

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA AND CHANGE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2017 ANTI-OPEN GRAZING LAW IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examined the challenges of implementing Benue State's Anti-Open Grazing Law and its socio-economic impact on people and communities in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs). The study focused on awareness of the law, perceived implementation challenges, and socio-economic impacts on livelihoods, security, displacement and community relations. Enacted in 2017 to prohibit open grazing and promote ranching, the law was designed to curb farmer-herder violence, protect farmlands, enhance food security, and modernise livestock production. However, persistent conflict, displacement and livelihood losses suggest a gap between policy intention and outcomes. Guided by Policy Implementation Theory, the study interrogated how institutional capacity, communication practices and stakeholder responses shape implementation and its effects on everyday life in affected communities. A mixed-methods design was adopted. Quantitatively, structured questionnaires were administered to 400 sampled residents of Agatu, Guma and Kwande LGAs, of which 318 were correctly completed and analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitatively, Focus Group Discussions, Oral Interviews and Key Informant Interviews were conducted with farmers, herders, traditional rulers, community members, policy implementers and media practitioners. Findings reveal substantial scepticism about the effectiveness of implementation: although 47.2% of respondents believe the law is being enforced to some degree, 52.8% somewhat or strongly doubt government effectiveness. Communication emerges as a major constraint; 40.9% are satisfied with government communication on the law, 37.1% are dissatisfied, and 22.0% are neutral, indicating uneven, often inadequate sensitisation. Qualitative evidence shows that enforcement is perceived as "mixed" and irregular, with

continuing tensions, displacement and livelihood disruption. Farmers report only partial protection of land, while herders feel pushed out and insufficiently supported to transition to ranching. The study concluded that implementation weaknesses—limited institutional capacity, inconsistent enforcement, poor communication and inadequate livelihood support—have constrained the law’s ability to deliver its intended socio-economic benefits. It recommended strengthening enforcement capacity and coordination, adopting comprehensive multilingual communication strategies, providing targeted support for both farmers and herders, institutionalising participatory monitoring mechanisms, and promoting conflict-sensitive, peace-oriented media practice.

Keywords: Anti-Open Grazing Law, Farmer–herder violence, Policy Implementation Theory, Socio-economic Impact, Institutional capacity

Introduction

The farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria has evolved from localised quarrels over land and water into a prolonged humanitarian, security, and development crisis, with Benue State at its core. Population growth, climate change, desertification, and weak enforcement of land-use regulations have intensified competition over land and water, pushing pastoralists further south in search of grazing resources (Okpara & Onwuchekwa, 2022; Nwankwo, 2022). As migratory routes intersect with densely settled farming communities in the North-Central region, everyday encounters over crops, farmland, and water increasingly escalate into violence. Scholars argue that the conflict now encompasses complex socio-economic, environmental, and governance dimensions, far beyond mere occupational disputes between farmers and herders (Kwaja & Bukola, 2017; Bwala & Ogirima, 2020).

Benue State, located in North-Central Nigeria with Makurdi as its capital, is predominantly agrarian, with over 75% of the labour force engaged in farming (<https://benueacresal.ng>). It produces major staples, including yams, rice, cassava, maize, beans, and soybeans, making it central to national food security. Yet this agricultural strength has also made Benue a major flashpoint in the farmer–herder crisis. Repeated attacks by armed herders have resulted in large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with tens of thousands forced into camps across Guma, Makurdi, and Logo Local Government Areas. Economic losses run into tens of billions of naira, while thousands of lives have been lost (Daga, 2018). The cumulative effect is the erosion of rural livelihoods, the breakdown of social cohesion, and the heightened vulnerability of already poor communities, turning a resource conflict into a broader human security and development emergency.

In response, the Benue State Government enacted the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in 2017, widely known as the Anti-Open Grazing Law. The law bans open rearing and grazing of livestock and promotes ranches as the acceptable system of livestock management. Its core objectives are to prevent the destruction of farms and rural infrastructure by uncontrolled livestock movements, reduce violent clashes, promote environmental sustainability through controlled grazing, and safeguard agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. The law thus seeks not only to protect lives and farmlands, but also to stabilise the rural economy, support land-use planning, and lay foundations for a more modern livestock sector.

