
Reporting of Rural Grazing Area Initiative in Selected Daily Newspapers in Nigeria <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jae.v24i4.9>

Ogunlade Israel

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Ilorin, PMB 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

israelogunlade@gmail.com

08035617692

Olabanji Oluwafemi Peter

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Ilorin, PMB 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

folabanji21@yahoo.com

08032406059

Adebisi Faridat Adetola

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Ilorin, PMB 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

adebisifaridat@gmail.com

08147643724

Omotesho Kemi Funmilayo

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Ilorin, PMB 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

kfomotesho@gmail.com

08034739568

Olabode Deborah Adedoyin

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Ilorin, PMB 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

olabodedeb@gmail.com

07031558337

Abstract

This study assessed how the Rural Grazing Area initiatives (RUGA) were reported in selected Nigerian newspapers, by assessing: the prominence given to RUGA news with reference to other subject matters, the frequency of reportage, and news report format. A systematic quantitative content analysis was used in collecting, analysing as well as interpreting the data for the study. A total of 276 daily publications of three newspapers were analysed from a pool of sample drawn through purposive sampling technique from issues of the newspapers published within three months' period of July to September, 2019. The data from these newspapers were analysed using percentages. Findings showed that RUGA issues were not given adequate prominence in the three newspapers, and the newspapers performed more of an informative role in the reportage rather than giving a journalistic analysis of the policy itself in form of feature or editorial. News writers should be more analytic in

their style of reporting developmental initiatives so as to help people understand the purpose and essence of such initiative. Also, the Nigerian newspapers, should scale-up agricultural content in their publications as a way of consolidating agricultural consciousness in Nigerians.

Keywords: Daily newspapers, reporting, rural grazing, initiative

Introduction

Nigeria's socio-political and economic landscape has been threatened by various forms of religious and ethnic violence. These have been severely heightened by the recent farmer-herder's violence spreading across the country, and resulting in widespread frustration and deep sense of insecurity to life and properties (Mohammed & Baba, 2018). Neither the urban nor rural areas are immune to these attacks which, in recent times, have plagued Nigeria and currently threaten to tear communities and ethnic groups apart. The state of insecurity in Nigeria today is such that it is not an overstatement to conclude that the Nigerian nation is under heavy siege (Omede & Omede, 2015; Itabiyi, Kayode-Adededeji, Omole, & Ekanem, 2019). This situation has become a matter of grave concern to government, security agencies and the Nigerian citizenry at large.

Occasioned by this state of affairs, the government of Nigeria, in bid to find a lasting solution to the bloodsheds, initiated the idea of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) as a way of responding to farmer-herder's crisis. Prevention and responds to crises are strategic measures in crisis management, with the purpose of removing risk and uncertainty (Civelek, Çemberci, & Eralp, 2016 and Olabanji & Olabanji, 2020). According to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Reports (FMARD, 2019), the implementation of RUGA settlements is to curb open grazing of animals that continue to pose security threats to farmers and herders. The crises, most notably over land access and resources, has led to the death of thousands in the past few years, with herders usually blamed for majority of the attacks. The RUGA settlement was projected at housing herders and animal farmers. The settlement will provide water and pasture for animals, schools for children, security, hospitals, road networks, vet clinics, markets, agro-rangers, among other amenities (FMARD, 2019). It is believed that RUGA settlements will put an end to the nomadic lifestyle of herdsmen.

Despite the great benefits posed by the initiative, its declaration by the federal government has been met with considerable outrage from Nigerians. This may be due to the fact that Nigerians are not well informed on the intended benefits that the initiative could offer. The responsibility of creating public awareness is exclusively vested on the press. The press is able to influence the news source by providing accurate and well-timed information and is expected to transmit the reality and uncover the underlying fact of things (Oriola and Ogbemi, 2016).

