

THE ROLE OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN ADDRESSING FARMER–HERDER RESOURCE USE CONFLICTS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Farmer-herder conflicts over resource use have become a major socio-economic and security issue in Nigeria, especially in recent years. In Southeast Nigeria, rising competition for land, water, and grazing routes has heightened tensions between agricultural communities and pastoralists, leading to loss of life, property damage, forced displacement, and disruptions to farming. This study investigates how moral philosophy can help address these conflicts by analyzing their ethical dimensions and assessing how moral principles might support peaceful coexistence, fairness, and sustainable management of resources. Data were collected through questionnaire and oral interview. It is grounded in core moral theories: utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and African communal ethics, all of which offer insights into responsibility, justice, mutual respect, and collective well-being. The findings indicate that while resource scarcity plays a role, many conflicts are also fueled by breaches of ethical norms, including disregard for justice, human rights, accountability, and social obligations. The study shows that applying moral reasoning can encourage dialogue, support reconciliation, promote fair access to resources, and reinforce local conflict resolution practices. It concludes that moral philosophy provides meaningful approaches for tackling the ethical roots of farmer-herder disputes and fostering lasting peace in the region. The study advocates for incorporating moral education, community-based ethical values, inclusive policy development, and traditional mediation systems into conflict prevention and management strategies. By emphasizing the role of ethics and moral reflection, the research adds to existing knowledge on resolving resource conflicts and strengthening social cohesion.

Keywords: Moral philosophy, farmer–herder conflicts, resource use, ethics, conflict resolution, Southeast Nigeria, communal ethics, sustainable peace.

Introduction

Farmer-herder conflicts have emerged as one of Nigeria’s most urgent socio-economic and security issues in recent decades. At their core, these tensions stem from competition between settled farming communities and nomadic or semi-nomadic herders over limited natural

resources, including arable land, water sources, and grazing corridors. In southeastern Nigeria, the growing presence of herders in predominantly agricultural areas has led to violent confrontations, widespread damage to crops, loss of life, forced displacement, and heightened ethnic divisions. These ongoing disputes have undermined food security, disrupted rural development, and weakened social cohesion in the region (Akinwotu, 2018). Moral philosophy offers a valuable lens through which such conflicts can be understood and addressed, drawing on ethical concepts like justice, fairness, responsibility, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. Theoretical frameworks such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and communitarianism highlight the importance of moral duties and cooperative social behavior in managing communal relations. When applied to farmer-herder disputes, these perspectives can help stakeholders reflect on the ethical implications of land use, human rights, environmental stewardship, and conflict resolution strategies.

The Southeast is largely agrarian, with most communities relying on subsistence and small-scale farming for survival. The encroachment of cattle onto cultivated fields frequently leads to crop damage and retaliatory attacks, fueling cycles of violence. Although government efforts have primarily focused on security measures and regulatory policies, there has been limited emphasis on fostering ethical dialogue, empathy, and reconciliation between opposing groups (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Additionally, the erosion of traditional moral norms, community-based values, and indigenous mediation practices has played a key role in deepening the crisis. African moral thought, which centers on communal living, human dignity, and shared responsibility, presents meaningful alternatives for restoring peace and managing resources sustainably. Ethical principles derived from indigenous African philosophies could thus support efforts to rebuild trust and promote long-term harmony in conflict-affected areas (Metz, 2015).

This study investigates how moral philosophy can contribute to resolving resource-related conflicts between farmers and herders in Southeast Nigeria. It aims to assess how ethical reasoning and philosophical insights might support conflict prevention, peacebuilding initiatives, and fairer management of natural resources. Despite numerous governmental and security-led interventions, farmer-herder conflicts in Southeast Nigeria persist and, in many cases, continue to escalate. The consequences include extensive crop destruction, fatalities, displacement of rural populations, economic strain, and increasing suspicion among ethnic communities. Most responses so far have prioritized legal, political, and military solutions, leaving the underlying moral and ethical aspects of the conflict largely unaddressed.

The lack of ethical engagement, shared understanding, and recognition of communal values has exacerbated tensions. Both farmers and herders often defend their actions as necessary for survival and access to resources, giving rise to complex moral questions around justice, land rights, environmental sustainability, and human safety. Given this context, there is a pressing need to explore how moral philosophy can offer practical ethical frameworks that encourage coexistence and support lasting, equitable solutions to the conflict.

