

Imperatives of Public Relations in Policy Formulation and Implementation: A Study of the Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law

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Abstract

This study underscores the imperatives of public relations strategies in policy formulation and implementation with focus on the Taraba State open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law. It contends that public relations is an important tool for enhancing positive perception and acceptance of public policies. Descriptive research design is adopted with survey as method of data collection. 399 copies of questionnaire were administered on residents of Taraba State. Findings indicate that even though the Taraba State government applied public relations strategies in the formulation and implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law, they were not adequately applied. The study then concludes that the applicability of public relations strategies is key for the success of government or organization's policies and programmes, and that poor application of public relations in the case of the Taraba State anti-open grazing law led to the failure of the law in addressing cases of hostilities between herders and farmers. It then recommends that the government should embark on aggressive awareness campaign about the law using various public relations strategies such as celebrity endorsement, stakeholders' meetings, press releases, jingles, media chats and town hall meetings to canvass for public acceptance of the Law.

Keywords: Public Relations, Policy Formulation and Implementation, Open Grazing Prohibition Law, Taraba State.

Introduction:

The importance of Public Relations in policy formulation and implementation cannot be overemphasized. Public Relations has been a potent tool in the promotion of mutual understanding, healthy relationships and individual commitment to the attainment of organizational goals and programmes. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) in Kalu, Mma and Ejike (2015) have opined that public relations is one of the primary marketing communication tools widely used to create awareness, build relationships and achieve sales or adoption of views, products or services. Over the years many organizations and

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government have identified public relations as a tool in creating awareness, attracting positive changes and ensuring their credibility and good image before their publics. Nigeria's quest for sustainable development needs the application of public relations in her policy formulation and implementation given the country's diversity and the growing mutual suspicion orchestrated by the growing trend of fake news and hate speech occasioned by the uncensored new media.

Aggressive use of public relations by government and public institutions will, therefore, improve the level of awareness and buy-in the commitment of relevant stakeholders especially in the formulation and implementation of new policies. One of such policies which needs the application of public relations to ensure its success is the recent banning of open grazing by some states in the country. The application of public relations strategies has become even more necessary in this regard because open grazing is a culture that is associated with some group of people in the north especially the nomadic Fulani grazers. Since open grazing has been with them for a long time, a sudden change in the practice without adequate application of public relations strategies is likely to attract some resistance, because naturally, people do not accept change so easily.

Livestock or animal farming has been one of Nigeria's major revenue contributors. The sector has employed many in its value-chain and its ranked high in terms of contributing to Nigeria's GDP. For instance, livestock has rich nutritional value because of its rich protein content, the cow dungs serves as fertilizer for farmers and it is also a good source of raw materials for the leather and clothing industry.

Nigeria, the largest Black Country on earth has undergone some changes since independence in 1960. From a population of barely 40 million people when the country gained her independence Nigeria's population is said to have grown geometrically, putting her at an estimated over 200 million in 2019. Studies have shown that there were cattle routes and grazing reserves that were created in the 1950s and 60s which are no more in existence because of the growing population. The taking over of these cattle routes and grazing reserves as a result of population increase and the continue search for greener lands for grazing by cattle herders and other factors have led to violent clashes between herders and farmers in recent times. Others have argued that desertification and increase in population have driven pastoralists to move down south in search of greener pasture for their animals especially during the dry season. The pastoralists in the process of their movement do encroach on farmlands that were hitherto left uncultivated for natural regeneration of the soil nutrients.

These violent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria and the middle belt, in particular, have claimed thousands of lives and property worth billions of Naira. The conflict has exacted a heavy humanitarian toll with tens of thousands displaced. Some estimates suggest that about 2,500 people were killed across the country in 2016 – a toll higher than that caused by the Boko Haram insurgency in the same period. In Benue alone, Governor Samuel Ortom, as reported in the PUNCH Newspaper edition of July 6, 2017 was quoted as saying more than 1,878 people were killed between 2014 and 2016 and tens of thousands also displaced. From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in

Kaduna, Benue and Plateau States, while scores of others were displaced in Taraba State according to the report.

