

Climate-related armed conflict and communities' resistance to Rural Grazing Area settlement policy in Nigeria's Middlebelt

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Abstract

In Nigeria, resource contests have sparked unending ecological conflict. As a result, conflict resolution measures have been proposed to mitigate climate-related conflict. However, the acceptance of such policies is hampered by ethnic suspicions, communities' exclusion, religious sensitivities, and a lack of political will. State policies are frequently based on centralized resources, which is exacerbated by the complexities of power relations between central and sub-national authorities. Thus, this article examines communities' resistance to the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement policy in Nigeria's Middlebelt using Benue state as a reference point. The study employed a quantitative method using questionnaires. The study used a sample size of 385 questionnaires administered in Guma, Gwer-West, Gwer-East, Ukum, and Logo local governments in Benue state. Therefore, the article found that the failure of communities' inclusivity substantially contributed to the local revolt against the RUGA settlement policy. Specifically, the study's findings demonstrate that the possibility of losing ancestral lands, the past experience of the host communities, ethnic and political factors, and poor policy awareness were the primary factors that reinforced communities' resistance

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to RUGA policy. Moreover, the government's over-reliance on an authoritarian mechanism and wrong policy choices compounded by a non-inclusive approach contributed to policy failure to gain acceptability at the grassroots level in Benue state. As an intervention, the article recommends democratically inclusive conflict resolution strategies for climate-related armed conflict in the region.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The impact of climate change on small islands was no less threatening than the dangers guns posed to large nations—Robert Aisi, Senior Papua New Guinean diplomat (UN Security Council Report, 2021)

If we continue on our current path, we will face the collapse of everything that gives us our security—food production; access to fresh water; habitable, ambient temperatures; and ocean food chains.” “Please make no mistake. Climate change is the biggest threat to security that humans have ever faced”—David Attenborough (UN Security Council Report, 2021)

The above excerpts demonstrate how climate change has become a “threat multiplier” to security (Brown et al., 2007; Buhaug et al., 2008; Mach et al., 2019; Theisen et al., 2013; UN Security Council, 2021). Observations around the world are providing empirical evidence of increasing changes in climatic conditions that pose a threat to human livelihoods and global peace (Gabriel, 2009; IPCC, 2007). The global temperature is rising, and extreme weather events and ecological changes are being experienced. There has been a decrease in rainfall in some parts of the world and an increase in rainfall in other regions, which can have a devastating effect on human lives. Deforestation is getting worse, occurrences of drought, poor water quality, and crop losses are being experienced while human migration driven by climate change is expected to increase in the near future (Agnew, 2012; Irwin, 2010; Sinden, 2007; Wood, 2007). Climate change poses more danger to global security than the ongoing proliferation and contestation over nuclear weapons among the states (Odoh & Chilaka, 2012). At the 2007 United Nations Security Council summit, the issue of climate change was first echoed as a threat to international peace and security (UN Security Council, 2007).

Climate change poses a potential threat to aggravating the existing security problem worldwide (UN Security Council, 2021). Besides, there is a possibility that climate change exacerbates the current level of poverty, conflict, and ethnic distrust between communities and states (UN General Assembly, 2009). The consequences of climate change have provided an understanding of human decision-making processes regarding where to migrate, when, and when to return (Warner & Van der Geest, 2013). Climate-induced drought is expected to aggravate socio-economic havoc and the endless migration of pastoralists. Available evidence reveals that competition and overreliance on natural resources for human survival trigger belligerence among ethnic groups (Ojo, 2020). This connection has been manifested in Nigeria, where climate-related migration has promoted armed conflicts among diverse ethnic groups. Some

armed groups, ethnic militias, and jihadist extremists have exploited such vulnerabilities to recruit from the vulnerable communities affected by the climate-induced drought (Middendorp, 2019). At the same time, elites have also used such an opportunity to promote ethnic divisions for political gain (Nwozor et al., 2021). It is fundamental to acknowledge that climate change does not directly lead to conflict (UNESCO, 2018). However, it remains a significant driver and multiplier of conflict among diverse ethnic groups (UNEP, 2021).

Conflicts over natural resources have been labeled in various dimensions as herders-farmers conflict (Ojo, 2020), eco-violence (Olumba et al., 2022), and pastoralists-farmers conflict (Ajala, 2020). These hostilities have occurred across Africa, including in Nigeria, where resource competition and access to natural resources remain a contention issue. There is a conflict at the core of ecological phenomena, which include resource competition, environmental degradation (Adebayo, 2019), and increasing urbanization. These have had a devastating humanitarian impact on farming communities across the country. As articulated by the International Crisis Group (2017), thousands of people have lost their lives, and many have been displaced as a result of such conflicts. Several solutions have been offered in order to resolve the conflict; however, they are unable to provide lasting peace between the warring occupational communities (Adekola et al., 2022). Therefore, this article focuses on the recent Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement policy adopted by the Nigerian federal government. The RUGA settlement policy is aimed at addressing migratory pastoralism, a mobile form of cattle rearing. This involves the continuous movement of herders and cattle in search of green pasture. According to Ojo (2020), the RUGA settlement is intended to establish a stationary infrastructure with basic amenities for nomadic herders across Nigeria and discourage their migratory practice of cattle rearing. In some states, such a policy was supported but met with overwhelming resistance in others.

Few empirical studies have provided scientific explanations regarding the rationale behind communities' resistance to the RUGA settlement policy introduced by the Nigerian Federal government in 2019. The mentioned gap rationalizes why this study was conducted. Therefore, this article aims to investigate communities' resistance to the RUGA settlement policy in Nigeria's Middlebelt, using Benue state as a reference point. The paper examined three fundamental questions:

- Which factors explain the level of support of the members of indigenous host communities for the proposed RUGA settlement policy?
- How do the personal interests of the key actors and citizens influence the level of support for the policy?
- How do perceivable impacts of the policy affect the level of support?

