Assessment of Development Communication Strategies Used in Implementing Rural Grazing Area Policy

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ABSTRACT

The significance of an effective development communication strategy is fundamentally central to the success of any development endeavour. This study is an assessment of the communication strategies used for Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) policy implementation in Nigeria with particular reference to the Domalocal government area of Nasarawa State. The paper adopted a theoretical framework that is hinged on participatory theory, theory of charismatic leader and empowerment theory. A thorough review of relevant literature, alongside an empirical analysis of data collected from a survey sample of 100 respondents in Doma, reveals significant insights into the challenges faced during the policy's rollout. Key findings highlight that the absence of prior consultation with stakeholders and a lack of clear policy understanding among the local population were critical factors contributing to the policy's failure. The study concludes with practical recommendations for improving development communication strategies, emphasising the need for inclusive stakeholder engagement, transparent information dissemination, and empowerment-focused communication to enhance the effectiveness of future policy implementations.

KEYWORDS: Rural Grazing Area, Development Communication, Agriculture, Policy, Implementation

I. INTRODUCTION

Public understanding and support towards government policy is fundamental for its effective implementation, irrespective of the sector. To encourage policy understanding and acceptance, deploying the right communication strategy is regarded as a sure means of enabling relevant stakeholders to identify, learn, and decipher policies. It is in the light of the foregoing, that this paper deems it important to examine the communication strategy used in implementing the now-suspended Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) policy, especially in the wake of incessant herder/farmer crises in different parts of Nigeria. RUGA is an acronym for the Rural Grazing Area policy and a word translated to mean 'cow settlement' in Hausa and Fulani (Bankole 2019, Toromade 2019). Introduced by the Muhammad Buhari administration, the policy was created with the aim of resolving conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers by providing settlement areas for herders and their cattle in each state of the federation. These reserved grazing areas will encompass pasture, water, schools, health facilities, road networks, security, and markets as well as processing companies for refined cattle by-products (Bankole, 2019). While this policy might be considered a forward-thinking blueprint for agricultural development, the massive apprehension and opposition put up by different socio-cultural groups in the country not only led to the suspension of the policy but earned it the tag of one of the most controversial policies introduced by the presidency.

According to Agbakwuru&Awujo (2020), the objections to the policy were anchored on suspicions and negative perceptions of the motive of the government in coming up with the RUGA policy; thus, development communication strategies are fundamental to the success of public policy execution. Doma local government area of Nasarawa state is one of many local communities affected by herder/farmer crises, it has led to the destruction of lives and properties generated from existing data on the RUGA policy, as well as a somewhat qualitative survey consisting of 100 people from Doma local government area of Nasarawa state, a community that has experienced herder/farmer conflict . The theoretical and

conceptual analysis will be harnessed for insightful presentation and interpretation of the research findings. The paper will conclude with practical recommendations for future implementation .

Herder/farmer conflict in Nigeria emanates from a struggle for limited scarce resources, such as farmlands, grasslands and water spots between farmers and herdsmen- who were mainly Fulani (Ofem& Inyang, 2014). These conflicts have existed for decades, resulting in persistent violence that has claimed thousands of lives. Contrary to the present narrative, it is worthy to note that in the past, rural farmers and herders had a pleasant and stable relationship that allowed them to work side by side for decades. In fact, the Fulani herder's pastoral activities entailed the movement of his cattle to graze on farmlands, where the owners would also in turn need dairy products for their day-to-day consumption and manure to fertilise their fields. (Shettima and Tar, 2008). Environmental degradation, destruction of farm produce as a result of grazing, cow rustlings by host communities, property rights, population surge and globalisation, are major contributing factors to the issue, specifically the significant increase in the demand for land by both parties, coupled with a low productivity has led to invasion of crops by Fulani herders and their cattle; This of course is perceived by farmers as a direct incursion on their livelihood, degenerating to destruction of lives and properties. Aluko (2017), stated that the herders/farmers conflict in north-central Nigeria has displaced more than more than 100,000 people in Benue and Nasarawa states.