In the absence of any arrangement like Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, most of these displaced people seek shelter in other poor rural communities and public primary schools. One of these sad scenes is the camp at Daudu along the Maklurdi-Lafia road, in Guma Local Government area of Benue State. One of the consequences of this raging conflict is mass migration from rural to urban centres by local residents who consider urban centres as a safe haven. For women and girls, the impact is more severe. Relatives of men killed in the violence often evict widows from their farmlands. Moreover, post-conflict economic and social disenfranchisement render women and girls even more vulnerable to sexual and economic harassment. This was the case of a 10- year old girl repeatedly raped by a man at an Internally Displaced Person's camp in Makurdi who gave birth as reported in the Punch Newspaper of August 7, 2019.

According to the International Crisis Group (2017), the economic toll has also been huge. Findings from a study earlier conducted by the group in 2015 revealed that the federal government was losing \$13.7 billion in revenue annually because of herder-farmer conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states. The study found out that on average, these four States lost 47 percent of their internally-generated revenues. In March 2017, Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom stated that attacks by herders had cost his State N95 billion (about \$634 million at that time) between 2012 and 2014.

Communities and households also pay a heavy price. For instance, Agatu communities in Benue State reportedly said they lost N65 billion in properties (\$204 million) during the early 2016 herdsman attacks. The loss of large cattle herds (cattle rustling) and crops in the crisis have been reported. It is important to note here that conflicts between nomads and sedentary farmers date back to decades, they only increase or decrease in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental and other factors.

According to the International Crisis Group (2017), historically, relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. They lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship with herders' cattle fertilizing the farmers' land in exchange for grazing rights. But tensions have grown over the past decade, with increasingly violent flare-ups spreading throughout central and southern Nigerian States; with incidents occurring in at least 22 of the country's 36 states. According to one report, in 2016 over 2,000 people were killed and tens of thousands displaced in Benue and Kaduna States alone.

The spread of these conflicts into southern states between 2016 and 2017 and now kidnapping in the region linked to herdsman is aggravating the already fragile relations among the country's major regional, ethnic and religious groups. The south's majority Christian communities perceive the influx of predominantly Fulani Muslim herders, portray in some narratives as an 'Islamisation force' a deliberate expansion of Jihad (because herders are mostly Fulani), thereby lending an ethnic and religious dimension to the crisis. Some people in the southern part of the country have accused President Muhammadu Buhari of deliberately failing to stop herder aggression in the country, pointing to his pastoral Fulani

background and his position as life patron of the Miyetti-Allah Cattle Breeders' Association of Nigeria, (MACBAN), to cement their argument. Whether this is true or not, the suspicion is now in the public domain and subject of mix interpretation.

The farmer/herder crisis in Nigeria has got the attention of the international community with President Donald Trump and other world leaders condemning the crisis. In 2015 for instance, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), which is published by Sidney, an Australia based Institute for Economics and Peace, published in the Independent Newspaper of Wednesday November 18, 2015 labeled Fulani herdsmen as the fourth deadliest global terror organization after Boko Haram, the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and Al-Shabab in Somalia. On the threat posed to peace by these conflicts, the International Crisis Group (ICG) in their September, 2017 edition opined that violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's security and stability. With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast.

The report noted that conflicts in Nigeria particularly herder's attacks on farming communities, have spawned dangerous political and religious conspiracy theories in Nigeria. One is that the attacks are perceived as part of a longer-term Fulani plot to displace indigenous populations and seize their lands. Among Christian communities, herder attacks are widely seen as a subtle form of jihad. The Sultan of Sokoto, Mohammed Sa'ad Abubakar III, spiritual head of the Nigerian Muslims and a prominent Fulani, has repeatedly stressed that Fulani herders who kill should be prosecuted as criminals and even terrorists, but many remain unconvinced in a country with deep inter-faith suspicions. Communities in the middle belt and south have formed self-defense vigilante groups, some of who allegedly rustle cows belonging to the herders in reprisals.