Rationale for Moral Philosophy in Addressing Farmer/herder Resource Conflicts: The Focus

This paper makes the case that moral philosophy offers a practical ethical framework for tackling conflicts over resource use between farmers and herders in Southeast Nigeria. It asserts that disputes concerning land and natural resources go beyond economic or political dimensions, touching on deeper moral concerns such as justice, rights, responsibility, mutual respect, and the collective well-being of communities. Grounded mainly in African communitarian ethics, while also incorporating key ideas from utilitarianism and deontological theory, the study shows how ethical reasoning can support sustainable resource management and foster peaceful coexistence. Instead of offering a general overview of ethical systems, the paper zeroes in on identifying the underlying moral roots of these conflicts and suggests concrete, values-based solutions—such as dialogue, fairness, reciprocity, communal unity, and recognition of human dignity. It concludes that integrating such ethical principles into policy development, conflict resolution strategies, and community involvement can lead to more lasting and effective outcomes in addressing farmer–herder tensions in the region.

Farmer–herder conflicts over resource use have emerged as a significant socio-economic and security issue in Southeast Nigeria. These tensions typically stem from competition for limited resources like land, water, and grazing pathways, often leading to violence, displacement, property damage, and the erosion of livelihoods. Moral philosophy offers a useful lens for examining the ethical aspects of these disputes and for guiding the development of fair and lasting solutions. By focusing on values such as justice, fairness, human dignity, responsibility, and peaceful coexistence, it contributes meaningful perspectives to efforts aimed at preventing and resolving conflict (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). From a deontological standpoint, all parties involved in such disputes carry moral duties that should shape their conduct. Farmers are entitled to safeguard their crops and means of survival, just as herders have the right to engage in lawful pastoral activities. Respecting these rights entails following established laws, treating one another with consideration, and refraining from actions that inflict harm (Kant, 1993). In contrast, utilitarian ethics calls for decisions that enhance overall well-being. Conflict mitigation strategies should thus aim to foster broad-based peace, security, and economic stability for both agricultural and pastoral populations (Mill, 1863/2001).

The moral framework of African communalism also holds relevance in this context. Rooted in ideals of interdependence, unity, cooperation, and shared accountability, communal ethics promotes social cohesion. It encourages dialogue, reconciliation, and the use of community-led mechanisms to resolve disputes, urging individuals to place collective welfare above personal gain (Metz, 2007). In this regard, traditional authorities, elders, and local leaders can play vital roles in mediating disagreements and supporting peaceful relations. Additionally, environmental ethics underscores the obligation to manage natural resources responsibly. Practices such as unsustainable farming, excessive grazing, and the broader impacts of climate change and environmental decline tend to heighten resource competition. This ethical perspective advocates for stewardship that meets current needs while preserving ecological integrity for future generations (Attfield, 2018). In sum, moral philosophy presents essential

principles for tackling farmer-herder conflicts in Southeast Nigeria. Incorporating ideas of justice, rights, communal duty, and environmental care into policy and conflict resolution approaches can help foster lasting peace, equitable resource sharing, and greater harmony among affected groups.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the role of moral philosophy in addressing farmer-herder resource use conflicts in Southeast Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to examine the role of moral philosophy in addressing farmer-herder resource use conflicts in Southeast Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: a). examine the causes of farmer-herder resource use conflicts in Southeast Nigeria; b). analyze the ethical issues associated with farmer-herder conflicts; c) evaluate the relevance of moral philosophical theories in conflict resolution; d). assess the role of African communal ethics in promoting peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders; e). recommend ethical strategies for sustainable peace and resource management in Southeast Nigeria.

This study holds significance as it adds to the expanding knowledge on conflict resolution and moral philosophy within the Nigerian context. It underscores how ethical principles play a crucial role in tackling resource-driven conflicts that undermine rural development and national stability. The findings offer practical value to policymakers, peacebuilding initiatives, community leaders, and researchers by presenting ethical strategies for managing farmer-herder disputes. Additionally, the research encourages the integration of indigenous African values—such as communal responsibility, tolerance, dialogue, and fairness—into modern approaches to conflict resolution. In academic terms, it enriches philosophical discussions on ethics, peaceful coexistence, and environmental justice, while also laying groundwork for further research on ethics and natural resource governance in Nigeria.

Methodology

The research was carried out in Southeast Nigeria, a region composed of five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. This area is marked by dense population, extensive farming, and a growing number of conflicts between farmers and herders. The majority of the population belongs to the Igbo ethnic group, who live a community life, and shared responsibility. In recent years, the region has seen repeated confrontations between local farmers and nomadic herders, largely driven by competition for land and other natural resources. The study population included farmers, herders, community and youth leaders, traditional rulers, and security personnel from communities in Southeast Nigeria that have been affected by such conflicts.