However, a progressive legal framework alone does not guarantee peace or socio-economic recovery. Implementation of the Anti-Open Grazing Law has faced multiple challenges that call its effectiveness into question. Enforcement capacity is constrained by limited resources, difficult terrain, and security risks facing the Special Livestock Task Force. Governance gaps exist in land administration, ranch permit issuance, environmental impact assessments, and coordination among security agencies. Many herders, dependent on mobile grazing, view the law as a direct attack on their livelihoods and identity, while some political and ethnic actors portray it as discriminatory, fuelling resistance, non-compliance, and further tension (International Crisis Group, 2017; Okeke, 2020; Odoh&Chilaka, 2021). These bottlenecks weaken deterrence and create unintended socio-economic consequences, including continued displacement, reduced farm output, and an atmosphere of insecurity that discourages investment.

The socio-economic impact of these implementation challenges is felt sharply at the community level. Farmers still experience crop losses and fear of attack, limiting access to farmland and contributing to food insecurity. Displaced households grapple with the loss of assets, disrupted schooling, health risks in overcrowded camps, and deepening poverty. Local markets and agricultural value chains are disrupted, while rising youth unemployment and frustration increase vulnerability to recruitment into violent groups. Pastoralist communities face shrinking grazing options, the criminalisation of mobility, and social stigma, which can deepen marginalisation and push some into illicit or violent coping strategies. The law therefore sits at the intersection of security, livelihoods, and social relations, producing complex and sometimes contradictory outcomes for different groups.

Existing literature on farmer–herder conflict and anti-open-grazing policies in Nigeria has examined causes, consequences, and policy tools such as grazing bans, reserves, and corridors (Aliyu, 2015; Ekpendu, 2020; Okpara & Onwuchekwa, 2022; Nwankwo, 2022), as well as media framing and communication strategies (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Odiegwu-Enwerem et al., 2021; Sholola et al., 2025; Modeyin et al., 2025). Other works discuss the legal and political dimensions of anti-open-grazing laws in various states (Azomani & Gasiokwu, 2021). Yet, there remains limited, context-specific analysis of the practical challenges of implementing the Benue State law and how these challenges translate into socio-economic outcomes across different LGAs. Studies focusing on Benue often address broader conflict dynamics or peace journalism in specific communities, without systematically linking structural implementation gaps—such as weak institutional capacity, politicisation, resistance, or lack of inclusive participation—to everyday livelihoods, social cohesion, and perceptions of legitimacy.

Against this background, the seminar on “Challenges faced in the Implementation of Benue State’s Anti-Open Grazing Law and Its Socio-Economic Impact on People and Communities” aims to examine how the law operates in practice, identify key administrative, political, security, and socio-cultural obstacles, and assess how these obstacles shape the socio-economic conditions of farmers, herders, and rural communities.

Media and Change Communication Strategies

Distinctively, Media comprise of the channels and platforms used to transmit ideas, information, and knowledge, ranging from traditional forms such as drums and meetings to modern mass media like radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and digital platforms (Akanmu & Akinsanya, 2004; Bonney, 2013). These channels enable messages to reach large, diverse audiences and are increasingly deployed for both corporate and personal objectives (Mafé& Blas, 2008). Mass media powerfully shape thoughts, emotions, and behaviours (Petty et al., 2009) and contribute to socialisation, particularly among youth, influencing lifestyle, sexuality, fashion, peer relations, and substance use (Zastrow et al., 2019).

A key concept in understanding media influence is framing—the way issues are selected, emphasised, and organised in news and commentary. By highlighting certain elements and downplaying others, media frames shape how the public interprets causes, responsibilities, and solutions. In conflicts such as farmer–herder clashes and debates around the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law, media may frame events as ethnic conflict, resource competition, climate-induced migration, or a national security threat, each with distinct implications for public opinion and policy (Akpan et al., 2013; Adekunle, 2020, 2023).

The language and imagery used—terms such as “invasion,” “massacre,” “defence,” or “retaliation”—can evoke emotional responses and construct one group as the aggressor and another as the victim (Ekwueme & Okoro, 2022; Idahosa & Agbo, 2021). Consequently, the media can escalate or de-escalate tensions, deepen divisions, or foster dialogue (Shehu, 2017; Ogunyemi, 2023). Given this influence, scholars argue that the media bear a responsibility to avoid sensationalism and ethnic bias, and instead provide balanced, contextualised reporting that supports informed, peaceful engagement with complex issues (Adebayo, 2021; Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022).