1.1 | Literature review

The relationship between climate change, migration, and armed conflict has been widely discussed in the literature by numerous scholars (O'Loughlin et al., 2014; Uexkull et al., 2016). Global policymakers and media outlets have acknowledged climate change as a security concern. However, despite the global recognition of the potency of climate change to trigger armed conflict, the exactitude and channel through which climate change and migration result in conflict is obscured. One of the reasons for such obscurity is the uncertainty regarding the predictability and complexity of climate change extrapolation (Burrows & Kinney, 2016). Some quantitative empirical studies found a connection between climate change and armed

conflict (Burrows & Kinney, 2016; Cappelli et al., 2022; Hsiang et al., 2013). Several others indicated weak relationships or no connection (Scheffran et al., 2012). Despite these inherent challenges in objectifying the nexus between climate change, migration, and conflict, Homer-Dixon argues that environmental scarcity cannot solely trigger massive migrations and conflicts. It can only combine with other social, economic, and political factors to generate such an outcome (Homer-Dixon, 1999). The impact of climate change often results in loss of livelihood, economic deficiency, and forced migration. These factors often intersect with poor governance and social inequalities that deepen social fragmentation, resulting in violence (Theisen et al., 2013).

Armed conflict implies the involvement of two or more armed groups in a conflict or competition over resources, territory, or government policy (Kress, 2012). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Georeferenced Event Dataset succinctly defines *armed conflict* as “an incident where an organized actor uses armed force against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least one direct death at a specific location and a specific date” (Croicu & Ralph, 2017). The possibility of climate-induced natural resource scarcity, such as water and land shortages, to promote armed conflict has been established in the literature (Bretthauer, 2015). Schleussner et al. reveal the nexus between climate-related risks and conflict using the event coincidence analysis model between 1980 and 2010. The study revealed that approximately 23% of conflict intersects with climate change-related events, especially in diverse and ethnically polarized environments (Schleussner et al., 2016). Thus, climate change has been regarded as a security problem, and its possibility of promoting violent conflict has been recognized. Moreover, it is believed that climate change may reduce the capacity of the state to assist people in safeguarding their livelihoods (Barnett & Adger, 2007).

Ethnic tension between the host communities and migrants has been considered in the literature as one of the causes of conflict. Such tension often ensues due to the host communities' perception of migrants as strangers or others. Beyond ethnic colouration, socio-economic competition in terms of jobs and resources may provoke conflict between the two groups (Olzak, 1992). The construct of “otherness” often transcends individual concern and translates to national identity (Grant et al., 2011). In addition, the host communities may feel threatened due to the influx of migrants who speak different languages with foreign religious orientations. In this context, even if migration does not solely lead to conflict, the risk involved in accommodating people different from an ethnic group may trigger conflict.

In addition, climate-driven migration results in competition for natural and economic resources in several ways. One of those avenues is when the authorities do not clearly define property rights and resource ownership. Second, conflict of interest often arises from the new arrival of migrants without ethnic, cultural, or linguistic affinity with the host communities. This may trigger ethnic and identity tensions. Third, the influx of migrants may result in distrust between host communities and the migrant population (Buhaug et al., 2008). However, migration can be considered an adaptation strategy to cope with climate change (Jha et al., 2018; De Sherbinin et al., 2011). The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change considers migration as a form of adaptation, and governments worldwide consider resettlement an alternative to migration (Adger et al., 2014). However, one should consider the potential resistance and stress associated with adaptation-related migration (Adger et al., 2014). Even though migration is considered an adaptation strategy, the host communities' disinclination to share the available limited natural resources with the migrants has been one of the sources of conflict between pastoralist migrants and host communities in Africa (Ojo, 2020), and beyond.

1.2 | Theoretical framework: Human needs theory

Human needs are based on the orientation of the fundamental necessities for human survival. These various essential needs are not only shelter, food, and water. They constitute physical and non-physical components that are necessary for human existence. Although there is no specific or all-inclusive list of these various needs, however, a prominent scholar such as Maslow provides a five-stage model of a pyramid of needs, listed according to their priorities, including physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). Other scholars have added to Maslow's elements, including freedom, personal fulfillment, cultural security, love, participation, and justice (Marker, 2003). The social system must be able to address these numerous individual needs or anticipate instability that may change such a current position through conflict (Coate & Rosati, 1988).

Human needs theorists have asserted that the primary causes of many conflicts include the inability to meet individual, group, and societal expectations and needs (Northrup, 1989). It is essential to acknowledge that human needs cannot be jettisoned like interests. These needs cannot be subjugated (Carroll et al., 1988). A scholar like Kelman has asserted that collective needs and the issue of survival are the root causes of many inter-group and inter-communal conflicts (Kelman, 1997). The frustration of the people and the unmet needs of specific groups by the government institutions saddled with the responsibility of socio-economic distribution creates an enabling environment for protracted conflict in many societies (Burton, 1997). It is against this background that Burton suggests that it is only through the profound restructuring of society to fulfill the needs of diverse groups that conflict can be addressed. Without an effort to meet the needs of diverse groups, it becomes difficult to map out a conflict resolution strategy. This suggests the non-negotiability of human needs, making any conflict resolution mechanism permissive to providing one party's needs to reinforce further conflict between the concerned groups. Therefore, the road towards sustainable peace is to accommodate the inclusive needs of all the concerned parties and groups in society (Burton, 1997).

Human needs explain the several peacebuilding processes channeled towards mitigating structural violence. Structural violence erupts when society's political and economic structures exclude a specific group from benefitting from the common resources. When systematic economic deprivation is entrenched in a system, the well-being of the people is jettisoned, resulting in human growth and development (Christie, 1997). As Galtung (1969) claimed, the operational interpretation of structural violence can be considered in a society's social, economic, and political structures. For instance, this can be exemplified when starvation results in some deaths when there is food in other parts of the world to prevent hunger, or if people die as a result of a disease that can be treated. In that case, there is structural violence. From the perspective of human needs, structural violence, therefore, can be considered when systematic inequalities exist in a particular society's economic distribution and political arrangement. When the institution is responsible for responding to human needs, the outcome of such action often leads to violence or conflict (Rosati et al., 1990).