The research utilized a purposive and stratified sampling technique to choose participants from communities impacted by farmer-herder resource use conflicts in Southeast Nigeria. Respondents—including farmers, herders, community leaders, traditional rulers, security personnel, and local government officials—were selected purposively due to their direct experiences and insights into the conflicts. The stratification approach ensured a diverse representation across various states and stakeholder groups. While this method enhanced the data's relevance, it also risks introducing sampling bias, as the respondents' perceptions were influenced by their individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, and interests. Consequently,

the sample may not accurately reflect all affected communities or stakeholders in the region. Additionally, the gathered survey and interview responses highlighted both practical issues and moral perspectives. Responses regarding land encroachment, crop destruction, insecurity, and resource competition offered empirical insights into the realities of impacted communities, while views on justice, fairness, responsibility, peaceful coexistence, and communal harmony revealed deeper moral perceptions and value judgments related to the conflict's causes and consequences. Thus, these findings should be interpreted as both reflections of socio-economic realities and articulations of ethical concerns. Despite the study's depth, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The emphasis on Southeast Nigeria restricts the applicability of the findings to other areas with different socio-cultural and ecological backgrounds. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced subjective biases, such as recall bias and the tendency for respondents to view events through the lens of their own group interests. Therefore, caution is warranted when interpreting the findings, viewing them as indicative rather than universally representative. Nevertheless, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data delivers valuable insights into both the practical aspects and moral implications of farmer-herder resource use conflicts, forming a robust foundation for philosophical analysis and policy recommendations. A total of 320 participants were selected from various communities across the region where tensions have frequently occurred. The results were interpreted descriptively and aligned with the study's objectives. Secondary materials were examined through content analysis to identify philosophical viewpoints and ethical frameworks relevant to resolving these conflicts.

Result and Discussions

Causes of farmer–herder resource use conflicts in Southeast Nigeria.

Table 1 outlines the main causes of farmer–herder conflicts over resource use in Southeast Nigeria, based on responses from 320 individuals. Because participants could identify multiple causes, the total number of responses (2,063) surpasses the number of respondents. The most commonly cited issue was crop damage caused by cattle, mentioned by 275 respondents (85.9%), highlighting that harm to farmland from free-grazing livestock is the leading cause of tension between the two groups. This aligns with earlier research pointing to crop destruction as a central conflict driver. Encroachment on farmlands and grazing routes followed as the second most reported cause (81.3%), with competition for land resources coming in third (77.5%). These results suggest that growing demand for limited land has heightened tensions in rural areas. Additionally, disputes over water access (71.9%) and contamination of water sources by animals (67.2%) were frequently noted, underscoring water availability as another key source of friction.

Other significant factors included cattle rustling and livestock theft (61.9%), bush burning and loss of vegetation (56.9%), and incidents of sexual harassment and intimidation targeting rural women (51.6%). These problems often worsen existing distrust and animosity between farmers and herders. At the lower end of the scale were population growth and the expansion of settlements into grazing zones (46.9%), along with ineffective government policies and

inadequate conflict resolution systems (43.8%). While less frequently cited, these structural issues still play an important role in exacerbating ongoing conflicts.

Farmer–herder conflicts over resource use have emerged as one of Nigeria’s most enduring security and development issues. These tensions mainly stem from competition between settled crop farmers and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists for limited natural resources, including land, water, and grazing areas. Recent studies highlight that the roots of these conflicts are complex, involving a mix of environmental, economic, political, and cultural dynamics. A central driver is the growing competition for land and water. As farming activities expand and designated grazing lands shrink, both groups increasingly vie for access to productive land and reliable water sources. When herders’ cattle stray into farmlands, they often damage crops, sparking disputes that can escalate into violence (Idisi et al., 2026; Ja’afar-Furo et al., 2018).

Environmental changes also play a critical role. In northern Nigeria, desertification, prolonged droughts, deteriorating pasture conditions, and shrinking water supplies have pushed pastoralists to migrate southward in search of better grazing grounds. This movement brings them into closer contact with farming communities, increasing friction and the risk of conflict (Tukur et al., 2024; Adedeji, 2024). Rising population and the expansion of agriculture have further strained available resources. With Nigeria’s population growing steadily, more land is being converted for cultivation, disrupting traditional migration routes and cattle corridors. As a result, herders are often forced to cross farmed areas, leading to recurring clashes (Ma et al., 2022). Weak governance and inadequate land-use planning worsen the situation. Inconsistent enforcement of grazing policies, inefficient dispute resolution systems, and ambiguous land ownership frameworks make it difficult to prevent or resolve conflicts effectively (Adigun, 2019; Adedeji, 2024).

Ethnic and religious differences also deepen divisions. In many regions, farmers and herders come from distinct ethnic and religious backgrounds, turning resource disputes into broader identity-based confrontations marked by suspicion, prejudice, and cycles of retaliation (The Guardian, 2025). Moreover, the spread of small arms, rising crime rates, cattle theft, and general insecurity have intensified the violence. Armed groups and bandits often take advantage of existing tensions, exacerbating hostilities and leading to greater loss of life and displacement (The Guardian, 2026).