The media has great influence, since they can control how issues are perceived. They are mediators, the images, visuals, tone of articles they project can affect the public attitude and perception of government's plans and decisions (Cushion, Kilby, & Thomas, 2016). Media representation of issues, constitute how well it will be

received by the public. Kadiri, Muhammed, Raji, and Sulaiman (2015) and Wilson and Umar (2019) highlights common practices by the media which contributes negatively to public issues. They include, shallow and one-sided coverage of events, fake news, coverage of stereotype among category of people, sentimental coverage of stories based on journalist's culture, frequent use of sentimental headlines to boost sales and inflammatory statements against people, inability to support facts and so on.

The outright rejection of the RUGA initiative by majority of the Nigerian populace suggest a need to investigate the manner of reportage of the initiative in the nation's news media. Hence, this study primarily aimed at content analysis of Rural Grazing Area Initiative in selected daily newspapers in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- i. ascertain the frequency of daily newspapers reportage of RUGA news;
- ii. determine the format used by the newspapers in coverage of RUGA news;
- iii. identify the direction of reportage of RUGA news;
- iv. assess the level of prominence given to RUGA news by the selected newspapers and
- v. identify the major sources of RUGA news in the selected newspapers.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Nigeria on Latitude 9° 04' 39.90" N and Longitude: 8° 40' 38.84" E. The country has an estimated population of about 200 million people (United Nations Population Division, 2019). The population for this study comprises all the daily newspapers in Nigeria. A systematic quantitative content analysis was used in collecting, and analysing data for the study. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select the contents relevant to this study. In the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of three newspapers; the Punch, Guardian and Daily Trust. These daily newspapers have been chosen for analyses based on ratings and national coverage. In the second stage, three months were purposively selected (July to September, 2019) since this was the period the RUGA news was mostly circulated. In the third stage, all editions of the three newspapers published daily within the three months were purposively selected. This makes a total of two hundred and seventy-six (276) daily editions comprising ninety-two (92) editions of The Punch, The Guardian and Daily Trust newspapers each. Two hundred and nineteen of the editions were eventually used for the study. A coding sheet was developed to investigate frequency and prominence of reports regarding RUGA stories. The coding sheets were used to assign codes to the variables being studied. Variables on direction of coverage measured whether the reports were critical, passive or supportive. Sources of the news determines the origin of the news contents. Frequency of report was used to indicate the number of times the issue appeared in the publication within the study period. Nature of Coverage revealed the formats the newspapers adopted in reporting the stories (weather as news reports, opinion articles, commentary, interview, features, columns, editorials, special reports, letters to the editor and interview). Prominence of the report examined the placement of the news stories in various pages of the newspaper (front, back, middle or inside

pages). Percentages was used to arrange and represent the data. Cumulative percentages were obtained by dividing the frequencies of each of the monthly editions of the newspapers by the total frequency for the three months covered multiplied by 100 percent.

Results and Discussion

Frequency of Reportage of Rural Grazing Area Initiative

Table 1 shows that the number of reports on RUGA published by the Daily Trust was leading in July, accounting for 90.9% of the publications, the Guardian had more of the reports in August (16.7%) and September (2.8%). The frequency of coverage across the three dailies was highest in July (84.5%), in August it reduced to (13.7%) and lowest in September (1.8%). This implied that the frequency of publishing news relating to RUGA was diminishing as time progressed there by reducing the momentum of the initiative. According to Shahzalal and Hassan (2019), most development programmes needed to maintain some level of relevance all through their life span to remain important and worthy of consideration.