The basic premise of this theory is the unnegotiable nature of human needs, such as food, which cannot be substituted. Obstructing such a need will result in overwhelming action, which often results in conflict. Despite this, there are some human needs that transcend the materialistic worldview, such as security, freedom, and recognition, which must be acknowledged in every society. Any attempt to thwart such items will lead to adverse sequels (Park, 2010). However, one problem with this claim is how to measure freedom, recognition, and security, in what context, and what is the limit of these needs. To what extent can these needs be given to a

particular individual or group? These remain some of the unresolved questions that must be responded to. Another prominent scholar in conflict analysis and resolution, Christopher Mitchell, noted that the need for security in some instances could be measured as a need for dominance (Mitchell, 1990). Therefore, Mitchell's perspective raises the question of quantification and dominion.

Although Burton claimed that human needs do not require hierarchical order, one of the critics of human needs theory suggests that Burton's claim could not provide the hierarchization of needs, making it challenging to prioritize human needs (Griffiths, 2013). Furthermore, Richard Rubenstein raises a fundamental question regarding challenges in identifying the root causes of social conflict. According to him, "how can the basic needs unsatisfied, generate destructive social conflict be identified, described, and satisfied"? He further reinforces his argument by suggesting that the human needs theory is a "great promise" but elusive (Rubenstein, 2001). Another eminent scholar, Lauren Park, considered two inherent challenges associated with the human needs approach. The first is accompanying the awareness of the existence of needs. The second problem is measuring the value of needs, for example, their correlation to right and wrong, good, and evil (Park, 2010). Moreover, another perspective argues that human needs often require a combination of needs and interests. As a result, conflict resolution cannot be achieved by only meeting the needs of the people, primarily when needs such as freedom, security, identity, and interests that require resource distribution are necessitated. In this regard, the conflict will continue even if the people's needs are met. Therefore, sustainable conflict resolution can be achieved when both the needs and interests of the parties involved are met (Carroll et al., 1988).

In the case of Benue, the needs for grazing lands, water, and security of lives and properties offer an enabling environment for inter-group conflicts between the farmers and pastoralists. The shortage of natural resources, for instance, the lack of grazing reserves for pastoralists to sustain their livelihoods and continuous encroachment into farmlands, are considered the root causes of the conflict in the region (Ojo, 2020). However, this conflict derives its significant components from the human quest to survive. While pastoralists search for water and land to graze, the host communities have occupied the available land. Therefore, ensuing competition over the ownership and access to scarce natural resources. The following section provides a perfunctory account of the nature of the conflict in the Middlebelt region, including Benue.

1.3 | Climate-related armed conflict in Nigeria's Middlebelt

The Middlebelt of Nigeria comprises six states, including Benue, Kogi, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kwara, and Niger. The decreasing precipitation in the northeast and the increase in rainfall and temperature in the middle-belt due to climate change negatively impact the livelihoods of local communities. Climate change devastates pastoralists' animal production and water supply (International Crisis Group, 2018). The Fulani herders are continually searching for grazing lands and water holes for the survival of their herds. The farmers occupied the existing lands in the Middlebelt, including Benue, while the pastoralists needed to compete with the farmers over scarce resources (Ojo, 2020). Thus, resource competition is a source of tension between the two parties (farmers and herders), often leading to contemporary conflict and security challenges in the country (Ojo, 2020). Even though the region has enjoyed relative peace in the past, the recent hostilities between the farming communities and the Fulani herders have worsened the current security challenge in Nigeria. Tens of thousands have been forced to flee their homes in Benue state and other states in the Middlebelt region of Nigeria because of escalating

tensions between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. The recent conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria has been triggered by climate-induced drought and serves as a new security threat in the country (Ojo, 2020; Egbuta, 2018; Eke, 2020). The climate-induced drought has necessitated a form of migratory pastoralism, particularly in the country's Middlebelt and southern parts. More than 75% of farmland in the core northern part of Nigeria is desertified (Flamik, 2018).

The conflicts are embedded in climate-related challenges. The most common grievance between pastoralists and farmers often revolves around land use and competition over available natural resources. Although, in the past, such conflicts were often settled through local intervention to prevent further escalation of the conflicts. Perpetual violence is fueled by competition over natural resources such as water, and grazing land is responsible for perpetual violence (Gaye, 2018). Significantly, these conflicts are exacerbated by communal, religious, and ethnic factors. Due to the nature of pastoralist occupation, they are involved in the mobility and migration of herds, searching for grazing land and water (Brottem, 2021). In the agro-pastoral domains, insecurity affects pastoralists and farmers. Cattle rustling and armed banditry reinforce security challenges (Ojo, 2020). Over the years, particularly since 2010, the conflicts have claimed more than 15,000 lives (Brottem, 2021). The state authorities have ill-treated the farmers-herders' conflicts. Since the conflict is often tainted with land use, cultural, ethnic, and religious factors, the jihadist groups are dwelling on such factors to mobilize and recruit militant members into their folds. Such militant groups have championed the grievances of pastoralists (Brottem, 2021). However, most pastoralists are usually the victims of armed bandits whose operations revolve around cattle rustling and thefts (Okoli, 2019; Onwuzuruigbo, 2021).

The states that suffered most of the killings in the region include Benue (303 attacks—2539 lives), followed by Plateau (279 attacks—2138 lives), and Nasarawa (93 attacks—521 lives). The marauders often employed the tactic of attacking villages at night. As a result, more than 300,000 people have become homeless, sojourning in different Internal Displaced Persons camps (International Crisis Group, 2018). The conflict has claimed more lives compared to the Boko Haram insurgency. Since 2018, the conflicts have taken on another dimension. More than 300 people were killed in Mangu, Ladi, Barkin, Bokkos, Bassa, and Jos South local governments. At the same time, reprisal attacks have claimed more than 200 lives in several attacks carried out in 11 villages in Barkin Ladi's local government. In Nasarawa state, between January and June 2018, more than 260 people were killed in several attacks unleashed by the militias, particularly in Obi, Keana, Doma, and Awe local government zones (International Crisis Group, 2018). In addition, the fall of Muammar Gaddafi and the collapse of Libya gave rise to civilians' accessibility to weapons, therefore fuelling the conflicts (Chávez & Swed, 2022). It is also pertinent to note that Nigeria is a polarized nation-state along north-south and Muslim-Christian divides. The conflict is therefore aided by the existing polarization between the Fulani pastoralists, who are predominantly Muslim, and the Christian-dominated south and Middlebelt. As a result of the high frequency of attacks and fatalities experienced in Benue state, in Nigeria's Middlebelt, Benue state was selected as the case study for this article. This makes it an ideal location for conducting climate-related armed conflict research.