Communication is a fundamental human process through which individuals and groups create meaning, share ideas, and coordinate action. It involves at least a sender, a message, a channel, and a receiver, as highlighted in classical models of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Berlo’s (1960) SMCR model extends this by emphasising the communication skills, attitudes, knowledge, and social systems of both the source and the receiver, showing that effectiveness depends not only on transmitting information but also on the competencies and conditions surrounding the interaction.

Schramm (1971) proposed an interactive model that emphasises feedback and a shared “field of experience,” arguing that communication is successful only when the receiver’s interpretation approximates the sender’s intention. Contextual factors—such as place, medium, culture, and emotion—also shape meaning. Hall’s (1959, 1976) distinction between high- and low-context cultures and Stuart Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model demonstrate that cultural background and ideology significantly influence how messages are interpreted.

Non-verbal communication is equally central. Knapp and Hall (2014) note that facial expressions, gestures, posture, and tone of voice can carry more weight than spoken words, deeply affecting interpersonal interaction. Watzlawick et al. (1967) underscore the irreversibility of communication, reinforcing the need for accuracy and intention.

Beyond interpersonal exchanges, communication is the vehicle through which societies transmit values, norms, and culture, shaping collective identities and social action (Hall, 1980). In personal and organisational contexts, effective communication underpins decision-making, relationship-building, conflict resolution, leadership, collaboration, and the achievement of strategic goals (Adler & Rodman, 2012). Thus, communication is indispensable to both individual development and social organisation.

Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law and Its Objectives

The Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law, formally known as the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017, is a legislative instrument enacted to regulate livestock production and address the persistent farmer–herder crisis in the state. The law prohibits open rearing and grazing of livestock within Benue territory and promotes a transition to ranching as the acceptable mode of animal husbandry. Conceptually, the law serves as both a conflict-management device and a rural development strategy, seeking to curb violence, safeguard farmlands, and modernise the livestock sector simultaneously (International Crisis Group, 2017; Okeke, 2020). Its provisions respond to years of destruction of crop farms, community ponds, settlements, and other rural properties caused by uncontrolled livestock movements, which have undermined agricultural productivity and destabilised local economies.

The objectives of the law can be understood across several dimensions. First, it aims to protect agricultural assets and livelihoods by reducing crop losses and preventing encroachment on farms and water sources. Benue State, often described as Nigeria’s “food basket”, depends heavily on agriculture, with more than three-quarters of its labour force engaged in farming. Recurrent attacks on farmers and farmlands, coupled with crop trampling by roaming cattle, have severely affected production and income (Daga, 2018). By criminalising open grazing and requiring that animals be confined within legally established ranches, the law seeks to create a more predictable environment in which farmers can plant and harvest without constant fear of invasion or violence.

Second, the law has a conflict-mitigation objective. Farmer–herder clashes in Benue and other Middle Belt states have evolved into complex security problems driven by competition for land and water, climate change, and weak governance (Aliyu, 2015; Ekpendu, 2020; Okpara & Onwuchekwa, 2022). By regulating livestock mobility and prescribing clear sanctions for illegal grazing, trespass, and cattle rustling, the law aims to remove one of the immediate triggers of violence—the unregulated movement of herds through cultivated farmland—and to reduce opportunities for spontaneous confrontations. In this sense, it is not merely an agricultural reform but a key part of the state’s internal security architecture, intended to restore law and order in rural communities.

Third, the law serves environmental and public health purposes. Open and overgrazing contribute to soil degradation, loss of vegetation cover, and pollution of rivers and streams. These environmental effects further threaten rural livelihoods and food security (Nyong&Fiki, 2005). The law therefore promotes more controlled and environmentally responsible livestock management practices that align with broader land-use planning and environmental governance objectives. In addition, unregulated livestock movement complicates animal disease surveillance

and increases the risk of transboundary diseases. Through structured ranching, veterinary inspection, and regulated livestock movement, the law aims to support healthier herds and, by extension, the well-being of consumers (Olowu, 2019).

