

**Newspaper Framing Of “Ruga” Settlement Programme Of Nigerian Government And The Challenges Of National Security**

**BY**

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***Abstract***

When the immediate past President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari assumed office as the president of Nigeria in 2015, the age-long herders-farmers confrontations resurfaced albeit, with much venom and vehemence. Newspapers, through their news reports and comments also gave vent to the volatile development which has impacted negatively on the country's security and foreign direct investment drive. Efforts to salvage the situation by the Federal Government through the introduction of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements was also met with vehement opposition from ethno-religious individuals and groups in Nigeria. The frame which newspapers gave to the issue is what this study seeks to unravel. The study employs the documentary methods of research in analyzing newspaper Framing of the RUGA Policy while Social Responsibility and Framing Theories underpins the same. Google search on newspaper articles on RUGA settlement was conducted using the online websites of The Punch, This Day, The Nation, The Tribune, Pulse Nigeria and Press Reader newspapers. The study found that newspapers largely frame RUGA settlements using conflict and human interest frames. The study therefore recommends, amongst others that media organization should be socially responsible in framing their reports and stop exploiting the country's fault lines for sensational reportage and circulation bait in order to ensure that they do not aid desperate forces to cause conflict among different ethno – religious, social and cultural groups in the country.

***Keywords: Newspaper, Framing, RUGA settlements, National Security.***

**INTRODUCTION**

Successive governments, both military and civilian, right from independence in Nigeria have introduced and implemented various developmental programmes to improve the socio – political and economic development of the country but only few of such programmes was as explosive and controversial as the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) of the current Federal Government led by President Muhammadu Buhari. The programme which is geared towards putting an end to the recurring conflict between nomadic herders and farmers in virtually every

part of Nigeria and which has led to wanton destruction of lives and properties has been met with considerable outrage, disdain and suspicion.

According to Umar (2019):

“We felt that to do away with herders – farmers conflict, we need to settle our nomads and those who breed animals. We want to put them in a place that has been developed as a settlement where we provide water for their animals, pastures, schools for their children, security, agro-rangers, etc”.

But as laudable as the proposed ‘Ruga’ settlement by the Federal Government is, not a few, especially ethnic – nationalities believe the novel idea has anything good to it, as they see the programme as a land grabbing gimmick meant to favour the Fulani nomads whose kinsman, President Muhammadu Buhari was at the helms of affairs of the country. Others, like former president, Olusegun Obasanjo believe the programme is in furtherance of what he called “Islamisation and Fulanization” agenda of the Buhari presidency. In fact, Obasanjo’s line of thinking resonate in the reactions of the ethnic nationalities and religious groups such as Afenifere, Ohaneze, the Middle Belt and South-South leaders.

This line of thought was canvassed by the Afenifere, the Pan – Yoruba socio-cultural organization through its then spokesman, Yinka Odumakin who claimed that the Federal Government simply wants to carve out land from every community to give to the Fulani. According to Odumakin (2019), “For us in the South-West, no inch of Yoruba land would be given for *Ruga* because it is a plan to colonize the country; it is like what the British did.”

It could be seen from the foregoing that opposition to the ‘Ruga’ programme is rooted in historical rivalry and suspicion that characterizes the relationship among the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria over land, resource allocation and access to power. This much (Krause, 2011) alluded to, when he noted that tensions between ethnic groups rooted in allocation of resources, electoral competition, fears of religious domination, and contested land rights has metamorphosed into an explosive mix.

According to Human Rights Watch (2010), more than 13,500 people have been killed in communal violence since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999.

The mass media, regarded as the fourth estate of the realm in every democratic society, often play a key role in contemporary conflict. Their role, can basically take two different and

opposed forms. Either, the media takes an active part in the conflict, and has responsibility for increase violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence (Puddephatt, 2000). Put succinctly, the media in any conflict or crises situation may either act responsibly and fairly or act irresponsibly or with sentiments.

This study focuses on how the Nigerian newspapers frame the Ruga Settlement Programme of the Federal Government and their adherence to the social responsibility thrust respectively.

