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Farmer–Herder Conflict in Jigawa State: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract
This study examines the farmer–herder conflict in Jigawa State, Nigeria, through an Islamic lens. By integrating historical insights, questionnaire data, and scholarly literature, the research explores the multifaceted causes of the conflict—including crop destruction, climate change, and population growth and the evolving socio-economic relationships between farmers and herders. Emphasis is placed on the roles of traditional rulers and Islamic leaders in mediating disputes and fostering community trust, drawing upon Islamic principles such as justice, stewardship, and reconciliation. The findings indicate that although past interactions were characterized by mutual benefit, contemporary pressures have eroded social cohesion. Recommendations include enhancing the capacity of traditional and religious leaders through specialized training, promoting equitable resource management, and fostering community dialogue to achieve sustainable conflict resolution. This article contributes to the broader discourse on conflict management by demonstrating how culturally resonant, faith-based approaches can offer practical solutions in contexts of resource-based conflict.

Keywords: *Farmer–herder conflict, Jigawa State, Islamic perspective, conflict resolution, traditional rulers, climate change, resource management, community trust*

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Introduction

The farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria poses a significant challenge with far-reaching implications for national security, socio-economic progress, and social cohesion (Babagana et al., 2019). In Jigawa State—located in northwestern Nigeria—the conflict has drawn public attention through media reports (Punch Newspapers, 2025) and tends to intensify during key agricultural periods such as the harvesting and rainy seasons (Maishanu & Garba, 2021). The state's unique geographical context, including its proximity to international borders, established cattle routes, and the importance of the Hadejia River basin, further complicates these disputes.

Given that approximately 72% of Jigawa's population is Muslim, examining the conflict through an Islamic lens is critical. Islam provides extensive guidance on resolving disputes, defining land rights, and promoting community harmony (Islamicity.org, 2014). This article therefore investigates the causes of the conflict, the historical relations between farmers and herders, and current conflict-resolution practices—all while exploring how Islamic teachings on justice, reconciliation, and stewardship might offer culturally appropriate pathways to peace.

The study has several objectives. First, it examines both the immediate and underlying causes of the conflict by integrating questionnaire data with relevant scholarly literature. Second, it reviews the historical socio-economic relationships between farmers and herders. Third, it assesses current trust levels and dispute-resolution mechanisms among the stakeholders. Fourth, it evaluates the role of traditional rulers as mediators from an Islamic perspective. Fifth, it considers how Islamic leaders and scholars might contribute to peace initiatives. Finally, it discusses government initiatives and offers recommendations for conflict resolution rooted in Islamic principles.

Foundations of Islamic Conflict Resolution, Land Rights, and Community Relations

Islam emphasizes peace as intrinsic to the faith; indeed, the very term "Islam" derives from the Arabic root for peace (Islamicity.org, 2014). The Quran and the Sunnah advocate for reconciliation (sulḥ) and fairness in resolving disputes. For example, Quranic directives urging believers to resolve quarrels justly underscore the importance of peaceful settlements (Alhakam.org, n.d.). Islamic jurisprudence further details roles such as the qāḍī (judge) and mediators (wasta) who facilitate dialogue and impartial arbitration.

The Islamic view on land rights holds that ultimate ownership belongs to Allah, with humans serving as stewards (khulafā) responsible for managing resources equitably (Yahaya, 2011). Although private property rights are recognized, these rights come with ethical obligations; misuse or monopolization is not condoned (ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance, 2016).

Moreover, Islam stresses the value of community relations. The concept of ummah underscores the unity and brotherhood of all Muslims, while principles such as tawḥīd, al-ʿadl, afū, and raḥma provide a moral framework for mutual respect and cooperation (International Women Forum Nigeria, 2017). Historical instruments like the Charter of Medina further exemplify Islamic commitments to pluralistic coexistence and peaceful social order.

Historical and Contemporary Context of Farmer–Herder Relations in Jigawa State

Historically, farmers and herders in regions including Jigawa State often engaged in mutually beneficial exchanges despite occasional resource competition (Maishanu & Garba,

2021). Evidence from questionnaire responses—such as reports that herders supplied manure to farmers and that joint cultural festivals once bolstered community bonds—suggests a past marked by a degree of interdependence (Maishanu & Garba, 2021; International Women Forum Nigeria, 2017).

However, colonial policies, changes in land tenure, and the imposition of foreign legal systems disrupted these traditional arrangements. The collapse of historical structures (e.g., the Sokoto Caliphate) and subsequent migrations have further altered the dynamics (Maishanu & Garba, 2021). In the contemporary period, immediate triggers of conflict include crop destruction by cattle—which contravenes Islamic injunctions on the sanctity of private property (ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance, 2016)—and competition for grazing lands and water resources. Moreover, broader issues such as climate change (Ibrahim-Olesin et al., 2021) and population growth (Oji & Chukwu, 2021) have intensified resource pressures.

Analysis of Questionnaire Data through an Islamic Lens

The demographic profile from the questionnaire indicates that the respondents predominantly consist of farmers and herders from the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, with 72% identifying as Muslim. This demographic reality renders an Islamic analysis particularly relevant.