 While the above submissions constitute the reality of the clashes, it is impossible to disregard the role of ethnic, political and religious complexities when discoursing the increasing spate of farmers and herders conflict in Nigeria (Moritz, 2010). Attempts to proffer solutions met stiff resistance, posing a challenge to the execution of the RUGA settlement policy. The outrage and spiral reaction that ensued as a result of the policy did more harm than good, as conversation pervading public platforms encouraged ethnic and religious tensions. Conversely, the Middle Belt Forum- which Nasarawa state is part of - expressed its fears and apprehension by opposing the policy, stating that it was a scheme that would allow criminal Fulani from within and neighbouring countries to settle in their communities in order to change the demography for political, social and economic advantage, in pursuit of the fulanisation agenda of the federal government (Adetayo et al, 2019).

Other socio-cultural organisations such as OhanezeNdi Igbo, Afenifere of the Yorubas, as well as Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), also rejected the policy on similar grounds.
Suffice it to say, the Rural Settlement Area policy was formulated amidst perceived ethnic prejudice, and the fact that President Buhari is Fulani fuelling the narrative even further.
Consequently, the government suspended the programme stating that the suspension is to enable the "Ministry of Agriculture, state governments and other stakeholders to review it, taking into consideration the concerns of Nigerians" (Vanguard, 2019). Sadly, two years later, the conflicts have metamorphosed to being a top pressing security issue in Nigeria, posing a threat to national security, unity and development. As the Nation searches for sustainable solutions, it is important to draw lessons from past failures.

II. Conceptual Analysis
Understanding the concept of development communication is central to the objective of this research. Development communication involves the strategic use of communication for the mitigation of social problems in advancing societies(Wilkins, 1996). Wilkins stated that the design and implementation of communication campaigns is a key process in development communication. A development communication campaign is usually an organised program intentionally designed to address a social objective. The United Nations (UN) gives a very broad definition of communication for development, saying that it is a "process that allows communities to speak out, express their aspirations and concerns, and participate in the decisions that relate to their development"(2011).
Strategic communication campaigns may address problems located on a variety of conceptual levels, ranging from global and national macro-structural concerns to more community and individual-level issues. The factual and impartial communication of information "about government policies activities and services is critical to the democratic process', providing unblemished, honest and accurate information to the citizens is one of the most important responsibilities of government(Great Britain Parliament: House of Lords, 2009). Government communication involves providing or deliberately withholding information or knowledge-based resources, from a policy target group to influence and direct their attitudes and actions in regard to the policy (Howlett, 2009). In relation to policy implementation, two types of

government communication activities are prominent; one focuses on communication activities before policy implementation, and the other deals with government communication activities that take place after implementation(Mu et al., 2018).

The policy-making process consists basically of major four stages which include identifying the problem, formulating policy, implementing the solutions and managing and controlling. Communication plays a key role in each of the four stages. Communication tactics for the policy formulation and implementation stages typically entail researching and incorporating the practical situations of the target group into designing the policy. The communication at this stage also includes providing adequate and useful information, as well as assistance to relevant stakeholders for easy understanding of the policy before implementation. Collecting feedback post-implementation allows for policy performance evaluation, and continues sensitization for policy learning and adaptation (Central Information and Public Relations Department Press and Public Information Division, 1997).

Based on the aforementioned, it is apparent that stakeholder engagement is at the core of government communication. Government communication about prospective policies as propounded by Gelders et al (2007) should be seen as a part of the democratic process, where the government learns about citizens' opinions and needs regarding a particular issue. Freeman and Reed (1983) defined the term "stakeholder" to refer to "any identifiable group or individual who can affect the achievement of an organisation who is affected by the achievement of an organisation's objectives". In a policy context where several groups of stakeholders are involved in the policy process, different stakeholders can have different interests, hence engagement strategies should be curated accordingly. In order to meet up with differing needs in interest, stakeholder mapping should be one of the cornerstones of any communication strategy for development. Stakeholder mapping is a process that consists of research, debate, and discussion that takes note of multiple perspectives to determine a key list of stakeholders. Specifically, stakeholder mapping aims at identifying stakeholders that need to be engaged in order to achieve the highest impact.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Participatory theory is considered key to the understanding of this study.