### **Problem Statement**

Accounts of Farmers – herders clashes predates Nigeria’s independence and have lived with us overtime in spite of strident efforts made by successive governments to put an end to the recurring conflict. Although, reports also abounds of cases where such disagreements are resolved amicably among herders and farmers before snowballing into conflict. Any wonder then, that the relationship between both occupational groups have been largely cordial until recently, when gun – wielding rather than the hitherto stick – wielding-Fulani herders have had clashes with farmers over grazing land ostensibly, to protect themselves against attack especially when their herds strays into farmlands. Reasons ranging from climate change, inordinate quest to grab land, domination, political expansionism as well as religious aggression have been adduced by some stakeholders as the immediate and remote causes of the increasingly worrisome conflicts that have claimed hundreds of lives and loss of farmlands. To curb this disturbing turn of event, the Buhari – led Federal Government first mooted the idea of re-opening the grazing routes, exploring cattle colony initiative, and later, fiddled with the idea of establishing Ruga settlements which was not only controversial, but rejected by many Nigerians and groups, before it was eventually suspended by the Federal Government who seems to be taken aback by the criticism that accompanied its introduction.

Newspapers are the major channels through which people became aware of the ‘Ruga’ programme as they help to enlighten the citizenry about government programmes. However, some newspapers, in spite of the fact that they are not subjected to official sanction or restraint seems to inject biases and prejudices in their reports especially within the period the raging debate and altercations about ‘Ruga’ lasted. That recourse by many of the newspapers

escalate tension; and show ominous sign of insecurity in the land as the umbrella body of the Fulani herders, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) accused the media of been bias in their handling of the Ruga issue. This development touches on code of ethics of journalism which seems to have suffered flagrant violation in the hands of the affected newspapers.

This development thus raises the issue of the role of newspapers in a conflict or crises situation especially in the context of the coverage of the suspended ‘Ruga’ settlement programme. This is in realization that journalists could serve as constructive agents but they can equally serve as agents of destruction when journalists did not go by the dictates of their professional ethics.

This study, in view of the foregoing examines the frames given to the ‘Ruga’ programme by the following newspapers – *The Punch*, *Pulse Nigeria*, *The Tribune*, *PM News*, *Press Reader* and *This Day*. Similarly, the study seeks to find out how socially responsible the studied newspapers were in their reporting of the ‘Ruga’ settlement controversy.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following questions which is:

1. What were the news frames adopted for reporting ‘Ruga’ settlement programme by the selected newspapers?
2. How socially responsible were the selected newspapers in the reporting of the ‘RUGA’ settlement programme?

### **Scope/Significance**

The study covers the month of January, before the presidential election to July, 2019 after the election. The pre-election months was when conflicts arising from the debate on the programme attained alarming height especially in the central states of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau as well as the South – Eastern states of Enugu, Ebonyi, etc and not leaving the South – West and South – South states of Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Edo, Delta amongst others.

In fact, the ‘Ruga’ scheme became a political tool for both proponents and opponents of the policy particularly in Benue state where the governor had introduced Anti – Grazing law to curb the alleged excesses of the Fulani herders.

The states that were affected by the herders/farers clashes felt the pinch of the economic woes occasioned by frequent cases of crises and had to rely squarely on monthly allocation from the federation account to keep the machinery of government going, after expending huge sums on security, with little left to provide development project for the people.

The study is therefore, significant to determine how the media nay, newspapers cope with the framing of the crises in a no- partisan way. The study outcome would show whether newspapers had exhibited maturity and restraint in the ways they frame news and information to the public devoid of sentiment or parochial interest.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Newspaper**

Newspaper is generally regarded as a record of events or news and such record could be daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly. The newspaper Act of 1958 Section 2 according to Esimokha (2017) defines newspaper as “any paper containing public news, intelligence or any remarks; observations and comments thereon printed for sale and published in Nigeria, periodically or parts or numbers but does not include any newspaper published by or under the authority of the government. Hynds (1972) cited in Esimokhai (2017) on his part describes newspaper from functional perspective thus:

“Newspaper stimulates, motivates, inspires, interpret, builds, preserves, excites, satisfies, and sometimes disappoints. It archives yesterday, chronicles today and periscopes the possibility of a brighter tomorrow”.