1.4 | Climate-related armed conflicts and the RUGA settlement intervention

Changing climate patterns are driving pastoralists out of the Sahel region into Nigeria's central farmlands. The topography of Nigeria has been transformed as a result of the 75 percent

desertification of the grassland in the core northern region. Precipitation has decreased by half in the north-east, while rain patterns in the middle-belt have become more erratic, causing economic and ecological insecurity that affects agriculture and livestock. A changing climate is forcing nomadic herders to move into states already occupied by sedentary farmers, causing violent conflicts over water and grazing lands (Madeline, 2018). Consequently, the federal government of Nigeria has implemented significant policies to address clashes between pastoralists and farmers. One such policy is the RUGA settlement plan, proposed in June 2019, which aims to provide an immobile form of pastoralists' settlement in 36 states of Nigeria (Ademola, 2020; Afolabi et al., 2020; Ele, 2020). Ruga settlements have been proposed by the Federal Government, which intends to acquire and develop agricultural land in all the nation's states to settle pastoralists. Nwachukwu et al. (2021) acknowledge that these proposals have sparked protests and disputes across the country, particularly in the middle belt and southern Nigeria. The government introduced the RUGA settlement program to mitigate the conflict between farmers and pastoralists (Apikins, 2020). The policy is undoubtedly admirable. This is because it seeks to redefine the migratory pastoral systems, which have long been an integral part of the cultural and occupational values of Nigerian pastoralists. A settled or immobile cattle rearing system is provided by the policy, complemented by basic amenities such as hospitals, housing, ranching for cattle breeding, veterinary clinics, markets, schools, water supply, electricity, and security in each state of the federation designated for the scheme (Adebayo, 2019). Such a scheme is believed to address the violent conflicts between pastoralists, who often face climate change challenges, and farmers, who experience cattle encroachment on farmlands (Aidonjio et al., 2021).

As a modest form of settlement, the RUGA settlement aimed to discourage pastoralists from moving around on foot and settling in one area to rear their cattle. As stated by the Federal government, the RUGA settlement aims to improve animal production and promote animal hygiene, especially for meat and milk production. In addition to enhancing meat quality, such a program can stimulate investment (Aniche & Ugwu, 2019). Nevertheless, in the southern and middle belt regions, such a proposal has faced overwhelming resistance. This initiative has been vehemently opposed by several state governments, which accuse the federal government of securing state lands for the benefit of Fulani pastoralists (Egbuta, 2018). In the southern region and the middle belt, the policy was perceived as an opportunity for Fulani herders to take over ancestral lands (Nwachukwu et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that there was no consultation with local communities or state governments before the proposed plan was finalized. In the absence of public dialogue in such a crucial decision, the policy was criticized as anti-people. The RUGA settlement initiative was suspended by the federal government on July 3, 2019, in response to many concerns and requests from stakeholders and communities (Nwachukwu et al., 2021). Figure 1 below demonstrates the timeline of the RUGA settlement policy.

1.5 | RUGA settlement policy and community resistance in Benue state

On May 22, 2017, the law which prohibited livestock from grazing openly in search of pasture and water was first enacted in Benue state, which suffered most from Fulani pastoralist attacks. The alternative provision required ranches to be set up throughout the state. Both support and opposition were voiced for and against the Open Grazing Prohibition and Establishment of Ranches Law, 2017. A rancher could not sell his land to the state for establishing a ranch, a

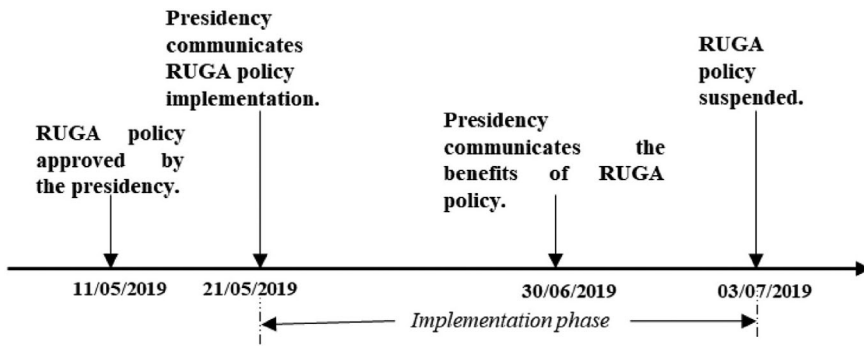


FIGURE 1 Timeline of the RUGA policy. Source: Adekola et al., 2022

residence, or any other related purpose. This is stipulated in section 12 of the Benue state Legislation. Specifically, Section 15(2) prohibited the ‘alienation of any right affecting land in a ranch by sale, transfer, mortgage, and so forth (Benue State, 2017).

Furthermore, land use shall not be altered or transferred except according to the Land Use Act with the consent of the state governor. It appears that this is contradictory. For example, selling land was illegal under Section 12 but was permitted by Section 15(2), but the governor's consent was required. Nevertheless, the two provisions cover a broad range of situations (Balarabe, 2021).

The 17 governors of Southern Nigeria duplicated Benue state's law prohibiting pastoralists from grazing openly on May 11, 2021 (Kabir, 2021). All the southern states followed the same part. States like Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, and Rivers, among several others, have implemented anti-open grazing laws. The law aimed to prohibit the herders from grazing openly while considering animal rearing as a private business that must be addressed by private individuals engaged in such a business. Thus, the policy encourages the ranching of animals by the private individuals who engage in it. However, the anti-open was reprimanded by most northern governors, who considered such a law against the fundamental human rights of the Fulani herders. Those opposed to it have argued that the law discriminates against herders and makes no supportive provisions for alternative livelihoods. Therefore, it is an effective strategy to dislodge herders from the state. Despite such criticism, many southern states have implemented the law. This has led to the prohibition of the movement of animals by foot from the northern states to the southern and middle-belt regions (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017).