Finally, the law assigns substantial responsibilities to government institutions, communities, and livestock owners, indicating that implementation is conceived as a shared governance project. The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (through its Livestock Department) is mandated to issue ranching permits, conduct environmental impact assessments, and supervise ranch standards. A Special Livestock Task Force, working with the police and judiciary, is empowered to monitor compliance, arrest offenders, and prosecute infractions. At the same time, citizens—farmers, herders, and community leaders—are required to comply with the ban on open grazing, keep animals within authorised ranches, obtain permits, and report violations (Azomani & Gasiokwu, 2021). Through this structure, the law conceptualises conflict reduction, environmental protection, and socio-economic stability as interconnected goals that can be realised when legal regulation, institutional enforcement, and community participation work together.

Socio-Economic Impact on People and Communities

Socio-economic impact refers to the combined social and economic effects that a policy, law, or event has on individuals, households, and communities. In the context of Benue State's Anti-Open Grazing Law, socio-economic impact encompasses changes in livelihoods, income levels, food security, employment, displacement, social relations, and community stability, arising both from the farmer–herder conflict and from the way the law is implemented. The concept highlights that policies designed to reduce violence or protect resources can generate both positive and negative outcomes, depending on implementation quality, the distribution of costs and benefits, and the resilience of affected communities (Aliyu, 2015; Ekpendu, 2020).

For farming communities, the law's intended socio-economic benefits are substantial. Reduced crop destruction and improved security should enable farmers to cultivate larger areas, invest in better seeds and inputs, and enjoy more predictable harvests. Over time, this would raise household incomes, strengthen food supplies for local markets, and support Benue's role as a key food producer. Preventing violent attacks on villages and farmlands is also expected to reduce displacement, allowing families to stay on their land, maintain social networks, and protect their assets. In this sense, effective implementation of the law could create a virtuous cycle of security, investment, productivity, and improved welfare for rural residents.

However, the concept of socio-economic impact also recognises that unintended and uneven consequences frequently arise. Benue has experienced large-scale internal displacement, with tens of thousands of residents forced into IDP camps as a result of farmer–herder violence, even in the post-law period (Daga, 2018). Displaced households lose access to land and livestock, children's schooling is disrupted, and households become dependent on humanitarian assistance or casual labour. Local markets are destabilised as agricultural output falls, food prices become volatile, and trade routes are disrupted. In communities where implementation is inconsistent, farmers may still face intermittent attacks or incursions by armed herders, limiting their willingness to return fully to farming. This mix of partial security gains and persistent vulnerability shapes complex socio-economic realities on the ground.

For pastoralist groups, the socio-economic impact of the law includes restrictions on mobility, livelihood restructuring, and potential marginalisation. Where ranching alternatives are not adequately provided or supported, pastoralists may lose access to traditional grazing routes, water points, and seasonal pastures. The costs of acquiring or leasing land, fencing ranches, purchasing feed, and accessing veterinary services can be prohibitive for small-scale herders. Without targeted support measures, these groups risk impoverishment, indebtedness, or forced migration to other states or countries. Scholars have observed that when pastoralist livelihoods are squeezed by restrictive policies and security operations, some actors may resort to illicit activities or align with armed groups as a survival strategy (Nwankwo, 2022; Agwadu& Ibrahim, 2024).

At the community level, socio-economic impact also encompasses social cohesion, trust, and inter-group relations. Years of violence, displacement, and mutual suspicion between farmers and herders have eroded traditional mechanisms of coexistence and conflict resolution (Adisa, 2011; Bukari&Schareika, 2015). Where the law is perceived as favouring one group and punishing another, it may reinforce perceptions of exclusion and injustice. Conversely, where authorities combine fair enforcement with dialogue, compensation mechanisms, and joint community monitoring, the law can contribute to rebuilding trust and shared responsibility for security. In many Benue communities, church leaders, traditional rulers, youth groups, and civil society organisations have tried to bridge divides by promoting peace education, supporting dialogue, and assisting victims, but their success is often constrained by ongoing insecurity and resource limitations.