The outcomes of the survey and interviews highlighted that issues like land encroachment, crop destruction, competition for limited resources, and instances of violence are viewed as primary contributors to the farmer-herder conflicts in Southeast Nigeria. Analyzing these issues through various ethical lenses reveals significant moral dimensions. From a utilitarian perspective, the ongoing violence and disputes over resources hinder the overall welfare and social stability of the communities involved, thereby contravening the principle aimed at achieving the greatest good for the largest number (Mill, 1863/2001). Deontological ethics indicates that actions such as illegal land appropriation, property damage, and retaliatory violence infringe upon the moral obligations and rights of individuals and communities, including their rights to safety, justice, and dignity (Kant, 1785/1993). In a similar vein, virtue ethics points out that these behaviors exemplify a lack of essential moral traits such as prudence, moderation, kindness, and

tolerance, which are vital for fostering a peaceful society (Aristotle, trans. 2009). From the standpoint of African communal ethics, the occurrences of violent conflict and indifference to communal agreements threaten the ideals of solidarity, reciprocity, and social harmony that typically guide relationships between groups (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997). Therefore, the research findings indicate that the enduring conflicts between farmers and herders stem not only from economic competition but also signify deeper issues relating to justice, accountability, respect, and community responsibilities. This highlights the necessity for ethical actions rooted in both universal moral frameworks and indigenous African principles to foster peaceful and sustainable resource management in Southeast Nigeria.

Table 1: Causes of Farmer–Herder Resource Use Conflicts

Causes of Farmer–Herder Resource Use Conflict		Frequency Percentage	
1	Destruction of crops by cattle	275	85.9
2	Encroachment on farmlands and grazing routes	260	81.3
3	Competition over land resources	248	77.5
4	Competition over water resources	230	71.9
5	Pollution/contamination of water sources by livestock	215	67.2
6	Cattle rustling and theft of livestock	198	61.9
7	Bush burning and destruction of vegetation	182	56.9
8	Sexual harassment and intimidation of rural women	165	51.6
9	Population pressure and expansion of settlements into grazing areas	150	46.9
10	Weak government policies and poor conflict management mechanisms	140	43.8

Ethical Issues Associated with Farmer–Herder Conflicts

Table 2 outlines the ethical concerns linked to farmer–herder conflicts in Southeast Nigeria, as reported by 320 respondents. Since participants could select more than one issue, the total number of responses reached 2,246, surpassing the number of individuals surveyed. The most frequently cited concern was loss of life and the violation of the right to life, mentioned by 290 respondents (90.6%), highlighting that protecting human life is the foremost ethical challenge in these conflicts. This reflects the severe humanitarian impact, with both farmers and herders experiencing fatalities and injuries. Destruction of crops and livelihoods followed closely, reported by 86.9% of respondents, while forced displacement of people and communities was noted by 82.8%. These results suggest the conflicts not only endanger lives but also compromise economic stability and social order in affected areas. A large share of respondents also pointed to damage to property and communal assets (78.1%) and breaches of land and property rights (73.4%), underscoring broader issues related to justice, ownership, and safeguarding economic resources.

Sexual violence and abuse targeting women and girls were identified by 65.6% of respondents, revealing the heightened risks faced by women during violent episodes. Additional concerns

included perceived injustice and unequal treatment of affected groups (61.9%) and human rights violations by those involved in the conflicts (57.8%), pointing to widespread ethical failures and disregard for basic rights. The least cited issues were the erosion of peaceful coexistence and social trust (54.7%) and the failure of government to fulfill its duty to protect citizens (50.0%). While these were less frequently reported, they remain significant, as they signal institutional shortcomings and weakening community bonds. Overall, the data show that farmer–herder conflicts in the region involve deep ethical challenges concerning the value of life, livelihood protection, human rights, fairness, and governmental responsibility. The extent of these problems highlights the urgent need for ethical, legal, and policy measures to safeguard vulnerable groups and foster harmony among resource-dependent communities.

Farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria extend beyond competition for land and resources, encompassing deep ethical challenges tied to justice, human rights, environmental stewardship, and peaceful coexistence. Recent studies highlight several moral dimensions that have played a role in prolonging and intensifying these tensions. A central ethical problem is the breach of the right to life and human dignity. Frequent acts of violence, including killings and reprisals by both sides, have led to widespread loss of life and forced displacement, directly contradicting the basic ethical imperative to uphold human life (Obikaeze et al., 2023).

The widespread destruction of livelihoods and property also poses serious moral questions. Crops damaged by free-grazing cattle, theft of livestock, arson attacks on homes, and harm to farmland strip individuals of their economic foundation. These actions run counter to ethical norms of fairness, justice, and respect for personal property (Nwankwo et al., 2023). Equitable access to natural resources such as land and water remains another critical concern. While both groups rely on these resources for survival, growing competition often leads to unequal distribution and exclusion. Ethical frameworks on distributive justice argue that fair allocation is essential to prevent marginalization and reduce conflict (Okoye et al., 2024).