Table 1: Frequency of reportage of RUGA

Months	Punch	The Guardian	Daily Trust	Cumulative (%)
July	84.5%	80.9%	90.9%	84.5%
August	13.6%	16.7%	9.1%	13.7%
September	1.9%	2.8%	0%	1.8%

Source; Data Computation, 2020

Nature of Coverage of RUGA News

Table 2 shows that the three newspapers reported RUGA in form of a news report (70.3%), interview (6.8%), letter to editor (2.3%), feature (1.4%), editorial (1.4%), opinion (10.0%), column (6.4%), commentary (1.4%) and special reports (0%). This implied that most of the stories and discussions on RUGA were predominantly reported as news reports and never as special reports. The extremely high use of news stories by these newspapers showed that more attention was tilted towards the direction of top news sources such as the government and other elites' groups and known organizations, most of which were gotten via statements made by these sources. The newspapers performed more of an informative role by reporting RUGA news as they occurred rather than giving a journalistic analysis of the policy itself in form of feature or editorial which could have revealed some facts about the policy hence, helping people to understand the purpose and essence of the initiative. Vu, Jiang, Chacón, and Bobkowski (2018) reported that mass media do not supply just facts and data but provide detailed analysis on information already relayed.

Table 2: Nature of RUGA news coverage

Formats	Punch	The Guardian	Daily Trust	Cumulative (%)
News report	84.4%	55.6%	61.3%	70.3%
Interview	4.9%	9.7%	6.8%	6.8%
Letter to editor	-	5.5%	2.3%	2.3%
Feature	-	4.2%	-	1.4%
Editorial	-	2.8%	2.3%	1.4%
Opinion	5.8%	15.3%	11.4%	10.0%
Special report	-	-	-	-
Column	4.9%	5.5%	11.4%	6.4%
Commentary	-	1.4%	4.5%	1.4%

Source: Data Computation, 2020

Direction of Reporting RUGA News

Table 3 shows that, of all the reports on RUGA across the three newspapers, the reports that were prevalently not in support of the initiative were 44.3% while 22.4% were in support of the initiative and 33.3% were passive news which were neutral and were neither in support nor against the RUGA initiative. A higher percentage of RUGA stories on The Guardian were in the critical direction (50%) and so were the RUGA stories on The Punch (49.5%) while Daily Trust recorded the least in the critical direction with (22.7%). Conversely, most RUGA stories on Daily Trust were in support of the initiative (40.9%) while The Guardian reported the least (15.30%). The passive reports on RUGA shows Punch had 32(31.10%), Guardian (34.70%), and Daily Trust (36.40%).

The finding shows that the reports were more in the critical direction. Various views and statements were strongly made by government officials, sociocultural group and other citizens (through opinion articles and letters to editor). The news articles were observed to have kicked firmly against the policy. The Guardian editorial were not in support of the grazing policy and demanded that the government looked into the cries of the supposed oppressed society before taking the bold step of implementing the initiative. Furthermore, most opinion articles in the Guardian were against the implementation of the project. Meanwhile, the Daily Trust had more news articles in support of RUGA.

This implies that as much as most people were against the implementation of the policy, some demanded to have a greater and clearer understanding of the initiative. Unrestricted access to unbiased information is crucial for forming a well-balanced understanding of issues. According to Hamborg, Donnay and Gipp (2019), news media has increased the degree of self-determination in how people gather knowledge, shape their own views, and engage with topics of societal relevance.

<http://eoi.citefactor.org/10.11226/v24i4>

Table 3: Direction of RUGA news coverage

Direction	The Punch	The Guardian	Daily Trust	Cumulative (%)
Critical	49.5%	50.0%	22.0%	44.3%
Supportive	19.4%	15.3%	40.9%	22.4%
Passive	31.1%	34.7%	36.4%	33.3%

Source: Data computation, 2020

Prominence of RUGA News Reportage

Table 4 shows that, of all the news articles published on RUGA across the three newspapers, only (13.2%) featured on the front pages and (4.6%) were on the back pages. The other majority featured on the inside pages (81.7%) showing that the newspapers accorded low prominence to RUGA stories. Only the Punch newspaper published one article on its centre page (0.5%). Independently, the Daily Trust gave the highest prominence to RUGA by reporting on its front and back pages (20.5%), followed closely by The Punch newspaper (18.5%) and the least was The Guardian (15.3%).