However, Newspaper, whether online or offline can be regarded as a journal that report unfolding events and issues for public consumption. As purveyor of news and events, newspaper helps Nigerians to become aware of the ‘Ruga’ programme in its role as the information bank from which society draws rational and irrational decisions as well as the vanguard (promoter) and (tribune) defender of people’s interest.

### **Framing**

Framing is the way the mass media paint and colour news items to an acceptable level of constructing social reality; affecting the audience, readers with a view to adding value to information processing and use by the recipients. News framing therefore, thrive on existing technology, professional competence of journalists and pre-existing information knowledge of recipients in a society (Umuerrri, 2008). In other words, news framing is akin to second level agenda setting as the media goes beyond the agenda it has set to presenting the news in the manner it feel will benefit the reader or audience. The frame therefore, refers to the manner in which news story is presented, it is the news angle or the context for the story; and the way in which news events are reported can affect how they are received and understood by the audience.

According to Potter, (2012), Freyenberger, 2013) recipients of a news story tend to build their opinion based on how the story is framed. Therefore, the manner in which ‘Ruga’ programme was presented by the newspapers to readers eventually determine the rejection of the scheme by many Nigerians which made the Federal Government to suspend the programme.

### **The Concept of ‘Ruga’**

The name or acronym RUGA is steeped in controversy, while the Federal Government said the acronym means Rural Grazing Area, some opponents of the scheme refers to it as a Fulani word for human settlement. Whatever name it is called, the fact remains that the presidency claimed in a statement released on the implementation of the policy that it was introduced to curb open grazing of animals that continue to pose security threats to farmland and herders.

However, those opposed to the policy do not believe the government; as many of them including former president Olusegun Obasanjo see the policy as a “Fulanisation and Islamization” agenda which aimed at taking the land of the local communities where the settlements are to be established.

#### **National Security:**

National security is the concerted efforts to ensure the safety of the nation, while protecting her from internal and external forces that could ferment crisis, chaos and spell doom for it (Oyo 2013:11).

The Nigerian constitution in Section 33 – 46 expresses in details such rights that are important for the country to be secured. These include fundamental rights of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and the press, freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom from discrimination.

According to Sehgal (2010), three factors pre-dominate national security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are the economy, the demographic movement of people as well as the threats and attacks by extremists. It can be deduced from the foregoing that security was at the heart of the ‘Ruga’ settlement scheme as government seeks to put an end to the perennial conflict between herders and farmers. Similarly, those who are opposed to the scheme also anchored their opposition on the fact that the safety of locals where ‘Ruga’ settlement are to be established cannot be guaranteed as any unusual stray of Cattles into their farms could ignite trouble; in addition to the fact that land so acquired by government could be a source of trouble between the locals and ‘Ruga’ settlers.

### Newspapers and ‘Ruga’ Framing

The basic functions of a newspaper in every democratic society include keeping readers informed of current event, entertaining readers, informing authorities of the need of the public, educating readers and helping readers live more comfortably among others. But beyond reporting issues surrounding the ‘Ruga’ settlement scheme, some Nigerian newspapers expand their education function through in-depth analysis which they presented inform of opinion of commentators, columnists and editorials. Hence, newspapers do not only set the agenda by updating readers, and accepting articles relating to ‘Ruga’ scheme but also through their gate keeping accept, and propagate those that fit into the frame they give to the scheme.

Inspite of the enormous benefits the Nigerian government believe ‘Ruga’ could bring to the rural economy, many Nigerian newspapers through their editorials, and published comments of ethno-religious and cultural groups and individuals opposed to the *Ruga* programme which are given much prominence by the media, took government to the cleaners, over the policy and rejected the scheme in all its entirety.