Participatory communication is a development communication theory that necessitates the use of communication practices that involve people in the decision-making process of the development of their community (Mody, 1991). Participatory communication is an approach based on dialogue, information, perception and opinion sharing, among various stakeholders. It is beyond the exchange of information and experiences as it also involves exploration and generation of new knowledge intended to address situations that need to be improved. Participatory communication is mainly associated with community-driven development, where individuals are encouraged to be active parts of the development programmes and processes by contributing ideas, taking initiative and articulating their needs and problems whilst asserting their autonomy (Baofo, 2006). While participatory communication has been said to be the "go-to" approach in today's world, this is not the reality in practice, as one of the chief criticisms of participation is that it is time-consuming and difficult to implement on a practical level (White,1994), this especially because of the complexities and multiplicities of interests.

Nevertheless, Weber's theory of charismatic leadership holds that charismatic leaders can influence a group to accept change for the good of the community. In his discourse on economy and society, Weber (1947) emphasised on the rise of exceptional, radical leaders in times of crisis, which he believed could attract an effective community of supporters, largely indifferent towards rational economic affairs. Further developing Weber's articulation of thr theory of charismatic leadership, Robert House argued that based on certain behaviours exhibited by a person, members of the society attribute extraordinary leadership abilities to those leaders. Wolpe (1968) in his critique describes the theory as an inadequate measure of legitimate authority; Impliedly, charisma can be used for good or for bad, elected or not elected, however, based on its ability to generate emotional excitement and loyalty from followers,

this paper advances that some stakeholders are charismatic leaders and are key to participatory development communication.

Equally significant is the empowerment theory. Empowerment is a paradigm that connects individual strengths and competencies, the process and consequences of efforts used to influence decisions that affect people's lives, functioning, and the quality of community life. The theory presents a perspective that unequal distribution of, and access to, resources are responsible for many social problems. A definition by Rappaport (1984) outlines that empowerment can ensue at multiple levels of analysis, stating that "Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their lives". An empowerment approach to policy formulation and implementation strategy redefines the professional's relationship with the target population, as he becomes a collaborator and facilitator instead of an expert and counsellor. This position provides an opportunity for professionals to learn about the participants' worldviews, life struggles and culture. (Zimmerman, 2000)

IV. METHODOLOGY
TThis paper adopts both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This paper made Figure 1. shows that out of a 100 respondents, 49%- being the highest percentage of respondents- are between the ages of 25 to 35, followed by 21 percent of the population being 36 to 45. Respondents between the ages of 56 to 65

use of secondary data such as journal publications and impact reports. In order to have a well-rounded study, data was gathered from a survey by means of an online questionnaire distributed on strategic social media groups: the Doma development group on WHATSAPP and Facebook. According to Daymon and Holloway (2011), quantitative research could offer researchers more credible data, and relatively objective analysis, because this method relies on data analysis rather than the researcher's subjectivity. The population of the study consisted of 100 adult respondents from Doma composed of key stakeholders. Semi-structured questions were used in a way that ensured both quantitative and qualitative data were provided.