Efforts to curb the unfortunate crisis led to some states government including Ekiti, Benue, and Taraba enacting open grazing prohibition law. The enactment of some of these laws was met with resistance, largely because of lack of adequate sensitization and involvement of key stakeholder. Hopkins (2015) in (Kalu and Ejike 2015) averred that government can effectively use public relations to increase dialogue with the citizens on policy matters and to influence, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics. This implies that the use of public relations in the day to day running of government business is very important to a government that wants to succeed.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria as a country especially in the last two decades since the return to democratic rule in 1999 has witnessed a lot of policy failures blamed largely on corruption, non-involvement of the target population at the planning stage and poor or non-application of public relations strategies in the formulation and implementation of policies. Chiakaan and Agaku (2014) have observed that no development programme, no matter how beautiful it is designed, can succeed if it does not involve the participation of the social group or people it is meant for.

Chiakaan and Agaku have gone further to reveal that involving the people in a development project is what is referred to as participatory development.

This study agrees with Chiakaan and Agaku and noted that visible government policies in the past two decades such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the 7-Point Agenda, Nigeria Vision 20:2020, YouWiN, N-Power, the Rescue Mission in Taraba State among others appeared not to have yielded the desired results largely on the account of perceived poor application of public relations approaches or strategies. This study, therefore, investigates the applicability of public relations in the formulation and implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017 by the Taraba State Government.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to demonstrate how public relations can be effectively employed by government for effective mobilization and implementation of programmes. Specifically, the study is set to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To find out whether the Taraba State Government recognized and applied public relations in the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law.
- ii. To unravel the public relations strategies by the Taraba State Government in the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law.
- iii. To determine how effective, the Taraba State Government was in the application of public relations strategies in the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition Ranches Establishment Law
- iv. To determine the success or failure of the Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law,

Conceptual Overview

Public Relations: There are many definitions of public relations. One of them is the one provided by Black (1989) in Chiakaan and Chile (2015, p.5), which defines public relations as “the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information.” Chiakaan and Chile (2015) also cite the definition of public relations offered by experts of public relations who gathered in the city of Mexico in 1978, the definition is popularly referred to as the Mexican Statement; it defines public relations as the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization’s leadership, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization and the public interest.” This implies that many activities are carried out by public relations and such activities are aimed at benefiting both an organization and its publics. Public relations is key in the day to day running of organisations as it helps organizations to relate well with their public. The Public Relations Society of America in its official statement issued on 6th November 1982 as cited by Chiakaan and Chile (2015, p.11) states that:

Public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and functions more effectively among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony. Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society, such as voluntary institutions. To achieve their goals, such institutions must develop an effective relationship with many different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders and other institutions and with society at large.

Kotler and Armstrong (2012) opine that public relations facilitate the building of good relations with a company's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and events relating to such a company. Grunig and Dozier (2002) in Kalu and Ejike (2015) have added that public relations contribution is evident in building quality, long-lasting relationships with strategic stakeholders. For Ajala (1993) public relations involves getting in contact with relevant target publics and convincing them of the benefits of a particular argument, giving them reasons why they should support particular issues and causes or accept an organization's proposals on public issues.

Policy Formulation: According to an EU funded Research project in the transport sector (2003), policy formulation has to do with the course of action adopted by a person or government. Policy formulation stands at the top of the planning process. It is a strategic planning process leading to a general concept, usually referred to as the Master plan. It includes a set of measures aimed at the future development of a project. In policy formulation, a consensus has to be found on which scenario or group of measures out of different scenarios and bundles of measures that are apt to fulfill the intended goals in the best way. This overall concept normally is a legally-binding framework for more detailed plans and concepts for a longer period of time.