The Punch (July 2, 2019) in its editorial entitled: “**Herder’s terrorism: Explosive ‘Ruga’ Settlement Option**” typifies the frame of the newspapers that vehemently opposed the ‘Ruga’ programme. Beyond the headline which is indictive and ethically wrong, the first

paragraph in the said editorial already set the tone of the frame the newspaper gave to the scheme. The newspaper stated in the said paragraph that:

Resolving the nomadic herdsmen nuisance comes in many guises but nearly all the solutions offered so far by the federal government keep on provoking tensions. The current move called the 'Ruga' settlement option is not different.

The Punch even went ahead to champion the cause of ethnic nationalities in the said editorial as it reiterated their opposition thus:

It is therefore, not surprising that the 'Ruga' policy has been greeted with indignation and outright rejection by ethnic nationalities in the South – West, South – East, South – South and the North – Central zone.

The stand of the Punch on the *Ruga* policy was typical of most newspapers in the Southern part of Nigeria, who based on cursory observation, were vehemently against the *Ruga* programme. The question to ask by any fair-minded person at this juncture is whether the newspaper which is supposed to champion the cause of public good should take the same stand with ethnic nationalities whose goals are at cross purposes with the fairness doctrine of journalism and the social responsibility that goes with it, since the ethnic nationalities stand only for what benefit their respective ethnic groups or zone as the case may be and not the national interest.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The Framing Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory (SRT) underpins this study.

### **FRAMING THEORY**

Goffman's (1974) framing theory is one of the theories adopted for this study. This theory suggests that there are inherent meanings in news messages. The frame refers to the manner in which news story is presented; that is the news angle or the context of the story. The way in which news events are reported can affect the way they are understood and perceived by the audience.

According to Potter (2012, Freyenbergers, (2013), recipients of a news story tend to build their opinions based on how the story is framed. As a media effect theory, Hassan, Azmi and



Abubakar (2017) noted that framing theory describes the influence of news angles used by journalists on the audience's perceptions. Angles refer to the interpretative and ideological frameworks from which journalists report about an issue and the conceptualizations of news reports within a specific framework.

A newspaper may decide to report about a person in a negative way, but the outcomes are that, the community being exposed to only the negative aspect in such report, will have negative perceptions about such a person (Fourie, 2011). Put in the context of this study, the framing of the *Ruga* settlement scheme by newspapers, whether negative or positive determines how Nigerians interpret these frames based on their understanding and perceptions.

### **The Social Responsibility Theory (SRT)**

Social Responsibility Theory is premised on the notion that freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press which enjoys a privileged position under the government, is obliged to be responsible to the society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication. Thus, the theory advocates some obligations on the part of the media to society (Owens-Ibie, 1994).

The media nay newspapers have come under severe criticisms on the way and manner it published news in the public in time of conflict and socio – political tension, without regard to the security implications of such report.

McQuail (2010) summarises the assumptions of social responsibility theory as:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligation to society
- These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance;
- In accepting and applying these obligations, media would be self – regulating within the framework of law and established institutions;
- The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or give offence to minority groups;
- The media as a whole should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of new and to rights of reply
- Society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure a public good

- Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

As postulated by McQuail (2010), these obligations are mainly to be met by setting standards to inform truth, accuracy, objectivity and balanced events that have the potential to cause conflicts or crises such as the *Ruga* settlement scheme. In other words, the media are expected to act responsibly in the best interest of the country in the reporting of issues surrounding the *Ruga* policy by being truthful, objective, fair and accurate in order to maintain societal stability and peace and national security as anything short of that will not augur well for harmonious coexistence among the diverse people in Nigeria.

## Method

The researcher employed the documentary methods of research in analyzing newspaper framing of the *Ruga* Settlement Policy of the Federal Government. The political space which was charged and heated in the build up to, and after the 2019 general elections when this policy came into public domain, and became topical was keenly observed. Extensive newspaper monitoring was done over a period of seven months (Jan – July, 2019) that is in pre and post election time when the policy was eventually suspended due to mounting pressure and opposition from some individuals, ethnic nationalities and some religious groups. An internet – based search for newspaper articles on *Ruga* settlement policy was conducted in order to locate the newspaper articles relating to the *Ruga* policy in some Nigerian newspapers; made up of *The Punch*, *Pulse Nigeria*, *The Tribune*, *PM News*, *This Day* and *Press Reader*. The internet search was done using websites of the newspapers. All the newspaper articles identified using this method were included in the study.