1.6 | Study area

Benue state is one of the Middlebelt states in Nigeria, with a population of 4,253,641, as estimated in the 2006 census. The state was created in 1976. It derives its name from Nigeria's second-largest river, the River Benue. Agriculture is the main occupation of Benue's population, which is why the state is named the Food Basket of the Nation. Five local governments, including Guma, Gwer-West, Gwer-East, Ukum, and Logo local governments, were targeted as the primary locations of this study in Benue state. Figure 2 below shows the map of Benue state in Nigeria.

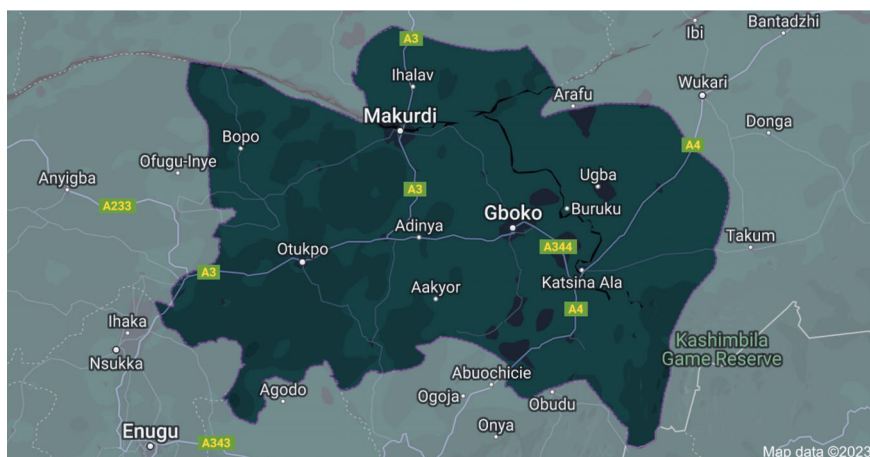


FIGURE 2 Map of Benue state. Source: Ministry of Lands and Survey, Makurdi.

1.7 | Methodology

This study examines host communities' perspectives on the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. Data was collected over 3 months between May and July 2020. The quantitative data was gathered through a survey strategy using a questionnaire method. The questionnaires were administered, reflecting several items, such as the level of relationship between the federal government and the Benue state government in the formulation and implementation of the Ruga settlement policy; consultation with the host communities; the level of awareness regarding the policy; the level of community support for the Ruga settlement policy in Benue state; the communities' perception regarding the possibility of the Ruga settlement policy guaranteeing lasting peace between the host communities and pastoralists, among others. The respondents evaluated these items using a scale of 1 to 5, including very low, low, medium, high, and very high. The study targeted the key local governments that have suffered the most from the pastoralist-farmers' conflicts in Benue state, including Guma, Gwer-West, Gwer-East, Ukum, and Logo local governments in Benue state.

A purposive sampling method was used in carrying out the study. As part of the pre-selection process, the major relevant stakeholders were identified using the marching characteristics of the targeted population, including local chiefs, community leaders, political officeholders, local elites, traditional rulers, and ordinary citizens without social titles. The researcher employed three research assistants who were indigenes and spoke the local language to identify the major stakeholders in the communities. A sample size of 385 was used to generate responses that reflect the entire population's opinion. The completed questionnaires using the Likert scale measurement were checked and coded accordingly. The questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS, presented in frequency, percentage, mean value, standard deviation, and regression analysis. Table 1 below shows how the sample size was calculated:

2 | RESULTS

The data are presented using frequency, percentage distribution of respondents, the mean score, and standard deviation on each of the assertions set out to evaluate interests, the role of the key

TABLE 1 Sample size

P	Population size	4,253,641
CL	Confidence level	95%
MOE	Margin of error	5%
N	Ideal sample size	385

Source: Author.

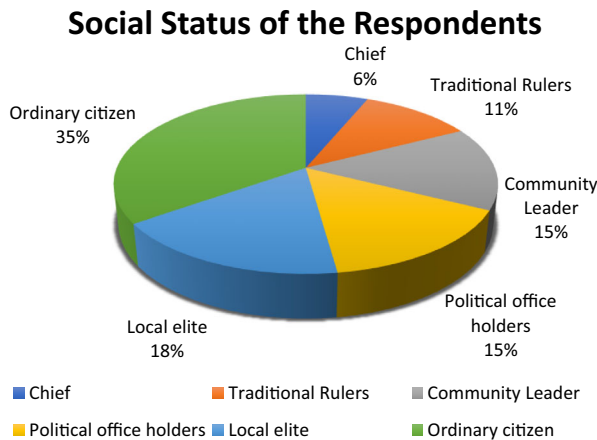


FIGURE 3 Social status of the respondents. Source: Author's fieldwork.

actors, and citizens on the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. Its values and responses were organized using the Likert scale of measurements codified on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) as follows: very high (1) high (2), medium (3), low (4) and very low (5). In addition, the mean value (\bar{X}) summarizes the strength of the respondents for each of the statements, using a decision rule as thus: where ($\bar{X} > 3.0$), more respondents tended towards a high rating; and where ($\bar{X} < 3.0$), more respondents tended towards a low rating.

Figure 3 shows the social status of the respondents. It shows that 24 individuals among the respondents were chiefs, 43 were traditional rulers, 58 respondents were community leaders, and 59 respondents were political office holders. Also, 67 individuals out of the total number of respondents were local elites, and just 134 individuals out of the total respondents were ordinary citizens. This demonstrates the extensive involvement and sense of social identity of the respondents for this study.