Finally, socio-economic impact must be viewed through the lens of long-term development trajectories. Persistent conflict and poorly managed implementation can undermine investment in rural infrastructure, schools, clinics, and markets, thereby limiting prospects for inclusive growth. By contrast, if implementation challenges are addressed and the law delivers sustained security and predictability, Benue could attract new investment in agriculture, agro-processing, and livestock value chains. In that scenario, regulated ranching, improved land management, and strengthened institutions could transform the farmer–herder relationship from a source of crisis into an engine of shared prosperity. Thus, the concept of socio-economic impact underscores that the Anti-Open Grazing Law is not only a security measure; it is a critical determinant of livelihood pathways, social stability, and development prospects for people and communities in Benue State.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Policy Implementation Theory as its guiding theoretical framework for analysing the challenges of implementing Benue State’s Anti-Open Grazing Law and its socio-economic impact. Classical work by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and subsequent contributions by scholars such as Lipsky (1980) argues that the success or failure of a public policy is determined not only at the point of formulation but, more critically, during implementation. Implementation Theory focuses on how decisions made at the top of government are translated into concrete programmes and everyday practices by agencies, frontline officials, and target populations.

From a top-down perspective, policymakers define goals, design instruments, allocate resources, and establish institutions responsible for enforcement. In the case of Benue's Anti-Open Grazing Law, the State House of Assembly enacted the law, the Governor provided executive backing, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources—through the Livestock Department—serves as the principal implementing agency, supported by the Special Livestock Task Force and security services. Implementation Theory raises key questions about whether these institutions have clear mandates, adequate resources, coherent guidelines, and effective coordination mechanisms to carry out their responsibilities. It suggests that vague objectives, fragmented authority, and under-resourced agencies are likely to produce implementation gaps, inconsistency, and limited impact.

From a bottom-up perspective, Implementation Theory emphasises the behaviour of “street-level bureaucrats” and target groups—those who interact directly with citizens and whose day-to-day decisions shape how the law is experienced (Lipsky, 1980). In this seminar's context, such actors include Task Force members, local government officials, police officers, traditional rulers, community leaders, and even IDP camp managers. Their discretionary choices—whether to arrest or warn, how strictly to apply sanctions, how to interpret exemptions, and how to communicate with farmers and herders—determine whether the law is perceived as fair, legitimate, and predictable. Bottom-up approaches also highlight that target groups such as pastoralists and farmers are not passive recipients; they interpret the law in light of their livelihoods, identities, and perceived risks, deciding whether to comply, negotiate, adapt, or resist.

Implementation Theory is particularly useful for linking implementation challenges to socio-economic outcomes. Where institutional capacity is weak, political support is divided, and socio-cultural resistance is strong, the law is likely to be enforced unevenly. This can result in continued violence, displacement, and uncertainty, thereby reducing agricultural production and deepening poverty in affected communities. Conversely, when implementation is supported by clear communication, participatory engagement, and adequate resources, the law is more likely to reduce conflict and create conditions for livelihood recovery and development. In other words, socio-economic impact is not merely a direct result of the law's text; it is mediated by the complex implementation process.

By applying Policy Implementation Theory, the seminar can systematically examine:

- i. How institutional design and capacity shape enforcement of the Anti-Open Grazing Law;
- ii. how frontline actors and communities interpret and respond to the law; and
- iii. how these interactions collectively produce the observed socio-economic conditions in Benue's farming and pastoral communities.

This theoretical perspective thus provides a coherent framework for understanding why the Anti-Open Grazing Law faces implementation challenges and how those challenges translate into concrete effects, positive or negative, on people and communities across the state.

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the challenges encountered in implementing the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law and its socio-economic effects on people and communities. This design is appropriate for a complex policy issue because it generates measurable patterns of perception through survey data while also capturing deeper explanations and lived experiences through interviews and group discussions. Quantitatively, structured questionnaires were administered to residents of Agatu, Guma, and Kwande Local Government Areas (LGAs), focusing on socio-demographic characteristics, awareness of the law, perceived implementation challenges (such as weak enforcement, political interference, inadequate security support, and lack of ranching infrastructure), and socio-economic impacts on farming, trading, displacement, poverty, and community relations. Qualitatively, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Oral Interviews, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with farmers, herders, community members, traditional leaders, policy implementers, and media practitioners to explore how the law is experienced on the ground, the obstacles encountered in enforcement, and how these challenges translate into livelihood losses, insecurity, and wider socio-economic disruption.