Policy Implementation: Policy implementation has to do with the fulfillment of a course of action or master plan discussed above. Policy implementation encloses all actions that take place during the realisation of a plan such as; budgeting, construction of infrastructure and the undertaking of necessary institutional changes for policy measures (EU funded research project in the transport sector 2003). Policy implementation also comprises the analysis of social and political acceptability of measures and the sensibility of citizens, politicians, journalists, and experts on the objectives of a programme or project before, during and after implementation of such measures. Public awareness and information may help to enhance the acceptability of initiated actions or plans.

Open Grazing Prohibition Law: It is a law banning grazing of animals in the public and confining them to designated areas called ranches. This law became popular in Nigeria in the wake of herder/farmer clashes in parts of the country which claimed the lives of thousands of people, dozens maimed, scores displaced and property worth billions of Naira destroyed from 2012 to date. So, far Ekiti, Benue and Taraba States have enacted the law. The Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law NO: 7 of 2017 was enacted to prohibit open grazing of animals which was said to be a major factor in the herder/farmer

crisis in the state. According to section 3 of the law, it was aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- a) Promote the modern techniques of animal husbandry, particularly the rearing of livestock;
- b) To promote job and investment opportunities in livestock farming as well as expand the value chain;
- c) To prevent destruction of farm crops and community pond, settlement and property by the open grazing of livestock;
- d) To prevent clashes between herders and farmers;
- e) To regulate and support the growth of livestock farming and manage the environmental impact of open livestock grazing;
- f) To prevent, control and manage the spread of disease as well as to ease the implementation of the policy that will enhance the production of a high and healthy breed of livestock both for the local and export markets;
- g) To create a more robust method of addressing the rising livestock density, particularly cattle, in an efficient manner.
- h) To promote greater productivity and profitability in the livestock business;
- i) To promote and enhance the production of high and healthier breeds of cattle, sheep, goats, horses and camels for both the local and export markets;
- j) To promote the establishment of international best practices in the dairy and beef industry.

As lofty as the objectives of the law are, there was public outcry especially among the Fulani cattle grazers who felt there was more to the law than meet the eye. Aggressive use of public relations strategies by government was then required to change the negative perception of some section of the public about the law. The Miyetti Allah group who represented the interest of the cattle grazers in the state openly condemned the government for coming out with an “Anti-Fulani” law, saying the law was not implementable. Citing section 25 of the law the Fulani cattle grazers’ umbrella group said the provisions of section 25 were too stiff and targeted at their business. Section 25 says; any person who openly grazes livestock or moves livestock other than in a motor vehicle without permit commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to:

- a) For any first offender to a fine not exceeding N50,000:00 or to imprisonment of 1 year;
- b) For any subsequent offences to a fine not less than N1, 000,000:00 or to imprisonment and not exceeding two years.

(2) Where any person openly grazes livestock or moves livestock other than in a vehicle without permit and causes damage to farm crops or settlement, pollutes any community pond or causes damage to property, such a person in addition to the provisions of subsection (1) shall pay compensation to any person whose farm or settlement or property has been damaged.

Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter also criticizes section 23 of the law which gives the Special Marshal established by the law the power to

arrest and detain with or without the assistance of security agencies any person or group of person (s) or their livestock engaged in open grazing or movement without permit. They faulted that given them such powers would endanger the lives and business of cattle grazers as the Marshall were not adequately trained and might fall into the temptation of doing the biddings of some people. These among other issues heightened suspicion and the controversy that surrounded the law in the state.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the transfer process model. The transfer process model of public relations formulated by Frank Jefkins in 1989 basically seeks to explain the function of public relations as converting four negative things towards an organization into four positive ones (Chiakaan 2015).