Weak governance and lack of accountability further exacerbate the situation. Inconsistent law enforcement, ineffective land-use regulations, and failure to prosecute perpetrators foster an environment where violations go unpunished. Ethically, governments are expected to safeguard citizens and deliver justice to those affected (Okoye et al., 2024). Ethnic and religious bias adds another layer of complexity. Conflicts initially rooted in resource use often evolve into identity-driven confrontations, fueling discrimination, harmful stereotypes, and collective punishment of entire communities. Such dynamics undermine values of equality, mutual respect, and social tolerance (Njoku et al., 2024). Environmental ethics are also at stake. Practices like overgrazing, unsustainable land use, and encroachment on fragile ecosystems raise concerns about the responsibility to preserve the environment for current and future populations (Nwankwo, 2024). Finally, the large-scale displacement caused by the conflict has triggered humanitarian hardships, raising ethical questions about societal duty toward vulnerable groups. Many displaced people face hunger, poverty, and limited access to essential services such as health care and education (Obikaeze et al., 2023).

Table 2 : Ethical Issues Associated with Farmer–Herder Conflicts

Ethical Issues Associated with Farmer–Herder Conflicts Frequency Percentage		
1	Loss of human lives and violation of the right to life	290 90.6
2	Destruction of crops and means of livelihood	278 86.9
3	Forced displacement of persons and communities	265 82.8
4	Destruction of property and community assets	250 78.1
5	Violation of land and property rights	235 73.4
6	Sexual violence and abuse against women and girls	210 65.6
7	Injustice and unequal treatment of affected groups	198 61.9
8	Human rights abuses by conflict actors	185 57.8
9	Breakdown of peaceful coexistence and social trust	175 54.7
10	Neglect of government responsibility to protect citizens	160 50.0

Relevance of Moral Philosophical Theories in Resolving Farmer–Herder Conflicts

Table 3 outlines how respondents view the role of moral philosophical theories in addressing farmer–herder conflicts in Southeast Nigeria. The most widely recognized contribution was the promotion of justice and fairness, cited by 285 respondents (89.1%), indicating that these theories offer a framework for impartiality and fair outcomes in disputes. Coming in second was their role in fostering respect for human rights and dignity, acknowledged by 85.9% of respondents, followed by providing ethical guidance for peaceful coexistence, noted by 82.8%. These results suggest that moral philosophies support conflict resolution by reinforcing ethical behavior, mutual respect, and social harmony.

Additionally, enhancing dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding (78.1%) and aiding in the fair distribution of resources (73.4%) were seen as key benefits. These aspects are especially relevant in conflicts rooted in competition over land and water. Respondents also highlighted the importance of encouraging accountability and moral responsibility (68.8%), enabling reconciliation and forgiveness (65.6%), and advocating non-violence and peaceful dispute resolution (61.9%). This suggests that ethical frameworks can help shift adversarial dynamics toward cooperation through responsible conduct and restorative practices. Even though they ranked lower, strengthening community unity and social cohesion (57.8%) and offering a foundation for policy development and conflict management strategies (53.1%) were still considered relevant by a majority of respondents. This reflects the potential of moral philosophy to shape both interpersonal relations and institutional approaches to conflict.

Moral philosophical theories offer essential ethical frameworks for understanding, managing, and resolving conflicts. They help guide individuals, communities, and institutions in making decisions that support justice, peace, fairness, and human well-being. In social conflicts such as farmer–herder disputes in Nigeria, these theories provide principles that can assist parties in addressing grievances, restoring trust, and achieving lasting peace. One key approach is Utilitarianism, which prioritizes actions that generate the greatest benefit for the largest number of people. In conflict resolution, this perspective encourages solutions that enhance overall

welfare and reduce harm. Measures like negotiated resource-sharing agreements and locally driven peace initiatives reflect utilitarian goals by aiming to improve outcomes for both farmers and herders (Driver, 2022).

Applying utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and African communal ethics to farmer–herder conflicts over resource use in Nigeria highlights both the strengths and shortcomings of each approach, as well as the challenges that emerge when Western ethical models interact with local cultural values. Utilitarianism, which focuses on achieving the greatest good for the greatest number (Mill, 1863/2001), can support policies designed to ensure peace and fair access to resources, particularly those that enhance overall social and economic stability. In Nigeria, such an outlook may justify state actions aimed at maintaining order and boosting productivity. Yet, by concentrating on collective welfare, it risks overlooking the needs and rights of minority or marginalized groups who may bear a disproportionate burden from these policies, potentially fueling feelings of unfair treatment.

Deontological ethics, grounded in duties, rights, and impartial moral rules (Kant, 1785/1993), offers a strong foundation for safeguarding individuals and communities against unjust dispossession of land and resources. This perspective aligns with constitutional protections and legal norms in Nigeria. However, its emphasis on individual rights can clash with long-standing African traditions that prioritize communal ownership and shared responsibilities. As a result, conflicts may arise when formal legal rights based on individual entitlements contradict customary practices rooted in collective land use.