The study area is Benue State in north-central Nigeria, with specific attention to Agatu, Guma, and Kwande LGAs. These LGAs were selected because they are among the most affected by farmer–herder conflict and together represent the state's three senatorial districts. Benue's status as Nigeria's "food basket," its heavy reliance on agriculture, and the scale of farmer–herder clashes and displacement make it a critical setting for assessing both implementation challenges and socio-economic outcomes. The target population comprises residents of the three LGAs directly or indirectly affected by the law, including farmers, herders, traders, community members, and leaders. Using projected 2022 figures based on the 2006 National Population Census, the combined population frame is 720,064 persons. Taro Yamane's formula (at 5% precision) produced a sample size of 400 respondents; 318 correctly completed questionnaires were returned and analysed. A purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to deliberately target those knowledgeable about, or directly affected by, the law.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages, to summarise respondent characteristics, identify common implementation challenges, and describe patterns of socio-economic impact. Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed thematically to identify recurring themes, including enforcement gaps, institutional constraints, displacement, economic losses, and changes in community relations. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced the depth, credibility, and robustness of conclusions about how implementation challenges shape socio-economic conditions in the affected communities.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data presented here are drawn from a quantitative survey of 318 respondents and qualitative Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in Agatu, Guma and Kwande LGAs. The tables have been selected because they directly address (a) perceptions of implementation and enforcement and (b) communication gaps and community responses – together indicating the practical challenges of the law and their implications for local people.

Perception of Government Communication on the Anti-Open Grazing Law

Table 1: Respondents' Satisfaction with Government Communication on the Law

Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very satisfied	50	15.7
Somewhat satisfied	80	25.2
Neutral	70	22.0
Somewhat dissatisfied	80	25.2
Very dissatisfied	38	11.9
Total	318	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

According to Table 1, 40.9% of respondents (15.7% very satisfied and 25.2% somewhat satisfied) express satisfaction with how the government communicates information about the Anti-Open Grazing Law. In contrast, 37.1% (25.2% somewhat dissatisfied and 11.9% very dissatisfied) indicate dissatisfaction, while 22.0% remain neutral.

The near balance between satisfaction and dissatisfaction, combined with a sizeable neutral group, suggests that government communication has been uneven and insufficiently engaging. The thesis notes that “nearly 37% of respondents expressing some level of dissatisfaction...highlights a significant gap in effective communication” and that the sizeable neutral group “suggests...a lack of engagement or awareness about the government’s efforts.”

Perception of Effective Implementation and Enforcement

Table 2: Respondents' Belief in Effective Implementation and Enforcement of the Law

Belief Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly believe	60	18.9
Somewhat believe	90	28.3
Somewhat doubt	98	30.8
Strongly doubt	70	22.0
Total	318	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 2 shows that 47.2% of respondents (18.9% strongly believe and 28.3% somewhat believe) feel that the government has effectively implemented and enforced the Anti-Open Grazing Law. However, a slightly larger proportion – 52.8% (30.8% somewhat doubt and 22.0% strongly doubt) – are sceptical about the effectiveness of implementation.

The paper summary notes that “nearly 53% of respondents...somewhat doubting or strongly doubting the government’s effectiveness” indicates a “significant level of scepticism” that the government needs to address. This scepticism points to perceived enforcement gaps, a weak presence of authorities and a lack of visible results.

Suggested Improvements in Communication and Media Engagement

To better understand how implementation challenges might be addressed, respondents were asked to suggest improvements in government communication and media coverage.

Table 3: Suggested Improvements in Government Communication on the Law

Suggested Improvement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Enhance clarity	90	28.3
Increase transparency	80	25.2
Utilise multiple platforms	70	22.0
Foster public participation	60	18.9
Educate through campaigns	18	5.7
Total	318	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The highest-priority identified by respondents is enhancing clarity (28.3%), followed by increasing transparency (25.2%). This aligns with earlier findings on limited understanding and mistrust, indicating that people want straightforward explanations of the law’s purpose, procedures and implications. A further 22.0% emphasise the need to use multiple platforms (radio, TV, social media, community forums), reflecting the reality that rural and urban audiences access information differently.

Importantly, 18.9% call for fostering public participation, suggesting that citizens want to be directly involved in consultations, town-hall meetings and dialogue sessions, rather than being passive recipients of information. Only 5.7% focus solely on education campaigns, which is consistent with the general call for deeper, more participatory engagement rather than one-way messaging.