The researcher selected articles that directly relates to *Ruga*. Each article in the original sample was read for relevance. Only straight news and editorials were chosen as units of analysis. The study adopted and modified the five news frames used in Semetco and Valkenburg (2000, p. 106) namely:

1. Conflict frame; which emphasizes conflict among and between individuals, groups or parties as a means of capturing audience's interest.
2. Consequence frame, which reports an event or issue in terms of the consequences on individuals, groups or parties
3. Responsibility frame, which presents an event or issue in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either an individual, group or party;
4. Morality frame, which puts an event or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions; and
5. Human interest frame, which brings an emotional angle to the presentation of an event or issue it refers to in an effort to personalize and exaggerate the story in order to capture and retain audience's interest.

## ANALYSIS OF STRAIGHT NEWS FROM SELECTED DAILIES

### 1.7 things you should know about Buhari's controversial 'Ruga' settlement

The above headline was published by *Pulse Nigeria* on January 1, 2019

News Framing	Newspaper
Responsibility	7 things you should know about Buhari's controversial <i>Ruga</i> settlement

Self compiled

### 2. Herder's terrorism: Explosive *Ruga* Settlement Option

The above headline was captured in the *Punch* Editorial of July 2, 2019

News Frame	Newspaper
Responsibility	Herder's terrorism: Exposure <i>Ruga</i> Settlement Option

Self compiled

### 3. Why Buhari suspended *Ruga* settlement

The above headline was published in the *P.M. News*, Friday July 5, 2019

Framing

News frame	Newspapers
Consequence	Why Buhari suspended <i>Ruga</i> settlement

Self compiled

#### 1. The problem with *Ruga* Settlement

The above statement was made by Olusegun Adeniyi and captured in *This Day Newspaper* of July 4, 2019.

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Consequence	The problem with <i>Ruga</i> settlement

#### 1. Federal Government is "bent" on making *Ruga* a Success

The above statement was made by Samson Toromade and captured in *Pulse Nigeria*, January 1, 2019

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
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Responsibility	Federal Government is “bent” on making <i>Ruga</i> a success
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**Self compiled**

**2. *Ruga* is a Fulani word for (human) settlement, yet the same word is being bandied about as an acronym for Rural Grazing Area (RUGA)**

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Conflict	<i>Ohanaeze</i> is appealing to the Federal Government to allow peace to reign in Nigeria. Buhari should pursue the global best practices in his quest to plant his kinsmen in all parts of Nigeria

**Self compiled**

**7. There is no land for the established of *Ruga* settlements in Igbo land.**

The above statement was made by the South-East governors forum and captured in *PM News*, July 5, 2019

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Human interest	There is no land for the establishment of <b><i>Ruga</i></b> settlements in Igbo land

**Self compiled**

8. *Ohanaeze* is appealing to the Federal Government to allow peace to reign in Nigeria. Buhari should pursue the global best practices in his quest to plant his kinsmen in all parts of Nigeria. The above statement was made by Chief Nnia Nwodo, President, *Ohanaeze Ndigbo* and captured in *Vanguard Newspaper*, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Conflict	<i>Ohanaeze</i> is appealing to the Federal Government to allow peace to reign in Nigeria. Buhari should pursue the global best practices in his quest to plant his kinsmen in all parts of Nigeria.

**Self compiled**

9. It is not right for anyone to attribute any decision taken by President Muhammadu Buhari to solve the problem as a decision to favour Fulani people because he is Fulani himself. I don't believe in opposing people for opposition sake.

The statement was made by Tanko Yakasai and captured in *Press Reader.com*, 21 June, 2019.

**Framing**

News Frame	Newspaper
Human Interest	It is not right for anyone to attribute any decision taken by President Muhammadu Buhari to solve the problem as a decision to favour Fulani people because he is Fulani himself. I don't believe in opposition for opposition sake

**Self compiled**

10. People are saying that Buhari, being a Fulani man, wants to seize their land for the Fulani but Obudu Cattle Ranch was not built by Fulani.