Virtue ethics, which centers on developing moral qualities like wisdom, empathy, fairness, and integrity (Aristotle, trans. 2009), provides useful guidance for encouraging cooperation, understanding, and reconciliation among opposing groups. These character traits resonate with many indigenous African values and can help build trust and mutual respect. Still, this approach offers little concrete direction for designing institutions or policies to tackle systemic problems such as unclear land tenure, unequal resource access, or weak governance in conflict resolution. African communal ethics, shaped by principles of solidarity, reciprocity, consensus, and the common good (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997), reflects deeply held Nigerian traditions and aligns with established community-based methods of resolving disputes. Its focus on social cohesion and mutual duty is especially relevant in societies where group identity often outweighs individual independence. Nonetheless, placing communal interests first can occasionally lead to the erosion of personal rights or silence legitimate grievances, particularly when vulnerable populations or overlapping land claims are involved.

These contrasts underscore a broader philosophical divide between Western ethical systems and indigenous African worldviews. Western models—especially deontology—typically emphasize autonomy, individual rights, and universal rules, while African communal ethics stresses interdependence, harmony, and collective responsibility (Wiredu, 1996; Held, 2023; Morris, 2022). In Nigeria’s diverse social landscape, relying solely on either framework may be insufficient. Overemphasizing individual rights could weaken community bonds, whereas an exclusive focus on community interests might endanger personal freedoms and equity. Thus, a more effective and contextually appropriate solution lies in a blended ethical

model—one that balances individual rights with communal duties and integrates both global moral standards and local cultural insights. Such an approach, as suggested by Metz (2007), holds greater promise for addressing farmer–herder conflicts and advancing lasting peace in Nigeria (Johnson, 2023; Kristjánsson, 2024; Mhlambi, 2023).

Table 3: Relevance of Moral Philosophical Theories in Conflict Resolution

		Frequency	Percentage
1	Promotes justice and fairness among conflicting parties	285	89.1
2	Encourages respect for human rights and dignity	275	85.9
3	Provides ethical guidelines for peaceful coexistence	265	82.8
4	Enhances dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding	250	78.1
5	Supports equitable distribution of resources	235	73.4
6	Encourages accountability and moral responsibility	220	68.8
7	Facilitates reconciliation and forgiveness among parties	210	65.6
8	Promotes non-violence and peaceful dispute settlement	198	61.9
9	Strengthens community cohesion and social harmony	185	57.8
10	Provides a basis for policy formulation and conflict management	170	53.1

Role of African Communal Ethics in Promoting Peaceful Coexistence Between Farmers and Herders

The results of Table 4 showed that African communal ethics significantly contribute to peaceful relations between farmers and herders. A large majority of respondents—89.4%—believed these ethics foster mutual respect, highlighting the importance of upholding human dignity in minimizing conflict. Additionally, 86.9% saw communal ethics as supporting peaceful dialogue and negotiation, while 85.0% felt they enhance community solidarity and unity. About 82.8% agreed that shared moral values rooted in communal traditions help prevent disputes, and 81.3% emphasized their role in promoting tolerance and understanding across cultural differences. Other key contributions include encouraging collective responsibility in managing resources (79.4%), ensuring fair and just distribution (77.5%), enabling mediation by elders and traditional authorities (75.6%), fostering cooperation in resource use (73.8%), and reinforcing social harmony for long-term coexistence (71.9%). Overall, the findings suggest that African communal ethics offer a solid moral framework for building cooperation, maintaining peace, and achieving sustainable conflict resolution between farming and herding communities in Southeast Nigeria.

African communal ethics offers a meaningful moral foundation for promoting peaceful relations between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Grounded in values such as solidarity, mutual respect, collective responsibility, and social harmony, this ethical framework highlights the deep connections among individuals and communities. These principles can play a key role in easing ongoing tensions by encouraging cooperation, open dialogue, and joint stewardship of shared natural resources. A central aspect of African communal ethics is its emphasis on

maintaining social harmony and constructive relationships. In many African traditions, peace is seen as a shared responsibility, sustained through understanding and respect among community members. By urging both farmers and herders to place community well-being above personal gain, this ethic helps minimize conflict and supports long-term coexistence (Metz, 2023).

The tradition also favors dialogue and consensus as primary methods for resolving disputes. Instead of turning to violence or legal confrontation, African communities often rely on negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation led by elders and local institutions. These practices support nonviolent solutions to disagreements over land use, water access, and grazing rights (Oyeshile, 2022). Equally important is the ethic's promotion of mutual respect and tolerance. It upholds the inherent dignity of all people, regardless of ethnic background, culture, or livelihood. Applying this principle can help counteract the biases, misconceptions, and distrust that frequently escalate tensions between farming and herding communities (Ekei & Ekanem, 2023).