Table 4: Suggested Improvements in Media Coverage of the Law

Suggested Improvement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diversify sources	90	28.3
Increase investigative reporting	80	25.2
Collaborate with legal experts	70	22.0
Utilise visual aids	60	18.9
Engage the audience	18	5.7

Total	318	100.0
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Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Respondents expect the media to support effective implementation by providing more diverse and investigative coverage. Diversifying sources (28.3%) and increasing investigative reporting (25.2%) indicate a demand for deeper, more balanced stories that go beyond sensational coverage of arrests and clashes. Collaboration with legal experts (22.0%) and the use of visual aids (18.9%) are seen as ways to make the law’s complex provisions easier to understand.

Qualitative data echo these priorities. Key informants emphasise that responsible, explanatory media content can either ease or complicate implementation, depending on how the law is framed – as an ethnic or political issue or as a solution to a livelihood and security problem. Where coverage is polarising or sensational, resistance and misunderstanding intensify, thereby reinforcing implementation challenges and prolonging socio-economic hardship.

Qualitative Evidence on Implementation Challenges and Socio-Economic Effects

Beyond the quantitative tables, the thematic analysis of KIIs offers direct insight into how implementation challenges affect people and communities. One key informant notes that “enforcement has been mixed,” with the irregular presence of authorities, and recommends “a hotline or an easier way for farmers to report violations quickly” and “incentives for herders to adopt ranching.” Another highlights that limited awareness, misconceptions, and reliance on informal channels have led to misinterpretation of penalties and ranching requirements, sometimes increasing conflict rather than reducing it.

On the socio-economic side, a key informant summarises farmer–herder relations under the law as characterised by “tension, bitterness, conflict resolution, and gradual protection of land.” Herders “feel like they are being pushed out,” while farmers believe they are “finally getting the protection they need.” This dual perception shows that, although the law offers some protection, uneven enforcement and poor communication continue to strain livelihoods, land access and social cohesion. More broadly, the thesis notes that enforcement has been inconsistent and that local realities in Agatu, Guma and Kwande still reflect serious socio-economic problems, including displacement, loss of agricultural output and humanitarian pressures.

Collectively, these results show that implementation challenges are not abstract; they are directly experienced as insecurity, damaged livelihoods, and strained community relations, even though many respondents recognise the law as necessary.

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the above findings in relation to the seminar topic – “Challenges in the Implementation of Benue State’s Anti-Open Grazing Law and Its Socio-Economic Impact on People and Communities” – and to the Policy Implementation Theory adopted as the theoretical framework.

The survey revealed that a slight majority (52.8%) of respondents doubt that the government has effectively implemented and enforced the Anti-Open Grazing Law. This aligns closely with

qualitative accounts describing enforcement as “mixed,” with authorities sometimes present but not consistently monitoring grazing practices.

From the standpoint of Policy Implementation Theory, this reflects a classic gap between policy intention and practice. The law is clearly formulated with ambitious objectives – protecting farmers, regulating grazing and promoting ranching – yet street-level enforcement is constrained by resource limitations, inconsistent presence of security agencies, and the absence of simple reporting mechanisms for violations. These weaknesses undermine the law’s legitimacy and erode public confidence. When people see that violations persist, cases go unreported or unresolved, and enforcement is irregular, they become sceptical about the law’s capacity to deliver security and stability. This scepticism, evidenced by the majority who “somewhat” or “strongly” doubt effective enforcement, therefore constitutes a central implementation challenge which directly affects both compliance and the socio-economic benefits the law was designed to generate. The second major set of findings concerns communication and information. Although 40.9% of respondents are satisfied with government communication, 37.1% are dissatisfied and 22.0% are neutral. Neutrality here is particularly significant: it often reflects limited awareness or weak engagement rather than true indifference.

FGDs and KIIs indicate that many rural residents learned of the law through informal discussions rather than structured campaigns, and that much of the early official communication was in English rather than local languages. This has produced partial understanding, rumours, and misperceptions about who is covered by the law, what penalties exist, and what constitutes legal ranching. The result, as the thesis notes, is that “poor communication may unintentionally increase conflicts or lead to non-compliance due to a lack of clarity.”

Tables 3 and 4 show that respondents themselves propose solutions fully consistent with Implementation Theory’s emphasis on stakeholder engagement and clear guidelines:

- i. Clarify and make communication transparent (53.5% combined for “enhance clarity” and “increase transparency”).
- ii. Use multiple platforms and visual aids to reach diverse audiences.
- iii. Encourage public participation and audience engagement so communities feel they are part of the process, not just recipients of decisions.