Figure 4 reveals the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents and the mean score and standard deviation on each of the assertions set out to evaluate the interests and roles of the key actors and citizens in the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. Its values/responses were organized using a Likert scale of measurements codified on SPSS as follows: very high (1) high (2), medium (3), low (4) and very low (5). In addition, the mean value (\bar{X}) summarizes the strength of the respondents for each of the statements, using a decision rule as follows: where ($\bar{X} > 3.0$), more respondents tended towards a high rating; and where ($\bar{X} < 3.0$), more respondents tended towards a low rating. On the first objective, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1–5, the extent to which they supported the proposition of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. A significant number of 112 (29.1%) respondents rated the level

THE INTERESTS/ROLE OF THE KEY ACTORS/CITIZENS IN RUGA SETTLEMENT POLICY IN BENUE STATE

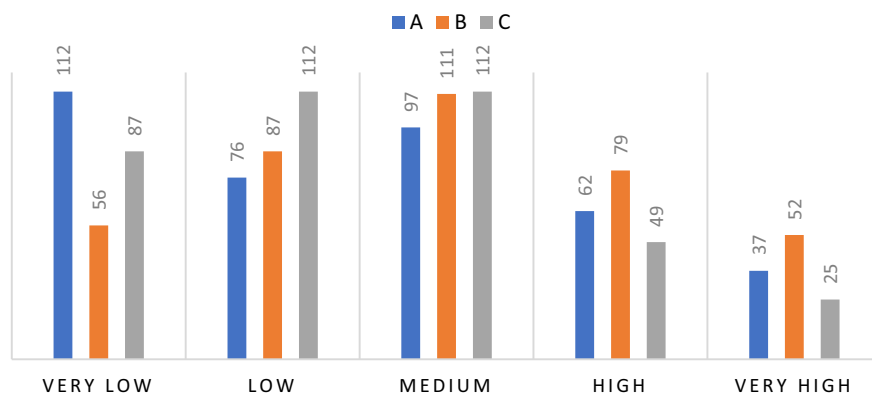


FIGURE 4 The interests/role of the key actors/citizens in RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. *Source:* Author's Fieldwork, 2020. "A" represents assertion 1: what was the level of awareness when the RUGA settlement policy was proposed in Benue state? "B" represents assertion 2: to what extent was the level of influence of the relevant stakeholders in the rejection of RUGA settlement policy. "C" represents assertion 3: what was the level of relationship between the federal government and Benue state government in the adoption of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state?

of support for the policy proposition as low, and 76 (19.7%) ordinarily rated the assertion as low. On the other hand, about 97 (25.2%) of the respondents took a moderate position on this assertion, 62 (16.1%) of the respondents rated the assertion as being high, and 37 (9.6%) rated it very high on this assertion. The mean value of 3.99 affirmed the strength of the respondents towards the low ratings of the assertion.

The respondents were asked to assess the level of influence of the relevant stakeholders in the rejection of the RUGA settlement policy. In their reactions, 52 (13.5%) of the respondents rated it as very high, and 79 (20.5%) acknowledged the high influence of the relevant stakeholders in the rejection of the RUGA settlement policy. Also, 111 (28.8%) stood at the mid-point, neither agreed nor disagreed, while 87 (22.6%) and 56 (14.5%) of the respondents rated it as being low and very low, respectively, for this assertion. However, the mean value of 4.67 confirms the position of respondents who rated the assertion high, with a standard deviation of 1.788 from the respondents who rated it low. This indicates that the level of influence of relevant stakeholders is always an essential factor for either acceptance or rejection of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state.

On the other hand, it was reported that 25 (6.5%) of the respondents maintained that there is a very high level of relationship between the federal government and the Benue state government in the adoption of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. Complementarily, 49 (12.7%) of the respondents rated the set-out assertion as being ordinarily high, while 112 (29.1%) of the respondents provided a balance point of view on the assertion. Among those who rated the assertion as being high, about 112 (29.1%) of the respondents maintained that there exists a low relationship between state and federal governments on the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy. In contrast, 87 (22.6%) respondents rated the relationship as very low. This indicates that a lower level of relationship exists between the two levels of

government on the proposition and adoption of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. The mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 4.06$, $SD = 1.850$) confirmed this frequency distribution. Therefore, the average or midpoint is set at 3.0.

Figure 5 presents the statistical reports on the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents and the mean score and standard deviation for each of the assertions set out to determine the impact of the policy on the indigenous communities and the process of decision-making. Its values/responses were organized using the Likert scale of measurements codified on SPSS as follows: very high (1) high (2), medium (3), low (4) and very low (5). In addition, the mean value (\bar{X}) summarizes the strength of the respondents for each of the statements, using a decision rule as follows: where ($\bar{X} > 3.0$), more respondents tended towards a high rating; and where ($\bar{X} < 3.0$), more respondents tended towards a low rating.

It was reported that 23 (6.0%) of the respondents affirmed that there was a very high level of awareness when the RUGA settlement policy was proposed in Benue state, and 60 (15.6%) of the respondents complemented the position of the 6% of the respondents with an ordinary high response. At the same time, 105 (27.3%) of the respondents assessed the assertion to be a medium between high and low. However, 105 (27.3%) of the respondents rated it as low, while 92 (23.9%) rated it as very low position. Therefore, the response strength resides with respondents who rated the assertion low, as confirmed by mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 4.05$, $SD = 1.895$).