Presentation of Data and Analysis of Findings

what age range do you fall in?
100 responses
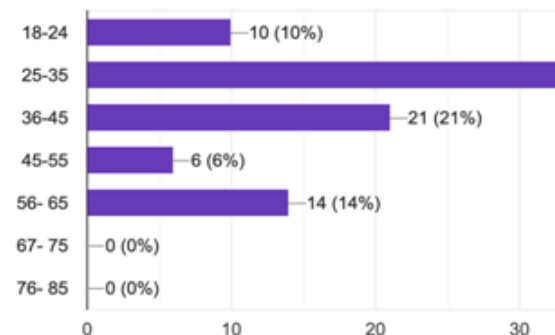
years constitute 14 percent of the responses, 10 responses are from the youngest demographic, while respondents from age 45 to 55 are responsible for 6 percent of the survey findings.
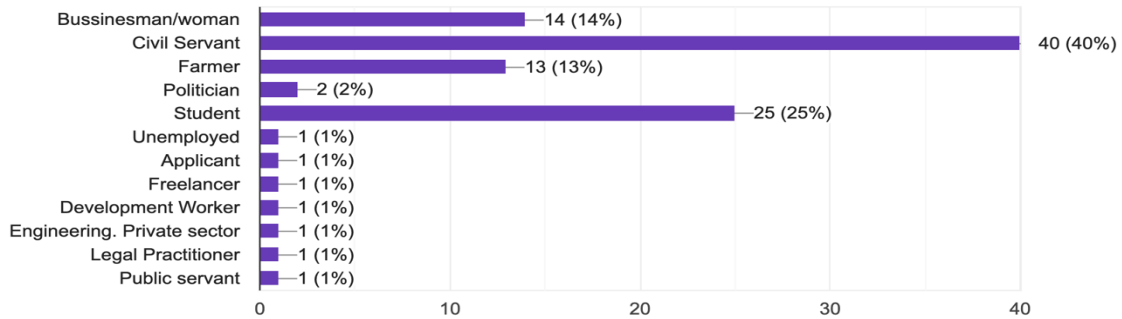
What do you do for a living?
100 responses

Figure 2. shows that 40 members of the population are government workers, 25 percent of indigenes that respondents are aged students, 14 are business men and women. Only 13% of respondents identify as farmers.
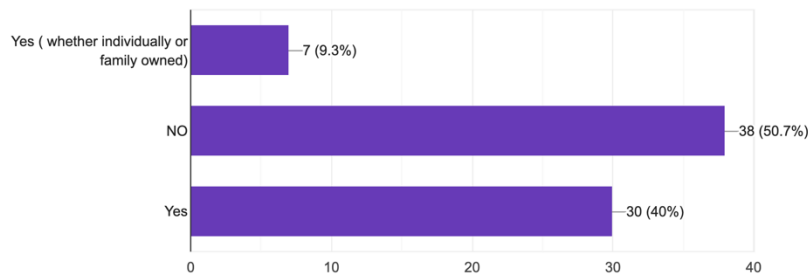
Do you have a Farm?
75 responses

Figure 3. shows that only 75 respondents stated whether they have a farm or not, thus 38 indigenes made up 50% of the respondents who don't have a farm while, 49.3% answered in the affirmative, and 9.3% 0f the 49% own a farm by virtue of their families.

In what way would you say the Herder/Farmer crises affected you ?
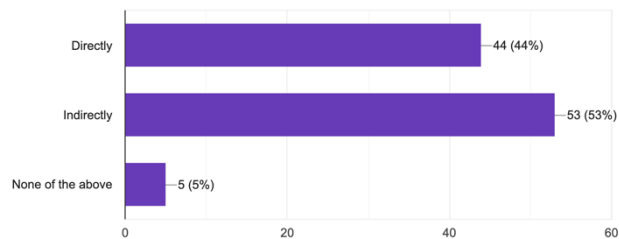100 responses

Figure 4. reveals that 97 respondents have been affected by the herders/farmers conflicts, 44% say they have been directly impacted and 53% indirectly impacted and 5% say they have never been impacted.
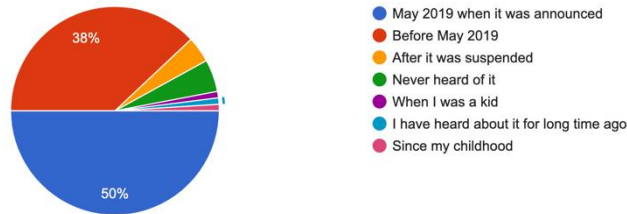
When did you first hear of RUGA?
100 responses

Figure 5 indicates that 50 respondents- representing 50%- first heard about RUGA when it was announced, 38% say they had knowledge of RUGA before the announcement, 4% learnt of it after the suspension and 5% until this survey, had never heard of it. 3 respondents, representing 3%, gave responses that suggest a literal knowledge of the word and not the policy.