Moreover, African communal ethics reinforces a shared duty in managing natural resources. Since land and water are commonly viewed as community assets meant to serve everyone, the ethic advocates for fair distribution and sustainable use. This mindset helps prevent resource competition and fosters a sense of equity (Ugwuanyi & Nwosu, 2024). The concept of Ubuntu, central to many African moral systems, further supports conflict resolution. Expressing the idea that "I am because we are," Ubuntu underscores empathy, interdependence, and human connection. By fostering concern for others' welfare, it contributes to healing divisions and building lasting peace between opposing groups (Metz, 2023).

Additionally, this ethical tradition favors restorative over punitive justice. When conflicts arise, the focus lies in repairing relationships, addressing harm, and reintegrating those involved into the community. In the context of farmer–herder disputes, this approach supports the rebuilding of trust and social unity, which are essential for enduring peace (Nabudere, 2022). Finally, values of hospitality and neighborliness also aid peaceful coexistence. Traditional African societies often promote openness, mutual support, and collaboration across group lines. These ideals can strengthen ties between farmers and herders and encourage joint efforts in tackling shared challenges (Ekei & Ekanem, 2023).

Table 4: Role of African Communal Ethics in Promoting Peaceful Coexistence Between Farmers and Herders

S/N	Role of African Communal Ethics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Promotes mutual respect among farmers and herders	286	89.4
2	Encourages peaceful dialogue and negotiation	278	86.9
3	Strengthens community solidarity and unity	272	85.0
4	Enhances conflict prevention through communal values	265	82.8
5	Encourages tolerance and understanding of cultural differences	260	81.3
6	Supports collective responsibility for resource management	254	79.4
7	Promotes fairness and justice in resource allocation	248	77.5

S/N	Role of African Communal Ethics	Frequency	Percentage
8	Facilitates mediation by community elders and traditional leaders	242	75.6
9	Encourages cooperation in the use of land and water resources	236	73.8
10	Reinforces social harmony and long-term peaceful coexistence	230	71.9

Ethical Strategies for Sustainable Peace and Resource Management

Table 5 outlines respondents' perspectives on ethical approaches to advancing sustainable peace and effective resource management in Southeast Nigeria. Dialogue and mediation among stakeholders emerged as the most supported strategy, with 285 responses (89.1%), highlighting a strong preference for peaceful negotiation in resolving conflicts over resources. Equitable allocation of land and natural resources was also widely favored (278; 86.9%), as was reinforcing community-led conflict resolution systems (270; 84.4%), both pointing to the importance of fairness and local involvement. There was significant backing for principles of environmental justice and accountability (265; 82.8%) and African communal values like Ubuntu and solidarity (260; 81.3%), emphasizing the role of ethics, collective well-being, and justice in managing resources. Respondents also identified participatory decision-making (79.4%), environmental education and ethical awareness (77.5%), and transparent resource governance (75.6%) as key to building trust and collaboration. Additional strategies receiving notable support include sustainable land-use practices, recognition of indigenous knowledge, improved legal frameworks, and youth engagement—factors seen as vital for lasting peace and environmental stewardship. Collectively, the results indicate that achieving long-term peace and responsible resource use in the region depends on integrating ethical leadership, inclusive participation, environmental care, social equity, and respect for traditional values.

Achieving lasting peace and sound resource management in Southeast Nigeria depends on ethical approaches that support justice, collaboration, environmental care, and social inclusion. With growing pressures from land conflicts, environmental damage, communal tensions, and competition over natural resources, ethical frameworks offer a vital foundation for fostering resilient and harmonious communities. Recent research identifies several ethical strategies that can support long-term peace and responsible use of resources. A central approach involves encouraging dialogue and inclusive conflict resolution. Ethical conflict management prioritizes transparent communication, mediation, and collaborative decision-making among all parties. Facilitating discussions that include traditional leaders, local authorities, farmers, herders, youth organizations, and government bodies can help resolve disputes peacefully and prevent escalation into violence (Okoye et al., 2024).

Fairness in the distribution of resources is another critical component. Ethical perspectives on distributive justice argue that access to land, water, forests, and other natural assets must be equitable and transparent. Ensuring balanced allocation helps reduce perceptions of exclusion and supports long-term social cohesion (Rawls, 2021; Nwankwo, 2024). Drawing on African communal values and Ubuntu philosophy also plays a significant role. These traditions highlight interdependence, mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility. By

promoting a sense of collective well-being, such ethical systems enhance community unity and support peaceful relationships (Metz, 2023). Environmental responsibility is another key ethical principle. Communities should adopt sustainable practices such as conservation, tree planting, erosion control, and careful land use. Environmental ethics underscores the moral duty of present generations to safeguard natural resources for those who come after them (Nwankwo, 2024).