The above statement was made by Kabir Ibrahim, National President, All Farmers Association of Nigeria and published in *The Punch*, July 7, 2019.

News Frame	Newspaper
Human interest	People are saying that Buhari, being a Fulani man, wants to seize their land for the Fulani but Obudu Cattle Ranch was not build by Fulani

**Self compiled**

11. If you look at it critically, there is nothing with the *Ruga* settlement plan but the truth is that it must be done in a way that is fair enough to most if not all Nigerians.

The above statement was made by Dr. Sam Nzekwe, former president of Association of National Accountants of Nigeria and captured in *The Punch*.

News Frame	Newspaper
Morality	If you look at it critically there is nothing wrong with the <i>Ruga</i> settlement plan but the truth is that it must be done in a way that is fair enough to most if not all Nigerians.

**Self compiled**

12. The Federal Government, by this *Ruga* plan is stating that violence pays, so, when people commit murder, arson and undue violence, they are compensated with people's land instead of being punished for their offence, this is a very dangerous precedent.

The above statement was made by Eze Onyekpere, Lead Director, Centre for Social Justice and captured in The Punch.

#### Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Conflict	The Federal Government by this <i>Ruga</i> plan is stating that violence pays, so, when people commit murder, arson and undue violence, they are compensated with people's land instead of being punished for their offence, this is a very dangerous precedent

#### Self compiled

13. We are in democracy and this is not the time of military rule. We already have enough conflicts at hand and we cannot afford to add *Ruga* to them.

The above statement was made by Professor Lai Olurode, a former National Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission captured in *This Day*

News Frame	Newspaper
Conflict	We are in democracy and this is not the time of military rule. We already have enough conflicts at hand and we cannot afford to add <i>Ruga</i> to them.

#### Self compiled

14. I think that there is going to be trouble in this country if this *Ruga* thing is not handled imaginatively and with humanity as priority. Any country where Cattle take priority over human life is definitely at an elementary stage.

The above statement was made by Noble Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka and captured in the *Sunday Punch* of July 7, 2019.

News Frame	Newspaper
Consequence	I think that there is going to be trouble in this country if this <i>Ruga</i> thing is not handled imaginatively and with humanity as priority. Any country where Cattle take priority over human life is definitely at an elementary stage.

**Self compiled**

15. A research by *Reuters* in 2000 found that between 1975 and 2013, the North-Central states lost 80,000 square kilometers of land previously available to herders in that zone whereas grazing land was 61 percent of all land in use, only 14 percent was farm land.

The above statement was captured in *The Punch* Editorial of July 2, 2019.

News Frame	Newspaper
Consequence	A research by Reuters in 2000 found that between 1975 and 2013, the North-Central states lost 80,000 square kilometers of land previously available to herders. In that zone, whereas grazing land was 61 percent of all land in use, only 14 percent was farm land.

**Self compiled**

16. Benue state has no land for either *Ruga*, open grazing or grazing routes; instead, only land for the establishment of ranches.

The above statement was made by the Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom and captured in *The Punch* of July 2, 2019.

**Framing**

News Frame	Newspaper
Conflict	Benue state has no land for either <i>Ruga</i> , open grazing or grazing routes; instead, only land for the establishment of ranches

**Self compiled**

17. The Federal Government simply wants to carve out land from every community to give to the Fulani. For us in the South-West, no inch of Yoruba land would be given for *Ruga* because it is a plan to colonize the country. It is like what the British did.



The above statement was made by *Afenifere*, the Yoruba socio – cultural organisation and captured in *The Nation Newspaper* of 17/06/2019.

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Conflict	The Federal Government simply wants to carve out land from every community to give to the Fulani. For us in the South-West, no inch of Yoruba land would be given for <i>Ruga</i> because it is a plan to colonize the country. It is like what the British did

**Self compiled**

18. Federal Government's rabid interest in the project amid its unpopularity was suggestive of a mission to settle criminal terrorist herdsmen.