This means the majority of respondents lack prior knowledge of the policy, its workings and possible benefits.

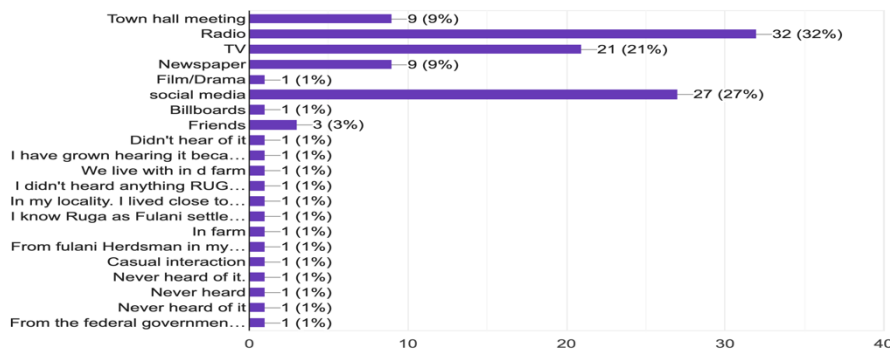If you have, how did you hear of RUGA?
100 responses

Figure 6. reveals that 32% of Doma indigenes in this survey learnt about RUGA policy from the radio, 27% from social media, 21% from TV, 9% from town hall meetings and Tv each, 3% from friends, additional responses here suggest unawareness and a literal understanding of the word "ruga". The findings indicate that, though a multiple-answer question, the majority of the respondents were never directly involved in any development communication initiative, thus, very little or ineffective community-based communication strategies were employed.

Do you know of any enlightenment or reconciliatory initiative to solve the Herders/Farmer crises in Doma ?
100 responses

- Yes
- No
- can't remember
- Option 3
- Herdrs should be given a particular gracing area
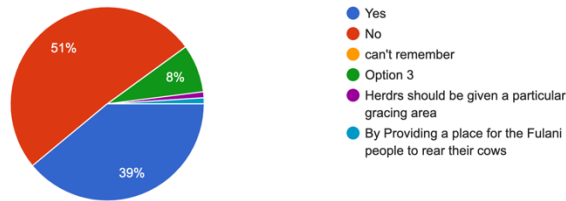- By Providing a place for the Fulani people to rear their cows

Figure 7. shows 51% of the survey population say they did not know of any enlightenment or reconciliatory initiatives, 39% say they did, while 8% didn't give a direct response, and 2% suggested solutions. This, again, emphasises the absence of stakeholder's involvement from the pre- implementation stage.

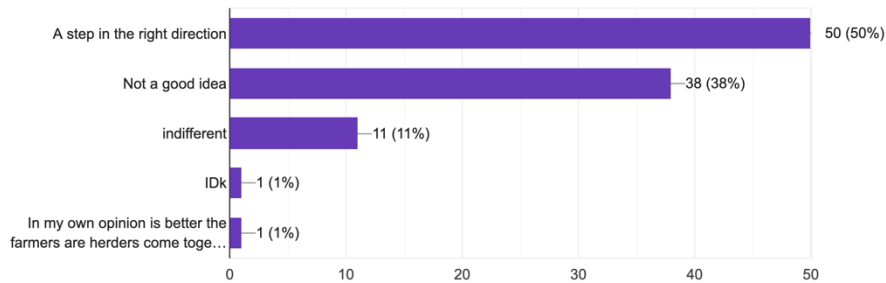What do you think about RUGA Policy?
100 responses

Figure 8. reveals that 50 respondents- representing 50% of the population- think the policy is a step in the right direction, 38% think otherwise, 11% are indifferent, 1 indigene expressed lack of knowledge to respond, and another left a suggestion. This implies that an average number of respondents are in support of the policy and those directly against it are less in proportion.