Negative

Hostility
Prejudice
Apathy
Ignorance

Positive

Sympathy
Acceptance
Interest
Knowledge

Source: *Jefkins (1984) Public Relations: Framework: London: Pearson Education Ltd.*

This model as illustrated above holds that the aim of public relations is to change the hostile attitudes the public of an organization may have towards it to sympathy. Where they develop a prejudice against an organization; it is still the duty of public relations to change it. The prejudice, according to Jefkins (1998) in Chiakaan (2015) may be caused by parental, educational, religious, social or class influences, environmental or just plain misunderstanding. Where this is the situation according to the model, the public of an organization may develop hatred or spirit of rejection against the product or services of that organization. The major concern of public relations, in this regard, is to change the prejudice to acceptance. Where people hold prejudice against an organization, they will equally develop apathy against its activities. The concern of public relations is to make people to have interest in the organization's activities, products and services.

The model further states that sometimes the negative attitude of the public of an organization towards it, may be as a result of their ignorance about its activities. Where this is the situation, it is the responsibility of public relations to change the ignorance to knowledge. The transfer process model is relevant to this study. Its relevance lies in the fact that since the cattle grazers in Taraba State have a negative attitude or perception towards the open grazing prohibition law, it is believed that proper management of public relations can help in changing their negative about the law to a positive one. Of course, open grazing has been a long existing practice among cattle grazers in Nigeria and other African countries. This

implies that replacing it with a new one will need adequate information so that it cannot be resisted but rather accepted which is the crux of the transfer process model.

Literature Review

Egwuonwu, Kabuoh, and Ajike (2015) carried out a study entitled: Imperatives of Public Relations Strategies and Nigeria Vision 20:20:20 Development Goals. The study adopted descriptive survey design and also reviewed the concept and strategies of public relations as they apply to Nigeria's prevailing issues of sustainable development. Findings from the study showed that public relations involve dialogic communication which fosters awareness creation, building of good and lasting relationships with various publics, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and events relating to a given cause or an organization. The study then recommended the application of public relations strategies such as the implementation of stakeholder meetings, sponsorships, celebrity endorsement, and buzz among others to improve the level of awareness towards the realization of the goals of Nigeria Vision 20:20:20.

In another related study, Chiaakaan, Pwashikai, Yough, and Nweze (2019) demonstrated that the clashes between herders and farmers were as a result of negligence by the government in sensitizing citizens towards achieving a common goal of tolerating each other. The study concluded by stating clearly that public relations was neglected in the management of the conflict and making the herders realise and accept the modern way of livestock management. Adequate sensitisation and enlightenment through diverse public relations approaches communicatively inclined was therefore, recommended by the study.

Kambaho Narasi Anyijuk (2014) analyze the practice of public relations activities in the operations of Microfinance Support Centre limited and other government development programmes as well as to explore how public relations could be integrated into the management structures of Microfinance Support Centre limited and other government entities. Survey method was employed and data were collected through questionnaire and interview. Data collected were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Findings majorly revealed that public relations strategies such as sponsorship, organised events, rallies, town hall meetings, press releases, publicity, press conferences, social marketing and many others were employed by the Microfinance centre in mobilising support for its programmes. The study concluded that the micro-finance support centre was successful in its objectives because of sound application of public relations. The study, therefore, recommended that public relations should never be left behind in the planning and execution of public policies or programmes by any government establishment.

Asemah (2011) examine how public relations strategies could be used to achieve the millennium developments goals. The study which employed qualitative research design collected data from secondary sources. Anchored on two-way symmetric model and the persuasion theories, the study concluded that public relations was relevant in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The study then recommended among other things that there was urgent need for the coordinators of the MDGs to apply public relations strategies in the management of activities towards the attainment of the Millennium

Development Goals and that public relations managers should constantly embark on research in order to understand current public sentiments regarding the policies of the government as well as constantly carry out public relations activities so as to win the goodwill of the publics. The study is equally very relevant here because it shows the importance of public relations strategies in winning public goodwill towards a programme. If such strategies are adopted and applied by the Taraba State Government in the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law, it will help in changing the perception of the people about the law.