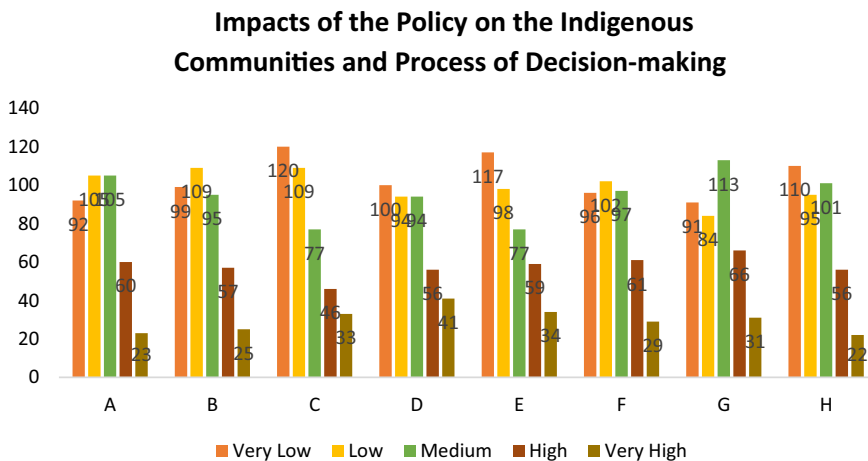


FIGURE 5 Perceived impacts of the RUGA policy on the indigenous communities and process of decision-making. *Source:* Author's Fieldwork, 2020. "A" represents assertion 1: what was the level of awareness when the RUGA settlement policy was proposed in Benue state? "B" represents assertion 2: to what extent were the indigenous communities informed of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state? "C" represents assertion 3: how can the respondents rate the community involvement and proper consultation before the federal government proposed the RUGA settlement policy? "D" represents assertion 4: what is the level of community support for the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state? "E" represents assertion 5: to what extent did community participation influence the decision-making process for the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy? "F" represents assertion 6: rate the possible benefits of the RUGA settlement policy to indigenous communities in Benue state. "G" represents assertion 7: to what extent do the respondents think the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy will guarantee lasting peace to the Fulani/farmers conflict in Benue state? "H" represents assertion 8: to what extent do the respondents think farmers will accommodate the Fulani herders in the near future?

Furthermore, respondents were asked how the indigenous communities were informed of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. It was reported that 25 (6.5%) of the respondents rated it very high, 57 (14.8%) of the respondents rated it high, and 95 (24.7%) of the respondents posited that the assertion was in-between low and high. However, 109 (28.3%) of the respondents rated it as low, while 99 (25.7%) rated it as very low for position. Nevertheless, the aggregate of low-rating respondents is greater than that of high-rating respondents. Thus, the mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 3.97$, $SD = 1.936$) closely fell with the low-rating frequency distribution.

How can the respondents rate the community involvement and proper consultation before the federal government proposed the RUGA settlement policy? The respondents were asked to assess this assertion. In their reactions, 33 (8.6%) of the respondents rated it very high, and 46 (11.9%) assessed it as being high—the rate of community involvement and proper consultation before the federal government proposed the RUGA settlement policy. Also, 77 (20.0%) was rated as medium, 109 (28.3%), and 120 (31.2%) of the respondents rated it as low and very low, respectively, for this assertion. In the same vein, the aggregate of the low ratings conforms with the mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 3.76$, $SD = 2.051$).

In addition, the level of community support for the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state was also examined. About 41, representing 10.6% of the respondents, positioned it as very high, 56 (14.5%) examined it as high; and 94 (24.4%) rated it as medium, while 94 (24.4%) and 100 (26.0%) of the respondents rated it as low and very low, respectively. This implies that community support for the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state is minimal, considering the dispersion of the data frequency and percentage. The mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 4.08$, $SD = 2.032$) tended towards this frequency distribution.

To what extent did community participation influence the decision-making process for implementing the RUGA settlement policy? In the respondents' reactions, 34 (8.8%) of the respondents and 59 (15.3%) of the respondents gave a rating of very high and high, respectively; 77 (20.0%) of the respondents remained indifferent to the question; while 98 representing 25.5% of the respondents, and 117 (30.4%) of the respondents rated it as low and very low respectively, on how community participation influences the decision-making process for the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy, as verified by the mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 3.86$, $SD = 2.082$). Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate the possible benefits of the RUGA settlement policy to indigenous communities in Benue state. It was reported that 29 (7.5%) of the respondents rated the assertion very high, while 61, representing 15.8%, just rated the assertion as high. However, 97 (25.2%) of the respondents agreed with the assertion that they were unconcerned. A mode frequency of 102 (26.5%) respondents believed the assertion to be low and 96 (24.9%) very low. This data distribution would, at least, affirm the expected low benefits of the RUGA settlement policy by the host communities, as evident in the mean value and standard deviation ($\bar{X} = 4.30$, $SD = 1.575$).

As depicted in Figure 5, respondents were asked to what extent the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy guarantees lasting peace in the Fulani/farmers conflict in Benue state. In their reactions, 31, representing 8.1% of the respondents, claimed it to be very high, and 66 (17.1%) of the respondents viewed it as high in this position. However, 113 (29.4%) of the respondents graded this assertion as moderate, stating that implementing the RUGA settlement policy will guarantee lasting peace to the Fulani/farmers conflict in Benue state. In comparison, 84 respondents, representing 21.8% of the respondents, pegged it as low as the assertion. Unlike the other respondents, representing 91 (23.6%) of the respondents, they took a very low position on this assertion. The data distribution is verified by the mean value and standard deviation

($\chi = 4.17$, $SD = 1.953$). In addition, there seems to be skepticism about the continuous coexistence of farmers and herders across communities in Benue state. It was reported that 22 (5.7%) of the respondents maintained a high possibility of coexistence in the future, while 56 (14.5%) of the respondents claimed it to be high. However, 101 (26.2%) of the respondents declared indifferent; and 95 (24.7%) of the respondents rated possible co-habitation as low, while 110 (28.6) advanced the level of possible co-habitation in the future as very low. On aggregate, the frequency distribution of low-rating respondents conforms with the mean value and standard deviation ($\chi = 3.87$, $SD = 1.983$).

2.1 | Level of support of indigenous host communities to implementation of RUGA settlement policy in Benue state

This section deals with the analysis/interpretation of the central question of this study. The statistical tool used to analyze the data is Spearman's correlation coefficient. The level of significance used in the analysis is 5% (i.e., 0.05).

Table 2 above presents the correlation analysis between the level of support of host indigenous communities and the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. According to Table 2, Spearman's correlation coefficient was positive (+0.304), significant at $p < .05$. The positive coefficient indicated 30 (30%) positive associations between the level of support of host indigenous communities and the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. Since the probability value (.000) is less than the alpha level (.05), it confirms that the level of support of host indigenous communities has a significant low effect on the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state ($r = +0.304$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the spearman co-efficient implies that only about one-third (i.e., 30%) of the implementation procedures of the RUGA settlement policy is somewhat being supported by the indigenes of host communities in Benue state. The positive association also showed that the better the community participation in the proposition of RUGA settlement policy by the governments at State and Federal levels, the better its implementation within the host communities of the Fulani herdsmen. To achieve the broad objective, it becomes clearer from the set-out variables that the opposing factors to implementing the RUGA Settlement policy are remarkably efficient, thus reducing the level of support by indigenes of the host communities. In this regard, the Relative Impact Index was used to explain why the proposition of RUGA Settlement policy was opposed in Benue state. The opposing factors were the indicators for the rejection.