Based on your response to the last question, please briefly state why[*]

63 responses
It will help in peaceful coexistence.
When Ruga is created, it will help in curtailing and control unforeseen clashes which may lead to destruction of lives and properties. Of course, when it is created, it is another form of empowerment and development, because there will be lots of activities.
It causes problems for farmers.
It will put an end to farming cattle header clashes.
They are restricting food production and the lives of farmers in society.
As long as open grazing is allowed, the farmers /herders crisis will continue. RUGA solves this .
When given an opportunity to settle in a place, they tend to want to dominate it and call it their own and that might cause chaos.
Only if it will be properly managed from its setting and implementation.
It is biassed.
There will be consistent damage of crops by the

The table above shows qualitative reveals responses to a follow up question. The responses are both for and against.

which of the following would you consider a major impediment to the success of RUGA policy
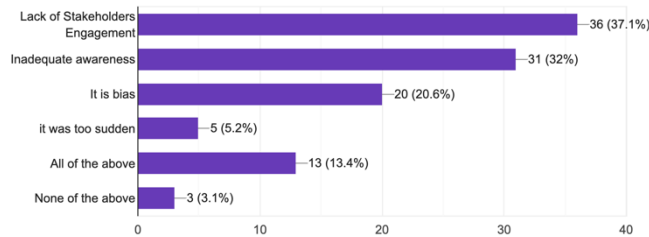97 responses

Figure 9. shows that only 97 indigenes responded to this question, 36 respondents representing 37.1%, believe stakeholder engagement was a major obstacle to the implementation of RUGA policy, 31 representing 32% considered inadequate awareness responsible of the implementation failure, 20.6% respondents believed biases as the cause, 5.2% thought it was too sudden, 13.4% say all of the options were responsible, and 3% believed none of the options were responsible. Impliedly, a majority of the respondents believe that with appropriate stakeholders engagement and awareness, RUGA policy could have been implemented.

Which of the following would you consider an ideal communication tool of gaining Doma indigenes ' acceptance of RUGA ?
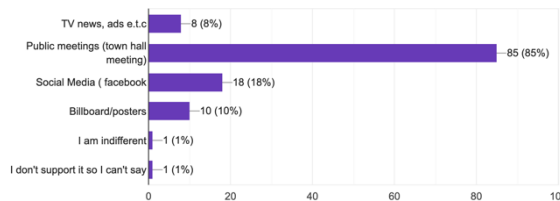100 responses

Figure 10. reveal that 85 indigenes representing 85% of the research demographic chose public meetings as the perfect communication channel for gaining Doma indigenes acceptance, 18% chose social media, 8% opted for TV, 10% settled on billboards, 1 respondent remained indifferent while another declined answering as he/she does not support the policy. The landslide choice of public meetings as an ideal communication tool highlights the desire of indigenes to have direct access to those in charge of the development process.

Any final thoughts ?
56 responses
In my own opinion, RUGA would be the solution because cows would no longer be moving around anyhow.
This should be realistic in such a way that political influence should be detached from it. Political manoeuvre has always engulfed programs or development like this.
Yes

The idea will affect the farmer
Public meeting (town hall meeting) not just in the town but it must be extended to villages across the town.
it's a good idea and will go a long way in curbing the problem of farmers/ herders crises, in that herders will start cultivating and making of hays to feed their cattle instead of eating people's farms, The method of acquiring land for their settlement should be determined by the land owners and not the government, the government should only act as adviser and should also make necessary laws to guide the activities of both the farmers and herders. Lastly security agents should be deployed to farms and the settlements to watch the activities of both the farmers and herders, doing this will however, go a long way to nib this problem in the bud.
56 respondents left final thoughts which proffered solutions, stated grievances and expectations, a strong sign that a majority of Doma indigenes are passionate about the issues that concerns the development of their community.