The above statement was made by the *Southern and Middle belt Forum* and captured in *The Punch Newspaper* July 2, 2019.

Framing

News Frame	Newspaper
Human Interest	Federal Government's rabid interest in the project and its unpopularity was suggestive of a mission to settle criminal terrorist herdsmen

**Self compiled**

## DISCUSSION

This study provides evidences on how the media, particularly, newspapers, frame the *Ruga* Policy of the Federal Government. According to the findings, the article published in the newspapers were largely conflict and human interest in frames. In other words, the study showed that most of the sampled dailies framed their reports in a manner that incites one group against the other. However, in some cases, the dailies also relied on playing up human interest in portraying discrimination or inciting comments against persons, groups or the Federal Government. This is in tandem with Fourie (2011) who noted that a newspaper may decide to report about a person in a negative way, but the outcomes are that, the community being exposed to only negative aspect in such report, will have negative perceptions about such a person; and by extension, in the context of this study, *Ruga* Settlement Policy and or the Federal Government.

In other words, framing theory suggests that the manner in which news stories are reported by the media might influence the audience's understanding of the issues; as readers might develop their attitude based on the manner in which the news story is framed, in addition to their own individual sentiment. This recourse of readers on issues seems to be the case with *Ruga*, as those opposed to the policy especially the ethnic- nationalities were actually doing so based on the manner on which news on the *Ruga* scheme was presented by the media.

This study has ample evidence to show that the newspapers have not acted responsibly in reporting the *Ruga* scheme as many of them through the set of individuals and groups they deliberately select and interviewed as well as those they neglected, including the brushing aside of the benefits which the Federal Government had canvassed and seek support and enlightenment for; showed lack of fairness, balance and objectivity which are part of the obligations to be met by the media through adherence to professional ethics.

Thus, the newspapers decided to take active part in the *Ruga* settlement controversy, albeit in negative manner even though they are equally in a position to mediate in a way that all stakeholders arrive at a beneficial and amicable resolution. This is in line with Puddephat (2000) assertion that the “media” either takes an active part in a conflict, and has responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence.

Typical of the report on *Ruga* that negates the tenets of social responsibility expected of the media was the *Punch* (2019) headline with the caption “Herder’s terrorism: Explosive ‘Ruga’ Settlement option”. To all intent and purpose, such headline which is a vitriolic attack on the policy that emits ethnic hatred shouldn’t have come from a local newspaper let alone, a newspaper that pride itself as a national newspaper with the largest circulation. A flip through the said *The Punch* editorial which carried the above headline revealed excessive outbursts and attack, primed to fit into the age-long ethno-religious divide that has kept the country apart and in-secured. It was simply an irresponsible attempt at finding solution to the raging controversy that has wider security implications for the country if not properly handled.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As the fourth estate of the realm, the media is shouldered with the core functions of information dissemination, education and entertainment which are important for societal progress, development, peace and stability as well as harmonious co-existence among the people especially in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society such as Nigeria.

Hence, wrong framing and bias reporting of news event could spell doom to peace and stability of the country as such practice could pitch individuals and groups against themselves on one hand, and against the Federal Government on the other hand. The newspaper reports on *Ruga* settlement as evidenced by the current study was framed and handled unethically which if not for its suspension by the Federal Government could have caused ethnic and religious crises.

The Federal Government also gave room for the bad press that the *Ruga* policy suffers because it allow the programme to be shrouded in secrecy, refusal to seek the input of stakeholders and insufficient explanation and communication of the *Ruga* Policy to Nigerians.

The foregoing therefore implies that the media and government were at fault in the controversy surrounding the *Ruga* policy. Therefore, the media should at all times exercise caution in framing their reports on any public policy such as the *Ruga* settlement scheme in order not to ruffle the feathers of unity, peace and security of Nigerai.

The media should also imbibe the virtue of the social responsibility they owe to the society by reporting issues truthfully, objectively; and with fairness and balance. Similarly, government should always engage and discuss policy issues with relevant stakeholders before setting out to implement such policy in order to avoid unnecessary controversy and diatribes which if not managed well could snowball into crises of unimaginable dimension.

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