Figure 6 above indicates that none of the observed opposing factors of the RUGA Settlement policy is rated below RII of 4.50. This is rather a confirmation of the strong level of influence of these factors on the implementation of the RUGA settlement policy. Similarly, it affirms the co-efficient analysis as to why the level of support of host communities is not enormous towards

TABLE 2 Correlation analysis between level of support of host indigenous communities and implementation of RUGA settlement policy in Benue state

Between level of support of host indigenous communities	Correlation co-efficient (r)	Df	p-value	N
Within the implementation of RUGA settlement policy in Benue state	+0.304	8	.000	385

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2020.

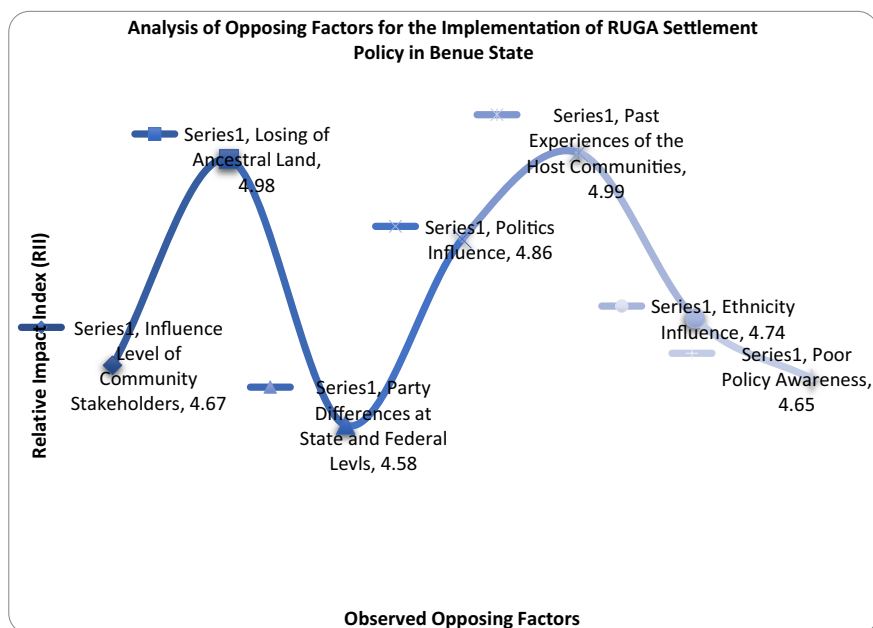


FIGURE 6 Opposing Factors for the Implementation of RUGA Settlement Policy in Benue state. *Source:* Author's Fieldwork, 2020.

sustaining the implementation of the RUGA Settlement policy in Benue state. The opposing factors include the influence level of community stakeholders (RII = 4.67), loss of ancestral lands (RII = 4.98), party differences between state and federal levels (RII = 4.58), political influence (RII = 4.86), past experiences of the host communities (RII = 4.99), ethnicity influence (RII = 4.74) and poor policy awareness (RII = 4.65). The above graphical illustration shows that the past experiences of the host communities and the possibility of losing ancestral lands are the foremost reasons why the host communities oppose the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. Also, the political and ethnic influences are among other second-layer reasons for the rejection of the RUGA settlement policy in the study area.

3 | DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examines communities' resistance to the RUGA settlement policy in Benue state. The study respondents are strategic stakeholders on the issue of the RUGA settlement policy. Their selection was adequate and result-oriented. The involvement of selected respondents was confirmed by Gever's study in 2019, where Benue indigenes were largely cited as accurate sources on the issue of anti-open grazing law. However, it was revealed that there was a poor level of support for the RUGA settlement policy proposals. This outcome was unpretentious because Ele (2020) had raised a fundamental problem that berates the policy proposals' support level. Ele (2020) maintained that "the problem with this proposal is how and where to obtain the land." In a similar vein, Ekpo and Tobi (2019) analyzed factors that resulted in the poor level of support and rejection. These factors denote the RUGA policy as a stratagem by the Fulani-dominated Federal Government to reallocate the ancestral lands of the people of the

middle-belt region to the pressurized Fulani herders. Apikins (2020) supported the position of poor support because the policy is “seen by the majority of Nigerians as the crudest assault on inclusivity in a multi-ethnic Nigeria.”

There was a relatively significant influence by local stakeholders on RUGA policy. Ejiofor (2021) explained that the local stakeholders strongly reinforced resistance to the policy because it was perceived as a hidden strategy to dominate local territories, hijack ancestral land, and override the identities of ethno-religious groups. Few or no existing studies establish any form of simultaneous relationship between the Federal Government of Nigeria and Benue state, particularly regarding adopting the RUGA policy. This observation was noted and assessed by this study. The results show the markedly low and dissenting relationship between the two levels of government that are expected to be drivers of the policy agenda.

The study found that the level of support by the host communities had a significantly low effect on the implementation of the RUGA policy in the study. Apikins (2020) noted that the low level of support was expected because the perception of RUGA policy is preconceived as an existential threat to the land and farming as the occupation of the host communities. Adekola et al. (2022) affirmed that the preconceived dissatisfaction occasioned the low effect of the RUGA policy on the indigenous people of Benue state.

4 | CONCLUSION

An examination of host communities' resistance to the RUGA settlement policy has been done in the context of prevalent top-down approaches that disenfranchise the local population. Therefore, developing an integrated governance structure that uses a bottom-up rather than a top-down conflict resolution strategy is imperative. Furthermore, representatives of communities must engage in conflict resolution programs to build a robust response to herders-farmers conflict in the region. In Benue state, however, communities' resistance has confirmed the relevance and necessity of multi-level governance and engaging community members in government policies on conflict resolution, as these policies profoundly impact their lives. This article demonstrates that communities' resistance dramatically influenced the failure of the RUGA settlement initiative. Therefore, the paper recommends that the inclusion of communities and relevant stakeholders can be instrumental in developing and managing robust programs tailored to communities' needs.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares there is no potential conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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