VI. DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of this study in relation to the demographic information is that the majority of the respondents are young, middle-aged, and are civil servants, while about 50% own a farm- though 9.3% out of the 50 being family-owned farms implies that farming is a foremost preoccupation in Doma, whether for business or private consumption. The fact that not all 95% of the respondents have been affected by the herder/farmer conflict directly and indirectly establishes a general sense of concern about the issue, confirming Carment's (1993) submission on the role of kinship in inter-ethnic conflicts especially in closed knitted communities that what affects one, affects another.

Major findings in relation to the research reveal that a greater percentage of the population only learnt about the RUGA settlement plan when it was announced mainly on radio and TV, a huge contradiction of the inclusive and dialogic principles of development communication (Mody, 1991). In the same vein, based on the responses, only 39 per cent of the respondents replied in the affirmative about knowledge of enlightenment or reconciliatory initiative, which was a key strategy according to the stipulations of participatory communication and empowerment theory. This not only provides necessary information for policy formulation but also empowers the people to feel responsible for the policy implementation. In a similar study, Mwamfupe (2015) found that the heavy-handed approaches used to resolve the conflicts are a major factor in the persistence of conflict between farmers and herders. While meetings at the Andoma palace with farmers and Fulani representatives were a reoccurring narrative, a majority of the respondents affirmed to not knowing about any enlightenment and reconciliatory initiatives in the survey, and a total of 67% of Doma indigenes considered the lack of stakeholder engagement and inadequate awareness as the main impediments to the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy. Interestingly, data shows that 50% of the population see the policy as a step in the right direction, with only 38 per cent directly saying it was a bad idea, thus, an indication that with the proper use of development communication strategy, more people could be won over.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research clearly demonstrate that the use of effective development communication strategies is critically lacking in the implementation of the RUGA policy. The study reveals that the absence of adequate stakeholder engagement during the formulation stage of the RUGA policy significantly contributed to its eventual suspension. This suspension, while indicative of the policy's shortcomings, presents a valuable opportunity for the government to reassess its approach and harness the immense potential of development communication to foster better policy outcomes. The research underscores the need for a more collective and inclusive approach to policy formulation and implementation, one that emphasises the importance of involving all relevant stakeholders from the outset. Such an approach is essential for achieving sustainable development, as it ensures that policies are not only well-informed but also widely accepted by those they are intended to benefit.

Furthermore, the study highlights that communication must not merely be an afterthought but rather a central component of any development initiative. It is imperative that communication strategies are designed to inform, engage, and mobilise target audiences about development initiatives, activities, and their potential impacts. By doing so, the government can enhance the transparency, effectiveness, and sustainability of its policies, ultimately leading to more successful and impactful development outcomes.

In conclusion, this study calls for a paradigm shift in how policies are communicated and implemented in Nigeria. To achieve meaningful and lasting development, there must be a deliberate effort to integrate development communication into every stage of the policy process, ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and that the intended beneficiaries are fully informed and engaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is against the foregoing disposition that the following recommendations are made:

1. Government policies must take into consideration the interests of all sides involved; therefore communication should be deployed to engage stakeholders, assess the situation, and create effective strategies for sustainable development. Charismatic leaders in the community should be identified and won over.
2. Communication strategies for delicate issues, such as the herder/farmer conflicts, should be persistent on participation and two-way

communication, as they are factors that are necessary for the avoidance of past mistakes.

3. The government must remain transparent and accessible to provide clarification at all times. Public meetings and one on one campaigns are advisable, especially at the beginning .

4. Development communication experts should be engaged to take the lead in developing communication strategies at all stages. It should be understood that this is more than passing information, it is about using communication to generate new knowledge and consensus in order to facilitate change.

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