Effective resource governance also requires inclusivity and accountability. Ethical administration calls for openness, impartiality, and meaningful community involvement in decisions about land and resources. Public institutions must ensure that policies are applied fairly and consistently (Okoye et al., 2024). Peace education and the promotion of moral values are further essential strategies. School and community programs that teach tolerance, empathy, nonviolence, and appreciation for diversity can ease intergroup tensions. Such education fosters ethical awareness and encourages individuals to seek nonviolent solutions to disagreements (Oyeshile, 2022). Reinforcing traditional institutions and indigenous dispute-resolution methods is equally valuable. In many areas of Southeast Nigeria, elders, customary leaders, and local councils hold respected moral and cultural authority. Their engagement in resolving conflicts often leads to reconciliation and the restoration of community trust (Nabudere, 2022). Finally, supporting sustainable livelihoods offers an ethical path to reducing resource-based conflicts. Initiatives that generate jobs, boost farming output, and advance rural development can alleviate poverty and lessen competition for limited resources, contributing to greater peace and stability (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024).

Table 5: Ethical Strategies for Sustainable Peace and Resource Management

Ethical Strategy		Frequency	Percentage
1	Promotion of dialogue and mediation among stakeholders	285	89.1
2	Equitable distribution of land and natural resources	278	86.9
3	Strengthening community-based conflict resolution mechanisms	270	84.4
4	Enforcement of environmental justice and accountability	265	82.8
5	Adoption of African communal ethics (Ubuntu and solidarity)	260	81.3
6	Participatory decision-making in resource governance	254	79.4
7	Environmental education and ethical awareness campaigns	248	77.5
8	Promotion of transparency in resource allocation and management	242	75.6
9	Encouragement of sustainable land-use practices	238	74.4
10	Respect for indigenous knowledge and cultural values	232	72.5
11	Strengthening legal frameworks against resource exploitation	226	70.6
12	Youth empowerment and employment opportunities	220	68.8

Transforming Moral Principles into Actionable Policies and Community Practices

The significance of moral philosophy in tackling the resource use conflicts between farmers and herders in Southeast Nigeria is rooted in its capacity to apply ethical principles in practical

ways, shaping effective policies and community engagements. Central to this is the principle of justice, highlighted by deontological ethics and African communal values, which can be effectively enacted via fair land-use policies, transparent compensation systems, and unbiased law enforcement, safeguarding the rights and interests of both farmers and herders alike. Moreover, establishing fair and accessible mechanisms for resolving disputes, incorporating traditional institutions, local authorities, and judicial systems, can enhance both distributive and procedural justice. The principle of respect can find expression through community-led dialogues, interethnic peacebuilding efforts, and public campaigns that promote the acknowledgment of dignity, cultural values, and the legitimate interests of all parties involved. These initiatives help cultivate mutual understanding, diminishing prejudice and hostility between the farming and herding sectors. Virtue ethics supports this direction by advancing moral qualities such as tolerance, empathy, prudence, and moderation—traits that are crucial for fostering peaceful coexistence. In a similar vein, the principle of responsibility can be enacted through cooperative resource management practices, involving farmers, herders, traditional leaders, community figures, and government entities in a shared commitment to conflict prevention and sustainable resource utilization. Grounded in African communal ethics, which prioritizes reciprocity and collective welfare, such practices can lead to the formation of local peace committees and inclusive decision-making frameworks that facilitate consensus and accountability. With these initiatives, moral principles transition from theoretical ideals to practical mechanisms that foster justice, mutual respect, responsible behavior, and lasting peace in Southeast Nigeria.

Conclusion

Moral philosophy is essential in navigating the clashes between farmers and herders in Southeast Nigeria, offering ethical guidelines that steer actions, endorse justice, and foster harmony. These disputes over access to land, water, and grazing are not purely economic or ecological; they inherently involve moral questions about rights, equity, and human dignity. By providing a lens through which to assess actions and policies, moral philosophy can help mitigate violence and support equitable, sustainable resource distribution. One of the approach's significant advantages is its focus on justice and rights, affirming that both farming and herding communities have rightful claims to their means of livelihood. Fair governance requires an unbiased consideration of these claims, facilitated through open dialogue and robust legal structures. Deontological ethics stresses the importance of honoring others' rights and preventing harm, which can help diminish aggressive rivalry and cycles of vengeance. On the other hand, utilitarian principles guide decisions aimed at enhancing collective well-being, advocating for conflict resolution methods that prioritize lasting peace and stability rather than immediate individual interests. Moreover, African moral traditions enrich this ethical discourse by emphasizing community bonds, interdependence, and shared accountability, which are crucial in mediation and reconciliation within these areas. Environmental ethics also contribute to this moral framework, highlighting the necessity for responsible stewardship and sustainable use of natural resources. This acknowledgment is vital, as environmental degradation can intensify conflicts. Ultimately, this perspective advocates for thoughtful management of land

and water resources, ensuring that the needs of future generations are taken into account and promoting practices that relieve pressure on shared ecosystems.

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