Research Methodology

This study employed descriptive research design with survey as the method of data collection. Three hundred and ninety-nine (399) respondents were sampled using Taro Yamane's sampling formula. The respondents were sampled from the population of Taraba State based on the 2006 National Population Census. Given that a good number of the respondents were local farmers and herders and largely illiterates, the researchers took the pain to read out the questionnaire for them in Hausa language which is commonly understood and spoken among the people of Taraba and their answers were ticked accordingly. In selecting the respondents, the researchers employed a multi-stage sampling approach. Accordingly, stratified, random and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents across the three zones of the state.

Questionnaire was the research instrument used in the study. Thus, 399 copies of the questionnaire were administered on respondents in Wukari, Bali and Jalingo Local Government Areas representing the Southern, Central and Northern zones respectively. One hundred and thirty-three (133) respondents were purposively sampled from each of the selected Local Government Areas, amounting to a total of three hundred and ninety-nine. Three research assistants were employed to help in the collection of data which lasted for three days. At the end of the exercise, only 392 (99.2) copies of the administered questionnaire were collected or returned for analysis. The remaining seven (7) copies of the questionnaire representing (1.8%) were lost. The analysis of the data was therefore, based on the 392 collected questionnaire.

Data presentation and analysis

The data collected is hereby presented, analysed and discussed below.

Table 1: Awareness about Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law

Response option	Frequency	Percentage
I was fully aware	Nil	Nil
I was moderately aware	36	9.2%
I was not aware	349	89.0%
No comment	7	1.8
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

The data on Table 1 above show respondents' awareness on the application of public relations strategies by the Taraba State government in the planning and implementation of the Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law. Data indicate that 349 (89%) were not aware, 36 (9.2%) respondents were aware and 7 (1.8%) respondents had no comment. This implies that people were not aware of the application of public relations by the Taraba State government in the planning and implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law.

Table 2: Awareness about the public relations strategies employed by the Taraba State government in the implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law

Response option	Frequency	Percentage
Stakeholders meetings	42	10.7
Jingles and press releases	8	2.0
flyers and bill boards	5	1.3
All of the above	7	1.8
None of the above	330	84.2
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Table 2 is concerned with determining the public relations strategies which the Taraba State government applied in the planning and implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law. In this regard, 42 (10.7%) of the sampled respondents identified stakeholders' meetings, 8 (2.0%) identified jingles and press releases, 5 (1.3%) mentioned flyers and bill boards, while 7 (1.8%) said the government employed the strategies earlier identified by the other respondents. Unfortunately, 330 (84.2%) said the government did not apply any of the earlier public relations strategies. This means that government's application of public relations was poor and the strategies inadequate.

Table 3: Effectiveness and adequacy of public relations strategies employed by the Taraba State government in changing the negative perception of people about the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law

Response option	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	58	14.8%
Effective	47	12%
Not effective	287	73.2%
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Table 3 was concerned with the effectiveness and adequacy of public relations strategies employed by the Taraba State government in changing the negative perception of people about the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law. In this regard, 58 (14.8%) respondents said the strategies were very effective, 47 (12%) respondents agreed that the strategies were effective while 287 (73.2%) respondents unfortunately said the strategies

were not effective. This means that the public relations strategies employed by government were not good or effective. This implies that the public relations strategies adopted by the state government were not adequate or effective enough in changing the negative perception of the people about the law.

Table 4. Success of the of the Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law

Response option	Frequency	Percentage
Very Successful	18	4.6%
Successful	28	7.1%
Not successful	332	84.7%
Don't know	14	3.6%
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Data from Table 4 above indicate that the public relations strategies employed by the government were not successful in changing the perception of the people about the law. 18 (4.6%) respondents said the public relations strategies were very successful. 28 (7.1%) respondents admitted the strategies were successful. Unfortunately, 332 (84.7%) respondents believed that the strategies were not successful, while 14 (3.6%) respondents said they don't know whether the strategies were successful or not.