These perceptions confirm that communication is not a peripheral issue but a core implementation challenge. Where communication is incomplete, politicised or sensationalised, resistance hardens and compliance declines. Where it is participatory, multilingual and transparent, citizens are more likely to view the law as legitimate and worth supporting. The objective also emphasises socio-economic impacts. While the survey focused more on communication and perception, the qualitative evidence and broader empirical review in the thesis highlight clear socio-economic consequences of the ongoing implementation challenges.

Key informant accounts indicate that, even after the law’s enactment, communities in Agatu, Guma and Kwande continue to face tensions, displacement and livelihood disruptions. Herders feel “pushed out,” while farmers feel they are “finally getting the protection they need,” illustrating how benefits and burdens are unevenly distributed. The thesis underscores that, in these LGAs,

the farmer–herder conflict has evolved into “a complex security and humanitarian crisis,” marked by repeated attacks, population displacement and declines in agricultural output.

In Implementation Theory terms, this means that the law’s socio-economic objectives – stabilising livelihoods, protecting farmland, and promoting sustainable grazing – are only partially realised. Inconsistent enforcement and communication gaps allow old conflict patterns to persist, while insufficient support for herders in transitioning to ranching threatens their livelihood security. Without practical support (such as access to land for ranches, credit, veterinary services, and extension advice), herders risk losing income or being pushed into more precarious coping strategies, which can in turn fuel conflict.

For farmers and wider communities, incomplete implementation means that some gains – reduced open grazing in certain areas and partial protection of land – coexist with ongoing insecurity and economic uncertainty. This mixed experience is reflected in the simultaneous recognition of the law’s necessity and intense concern about how it is implemented on the ground.

Conclusion

This seminar examined the challenges of implementing Benue State’s Anti-Open Grazing Law and its socio-economic impact on people and communities in Agatu, Guma and Kwande LGAs. The law was designed to address escalating farmer–herder conflict by protecting farmland, reducing violence, promoting ranching and stabilising rural livelihoods. However, the findings reveal a wide gap between these objectives and implementation realities. More than half of respondents doubt that the law is effectively enforced, reflecting low confidence in government capacity and consistency. Although many acknowledge the law’s necessity and protective intent, enforcement is widely perceived as irregular, reactive and sometimes politically influenced. Qualitative evidence describes “mixed” enforcement, with intermittent crackdowns followed by long periods of weak presence in rural areas, which undermines deterrence, encourages non-compliance and erodes public trust.

Communication emerged as a major implementation constraint. Government sensitisation about the law is viewed as partial and uneven, with respondents almost evenly split between satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and a large neutral group suggesting limited awareness. Many rural residents learned about the law through word of mouth and sensational media rather than through structured, sustained, locally adapted campaigns. Language barriers, poor use of local platforms, and few opportunities for community dialogue have contributed to misunderstandings of key provisions, penalties, and procedures for ranch establishment.

These weaknesses have serious socio-economic effects. For farmers, inconsistent enforcement means ongoing threats to land, crops and safety, contributing to displacement, reduced output and livelihood disruption. For herders, new restrictions on mobility and regulation are not matched by adequate support for ranching, fuelling feelings of exclusion and, at times, risky coping strategies. In Policy Implementation Theory terms, the problem lies less in the legal framework than in its operationalisation. Without strengthening institutional capacity, coordination, communication, participation, and livelihood support, the law will continue to yield only partial benefits and leave many communities vulnerable to insecurity, shocks and social tension.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- i. State institutions, in partnership with non-governmental actors, should strengthen institutional capacity and inter-agency coordination to ensure consistent, impartial enforcement of the Anti-Open Grazing Law, supported by clear mandates, adequate logistics, sustained rural presence, and inclusive monitoring mechanisms for accountability and adaptive oversight.
- ii. Implement a coordinated, multilingual communication strategy using trusted community platforms to enhance legal literacy, counter misinformation, and promote constructive engagement and voluntary compliance.
- iii. To reduce economic vulnerability and resistance to enforcement, the government should integrate targeted livelihood support for farmers and pastoralists—through infrastructure, land and water access, finance, skills development, and compensation—into implementation frameworks to reduce vulnerability, resistance, and conflict risks.

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