it resolute that, sedentary farmers were driven out of villages in several crisis zones such as rural communities which made them refuges in neighboring states. They were afraid of travelling to the farms in remote places in order to avert being attacked by nomadic herders. It climaxed in places like Benue state where villagers moved to Nasarawa state which made the governor to openly complain of his inability to cope with spillage. Other states also encountered a similar problem. In concurring with that, Nigeria Displacement Tracking Matrix, (2019) report revealed that, in the period between June and July 2019, a total of 2,018,513 people were displaced in the affected states of north eastern Nigeria. That showed an increase of 2 per cent or 38,477 as against 1,980,036 displaced persons previously recorded in 2018 as a result of conflicts and communal clashes in Nigeria.

Worthy of note is that, the northern coalition further made a provocative speech that the pace at which the President handled security situation in the north was unsteady and deceitful. Perhaps, the hidden plans they have was not actualized since the northern coalition group openly and boldly said that certain leaders from the north were fraternizing to give the presidential slot to the southerners in 2023, (Rine, 2019). On that premise, the desire of the northerners to continue in power was regurgitated and heightened the fear. The planned settlement was voluntary yet the Federal government suspended it instead of cancelling it in line with the wishes and aspiration of the masses, (Igbokwe, 2019). That in a nutshell, became a pathway for Nigerians especially in the south to be on eternal vigilance in order to seek self protection as a result of distrust. That made every ethnic group to be watching with keen interest while strategizing on the next step to take.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The federal government inability to implement an already existing policy about cow husbandry in the country and the threat by the northern coalition born out of the deceitful proposal of rural grazing settlement policy suspended due to public outcry posed several challenges. Hence this study aimed at examining the consequences of suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan of the federal government and threat of eviction by northern coalition on whimpering southerners in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that, there was display of leadership irregularity by the Federal government. Perhaps, they are all Fulani's of northern extraction despite the fact that it is lawful for every citizen to reside where he or she chooses. Kidnappings intensified due to lack of deterrent mechanisms. Killings of innocent lives were unabated because nomadic herders were allowed freedom to use unlicensed arms and lack of prosecutions and punishments. The palpable fear of insecurity persisted in the nation as a result of tricks and deceit of the government and provocative speeches of the northern coalition. Amidst that, to address the challenges associated with threat of eviction born out of suspension of rural grazing area settlement plan the recommendations below should be employed. In conclusion, the above findings have established that the cause of threat and insecurity was the government inability to prosecute the offenders given lack of interest.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. To eliminate the inconsistency of the Federal government in handling the crisis, social dialogue is crucial. There should be representatives from each geopolitical zone to speak the mind of people. Everybody's view among the stakeholders from different geopolitical zone must be respected irrespective of their status.
2. The Federal government should be proactive to create conducive environment for social, economic and political integration of the nation. To achieve this, each group in Nigeria should be given equal opportunity to develop instead of trying to channel the nation's resources to the Fulani's who are of northern extraction. This will reduce citizen's perception about the Federal government ulterior motive.
3. In order to stop the wanton killings of innocent citizen, the nomadic Fulani herders should be disarmed. Alternatively, all sedentary farmers should be allowed or licensed to go with arms as a counter measure to the brutal killings, murder of innocent Nigerians. Furthermore, since political power lies under the barrel of the gun, the Federal government should dissolve the appointments of the security network and restructure it to ensure that every geopolitical zone is fully represented. When every geopolitical zone has control of arms in Nigeria, the rate of threat and insecurity will reduce.
4. The perpetrators of the crimes such as kidnapping, killing and threat should be prosecuted for their crime by the Federal government. That would serve as a deterrent to others who may have some hidden plan to cause chaos.
5. To stop fear of insecurity, people should engage in risk taking because when you do that, you show yourself that you can't be held down by fear.

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