News stories on the front page and back page showed a high prominence, stories in the middle page showed medium prominence while stories on the inside pages show low prominence. However, in this study, the findings showed that most of the stories were reported on the inside page (81.7%) showing that the newspapers gave a relatively low prominence to RUGA stories while the front and back page featured just (17.8%) of the news stories. The middle page only had (0.5%) prominence and this is a result of one article that was reported on The Punch middle page. The Punch gave the highest prominence to RUGA by headlining 14 stories on the front and reporting 5 on the back pages making (48.7%) of all stories reported on front and back page across the three newspapers, while The Guardian gave less prominence by reporting (28.2%) of the news stories on front and back pages and Daily Trust gave the least prominence by reporting 23.1% across the three newspapers.

Taking these newspapers independently and comparing the prominence across their pages, Daily Trust is shown to have given more prominence (20.5%) followed by The Punch (18.5%) and the least was The Guardian (15.3%). The newspapers gave less prominence to RUGA and an overwhelming reportage of RUGA on the inside pages. This aligns with the findings of Ijeoma and Olajide (2018), that the Agricultural Transformation Agenda news was given low prominence despite its strategic importance and priority to government. Agenda setting theory explains further the relevance of news placement which is based on the premise that the media provides cues to the public which tells them where they should focus their attention. The prominence given to the reportage of news events by the media sets the agenda for development issues by assigning relative importance to the event.

<http://eoi.citefactor.org/10.11226/v24i4>

Table 4: Prominence of RUGA news reportage

Prominence	The Punch	The Guardian	Daily Trust	Cumulative (%)
Front page	13.6%	15.3%	9.1%	13.2%
Back page	4.9%	-	11.4%	4.6%
Center-spread	0.9%	-	-	0.5%
Inside page	80.6%	84.7%	79.5%	81.7%

Source: Data computation, 2020

Major Sources of RUGA News Reported in Selected Newspapers

Table 5 shows the major source actors used across the three newspapers were the sociocultural group (27.3%), government officials (24.7%), other individuals (20.1%), newspaper staff (9.1%), religious leaders (5.9%), presidency (3.7%), traditional leaders (3.7%), political parties (2.3%) and other sources (unclear) (2.7%). The Punch newspaper got news from sociocultural group sources the most (38.8%) followed by government officials' sources (33.0%) and from other individuals (9.7%). The Guardian utilized more of information from other individuals' sources (31.9%) followed by the sociocultural groups (18.1%) and then government officials' sources (11.1%). The Daily Trust utilized more of government officials' sources (27.3%) as well as from other individuals (25%) and newspaper staff (18.2%).

The data from the table illustrates that sociocultural groups sources (27.3%) were the major source actors that the Newspapers under review mostly used for RUGA news. The sociocultural groups ranged from the Coalition of Northern Youths (CNG) to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), the Ohaeze group, the South-East governors' forum, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), the Afenifere, South and the Middle Belt Leader's Forum (SMBLF), and the Yoruba Youth Forum. The dependence of the newspapers on sociocultural groups and government official tallies with the findings of Olomjobi and Ajilore (2017) that the press depends more on official sources such as government officials and organized groups.

Table 5: Major source actors of RUGA news

Source Actors	The Punch	The Guardian	Daily Trust	Cumulative (%)
Presidency	3.9%	1.4%	6.8%	3.7%
Farmer(association)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Herders(association)	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	0.5%
Government officials	33.0%	11.1%	27.3%	24.7%
Religious leaders	4.9%	9.7%	2.3%	5.9%
Traditional leaders	1.9%	6.9%	2.3%	3.7%
Sociocultural groups	38.8%	18.2%	15.9%	27.3%
Political parties	2.9%	2.8%	0%	2.3%
Newspaper staff	4.9%	9.7%	18.2%	9.1%
Other individuals	9.7%	31.9%	25.0%	20.1%
Not clear	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	2.7%

Source: Data computation, 2020

Conclusion and Recommendations

Not much attention was paid to RUGA matters by the Nigerian newspapers. The prominence and style of reportage of RUGA initiative could have influenced the reason why a great proportion of the masses failed to embrace the initiative. The direction of reportage by the newspapers as well as the lack of sufficient journalistic assessment of the initiative in form of editorials could have affected the public's perception and acceptance of the initiative. The Nigerian newspapers should expand their journalist abilities to be more investigative and thriving for facts rather than just relying on press release. This could enhance the style of reportage and hence boost the understanding of the public. Also, the volume of space allotted to developmental issues should be increased and treated as important.