Discussion of findings

This study was carried out to determine the application of public relations strategies by the Taraba State government in the planning and execution of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law. Findings from this study have indicated that even though the Taraba State government applied public relations strategies in the formulation and implementation of Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law, they were not adequately applied. This is evidenced from the findings on Table 1 where 349 (89.0%) respondents said they were not aware of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law. Inadequate application of public relations strategies by the Taraba State government in the planning and execution of the new grazing law had rendered the strategies very ineffective as shown in Table 3 where 287 (73.2%) respondents said the strategies were ineffective. This significantly indicated that the government did not adequately and effectively utilized public relations. The Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment law had, therefore, failed woefully as revealed by 332 (84.7) respondents in Table 4.

Public relations is majorly concerned with communicating government or organizational activities to relevant stakeholders so as to engender understanding and harmony between them. Chiakaan (2016) has revealed that public relations is a tool of relationships management. Haywood (1984) in Chiakaan (2016) has added support to the use of public relations by organisations when he states that organisations that want to succeed should never hesitate to apply public relations.

From the findings above, it will not be out of place to state here that many people in the state were not adequately informed and enlightened about the law and the role they were expected to play in order to ensure its smooth and successful implementation. This development is against the standard practice canvassed by Hopkins (2015) and Stromback and Kiousis (2011) as cited in Graham and Avery (2013), who submitted that government can effectively use public relations to increase dialogue with the citizens on policy matters and to influence, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics.

Government however, appeared to be aware of the powers of public relations in enabling it to succeed in the implementation of the new grazing policy. This is attested to by data in Table 2 where respondents have identified stakeholders' meetings, jingles and press releases, flyers and bill boards. Unfortunately, the application of these public relations strategies seemed to be highly inadequate. Public relations and its strategies are sustainable. They are not carried out in a day or for a short period of time as attested to by Black (1989) acknowledged by Chiakaan (2016:17) who defines public relations as "the deliberate, planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics." This poor application of public relations by the government made the law to fail woefully in achieving its goal of preventing open grazing and stopping hostilities between herders and farmers in the state.

Conclusion

This study is concerned with use of public relations strategies by the Taraba State government to ensure the successful planning and implementation of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law. Findings from the study have shown that the Taraba State Government did not make use of adequate public relations strategies in creating awareness about the law. The study then concludes that the applicability of public relations strategies is key for the success of government or organization's policies and programmes. Till date, many people in Taraba State, according to the findings, are not aware of the law and its importance because adequate information was not given about it. What is out there in the public domain is that the law is politically motivated and targeted at a selected group of people. Even those that know about it are yet to be fully aware of the roles expected of them to play towards its successful implementation.

Recommendations

Drawing from the conclusion, the study recommends that the Taraba State government should;

- a. Embark on aggressive awareness campaign about the law using various public relations strategies such as celebrity endorsement, stakeholders' meetings, press releases, jingles, media chats, town hall meetings etc.
- b. Show enough commitment towards the implementation of the law by establishing pilot ranches to enable animal grazers to gain experience on the workings of ranches which is, for now, alien to them.

- c. Reach out to the local people across the various local government councils in the state for the purposes of communication exchanges so as to harvest more opinions and allow the citizenry to feel a sense of ownership of the law.
- d. Embark on aggressive media campaign with messages packaged in the local languages of the people on the benefits of ranches so as to engender the commitment of the people towards the successful implementation of the law.
- e. Public relations is not bias, it does not show selfishness, it is neutral. This implies that the government should be seen by all parties affected by the law to be impartial and not taking side. Stakeholders should actually see the law as beneficial to all of them and this can make them to embrace it and allow it to operate.

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