The data reveal strong agreement that crop destruction by cattle is a major conflict trigger—an issue that directly violates Islamic principles of property rights (ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance, 2016). Similarly, while there is a neutral perception regarding conflicts over water access, the significant impact of climate change on land availability underscores the need for responsible stewardship, a value emphasized in Islam (Ibrahim-Olesin et al., 2021). The finding that trust between farmers and herders is lacking is especially troubling given that trust (amānah) is a cornerstone of Islamic community life (Babagana et al., 2019).

Further analysis shows that past social interactions—such as the provision of manure by herders to farmers and joint religious festivals—reflect a history of cooperation and mutual benefit (International Women Forum Nigeria, 2017). Yet, contemporary challenges, including perceptions of exclusion in local decision-making and diminished trust, point to the urgent need for strengthened mediation and dialogue in accordance with Islamic tenets of sulḥ and shurā (Alhakam.org, n.d.; United States Institute of Peace, 2019).

The Role of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution: An Islamic Perspective

Traditional rulers in Nigeria have historically maintained social order and mediated disputes. In Jigawa State, questionnaire data indicate that these leaders actively engage in resolving conflicts, often guided by Islamic principles such as sulḥ (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2023). Their collaboration with religious scholars further legitimizes their mediation efforts in a predominantly Muslim community (International Women Forum Nigeria, 2017). However, challenges such as allegations of bias, limited enforcement power, and political interference may undermine these efforts (Akinwale, 2010).

From an Islamic perspective, the accountability of leaders is paramount. Just leadership—grounded in consultation (shurā) and fairness—is essential for effective conflict resolution (Alhakam.org, n.d.). Empowering traditional rulers with enhanced knowledge of Islamic conflict-resolution principles could improve their capacity to mediate fairly and restore trust among community members.

The Role of Islamic Leaders and Scholars in Fostering Peace

Islamic leaders and scholars have a significant moral and social responsibility to promote peace. Their involvement in community reconciliation—from interfaith mediation to countering extremist narratives—is critical (New Security Beat, 2023). In Jigawa State, the collaboration between traditional rulers and religious scholars, along with the active participation of figures such as the Chief Imam, illustrates the potential of religious leadership to foster unity (HumAngle Media, 2023).

By invoking Quranic injunctions to promote good and forbid evil (Amr bil Maʿrūf wa Nahi ʿan al-Munkar), Islamic leaders are called to be moral exemplars who work tirelessly to ensure justice and equity (Islamicity.org, 2014). Nonetheless, challenges persist, including divergent interpretations of Islamic texts and the risk of political or ethnic bias influencing religious guidance.

Government Initiatives and Islamic Principles

The Jigawa State government has implemented several initiatives to address the conflict. Measures such as gazetting grazing reserves (FRCN HQ, 2025), forming peace committees (Punch Newspapers, 2025), banning nighttime cattle movement (NTA News, 2025), and establishing bilateral agreements (Channels Television, 2024) reflect efforts to reduce tensions. These initiatives generally align with Islamic principles, such as ensuring equitable access to resources and maintaining public welfare (ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance, 2016).

Yet, there remains room for improvement. Greater stakeholder representation—consistent with the Islamic principle of shurā—and enhanced enforcement of regulations would strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of government efforts (Oji & Chukwu, 2021).

Recommendations for Conflict Resolution Grounded in Islamic Principles

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Islamic-Based Mediation:** Provide training for traditional rulers and religious scholars in Islamic conflict-resolution and modern mediation techniques (United States Institute of Peace, 2019) and establish community-based mediation centers that adhere to Islamic values of justice and reconciliation (Alhakam.org, n.d.).
2. **Promote Equitable Land and Resource Management:** Implement participatory land-use planning and clearly demarcate grazing reserves (FRCN HQ, 2025). Develop sustainable water-management practices to ensure equitable access (ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance, 2016).
3. **Foster Community Relations and Trust:** Organize joint community events in mosques and educational institutions to promote mutual respect and accurate understanding of differing livelihoods (International Women Forum Nigeria, 2017). Develop educational programs based on Islamic ethics to counter negative stereotypes.
4. **Address Root Causes of Conflict:** Invest in climate-smart agriculture and sustainable livestock practices to mitigate the impact of climate change (Ibrahim-Olesin et al., 2021). Implement policies that address population growth and resource competition (Oji & Chukwu, 2021).
5. **Enhance Government and Stakeholder Collaboration:** Strengthen legal frameworks to protect the rights of both farmers and herders. Foster collaboration among government agencies, traditional institutions, Islamic leaders, and civil society for comprehensive peacebuilding.

Conclusion

The multifaceted farmer–herder conflict in Jigawa State demands solutions that address both immediate triggers and long-standing structural issues. By grounding conflict resolution in Islamic principles of justice, fairness, and communal well-being, stakeholders can work toward sustainable peace. Empowering traditional and religious leaders, while reinforcing government initiatives—offers a culturally resonant path forward that not only addresses current challenges but also reinforces the social fabric of a predominantly Muslim community.

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