References

- Civelek, M. E., Çemberci, M., & Eralp, N. E. (2016). The role of social media in crisis communication and crisis management. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 5(3):111–120.
- Cushion, S, Kilby, A, and Thomas, R. (2016). Newspapers, impartiality and television news: Intermedia agenda-setting during the 2015 UK general election campaign. *Journalism Studies*, 19(2): 162–181
- Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development (FMARD), (2019). Rural Grazing Area Initiative. Retrieved on 26th, April 2020 from <https://fmard.gov.ng/press-releases/>
- Hamborg, F., Donnay K and Gipp, B. (2019). Automated identification of media bias in news articles: an interdisciplinary literature review. *International Journal on Digital Libraries*, 20:391–415
- Ijeoma, M.C. and Olajide, B.R., (2018). Coverage and content analysis of agricultural transformation agenda news in selected newspapers in Nigeria. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 10(1): 1-7
- Itabiyi, O., Kayode-Adedeji, T., Omole, F., and Ekanem T. (2019). Newspaper Coverage of Religious Crises and Security in Nigeria (A Study of the Guardian and the Punch). Proceedings of INTCESS 2019- 6th International Conference on Education and Social Sciences, 4-6 February 2019- Dubai, U.A.E.
- Kadiri, K.K., Muhammed, Y.A., Raji, A., and Sulaiman A.L. (2015). Constraints and challenges of the media in the development of Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 17(1):44-60
- Mohammed A., and Baba, Y.T. (2018). Herdsmen-farmers' conflicts and rising security threats in Nigeria. *Studies in Politics and Society (Thematic Edition)*, 7(1): 1-20
- Olabanji O.P and Olabanji F.A (2020). Risk management attitude and practices of backyard poultry farmers in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. *Journal of Information, Education, Science and Technology (JIEST)*. 6 (1): 105-110.
- Olomjobi O. and Ajilore K. (2017). Press coverage of herders-farmers conflict in selected Nigerian newspapers. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 10(1): 38-51
- Omede, J., and Omede A.A. (2015). Terrorism and insecurity in Nigeria: moral, values and religious education as panaceas. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(11): 120-126
- Oriola M.O and Ogbemi O.B. (2016). News analysis as a media content for public opinion formation and moulding. *Benin Mediacom Journal*, 10:77-90
- Shahzalal, M. D., and Hassan, A. (2019). Communicating sustainability: using community media to influence rural people's intention to adopt sustainable behaviour. *Sustainability*, 11(3), 812

Creative Commons User License: CC BY-NC-ND
Abstracted by: EBSCOhost, Electronic Journals Service (EJS),
Google Scholar, Journal Seek, Scientific Commons,
Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), CABI and Scopus

<http://eoi.citefactor.org/10.11226/v24i4>

Journal of Agricultural Extension

Vol. 24 (4) October, 2020

ISSN(e): 24086851; ISSN(Print); 1119944X

<http://journal.aesonnigeria.org>

<http://www.ajol.info/index.php/jae>

Email: editorinchief@aesonnigeria.org

United Nations Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision.

Retrieved on 26th, September 2020 from

<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Nigeria&d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a12%3bcrlD%3a5>

66

Vu, H.T., Jiang, L., Chacón, L.M.C., Riedl, M.J., Tran, D.V., and Bobkowski P.S. (2018). What influences media effects on public perception? A cross-national study of comparative agenda setting. *International Communication Gazette*, 81(6): 580-601

Wilson F, and Umar M.A. (2019). The effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of freedom of expression. *Global Media Journal*, 17(1):32-38.