

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MECHANISMS AND POST-CONFLICT PEACE BUILDING: A PROGNOSIS OF HERDSMEN-FARMERS CONFLICT IN TARABA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined restorative justice mechanisms and post-conflict peace building: a prognosis of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives. The first was to examine how restorative justice mechanisms promote post-conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders. The second was to assess the challenges that affect the effective implementation of these mechanisms in the study areas. The study was anchored on Restorative Justice Theory. The theory explains justice as a process of repairing harm through dialogue, accountability and rebuilding relationships rather than punishment. A qualitative descriptive design was adopted to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of people directly affected by the conflict. Data was collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The participants included farmers, herders, traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth and women leaders, peace committee members, NGO representatives and local government officials. A total of 72 participants were drawn from six communities in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas. Data was analysed thematically to identify patterns and meanings in participants' responses. The findings show that dialogue, mediation, compensation and reconciliation meetings have helped to reduce violence, build trust and support peaceful coexistence. However, these gains are weakened by mistrust, political interference, corruption, economic hardship and weak institutional support, which limit the sustainability of peace efforts. The study concluded that restorative justice mechanisms have contributed to peacebuilding and improved relationships between farmers and herders in the study areas. However, their effectiveness is limited by structural and governance challenges as well as socio-economic pressures. The study therefore recommends stronger institutional support, proper funding of mediation structures and the integration of livelihood support and trauma healing programmes to ensure lasting peace and stable coexistence in the communities.

Keywords: *Restorative Justice, Post-Conflict Resolution, Farmers-Herders Conflict, Peaceful Coexistence, Taraba State*

Introduction

Restorative justice has emerged as a vital framework for healing divided communities and fostering sustainable peace after conflict. It moves beyond punishment to focus on repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, and creating meaningful dialogue among those affected (Zehr, 2022; Daly, 2023). The approach allows victims, offenders, and community members to come together to address grievances, identify responsibilities, and seek genuine

reconciliation through shared understanding (Braithwaite, 2024). Across the world, restorative justice is increasingly recognised as a humane and inclusive alternative to traditional punitive systems, finding practical application within criminal justice institutions, schools, and community peace building programmes in places such as Canada, New Zealand, and parts of Europe. Yet, within Africa, the essence of restorative justice has long been embedded in indigenous practices that prioritise communal dialogue, symbolic rituals, and compensation led by elders. The Rwandan Gacaca courts and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission exemplify how truth-telling and forgiveness can lay foundations for social healing (Bala & Okoye, 2022; Aigbe & Esezobor, 2023). In Nigeria, indigenous peace mechanisms like intergroup dialogue and reconciliation ceremonies are increasingly acknowledged for their success in achieving long-term stability where formal judicial systems have faltered (Apenda, 2021; Atando, 2021). However, Abdulahi (2022) and Ahmed (2021) argue that these approaches remain sidelined in policy despite their cultural legitimacy and proven capacity to foster reintegration.

In Taraba State, the persistent farmers-herders conflict in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas highlights the shortcomings of conventional, punitive approaches to peace building. The clashes, driven by competition over natural resources, climate pressures, and deep-rooted historical grievances, have resulted in widespread displacement, loss of life, and social fragmentation. Government-led interventions, often top-down and militarised, have produced only fragile peace, failing to address the underlying causes of distrust. This situation calls for the exploration of restorative justice as an alternative path to reconciliation. Through community dialogue, mediation, and reparative measures, herders and farmers could be given the opportunity to voice grievances, acknowledge harm, and forge agreements for peaceful coexistence.

Abdulahi (2022) maintains that when communities actively define what justice means to them, peace building outcomes are more durable. Yet, questions remain about how extensively such mechanisms have been applied in these areas and the extent of their impact. The involvement of traditional leaders and community elders is equally critical. Ibrahim and Usman (2023) note that community-driven initiatives are more credible and contextually relevant than externally imposed solutions, making their role in Lau and Karim Lamido indispensable to understanding reconciliation outcomes.

Restoring trust and rebuilding the social fabric are at the heart of post-conflict recovery. In Lau and Karim Lamido, years of hostility have eroded intergroup confidence, leaving behind fear, resentment, and suspicion. When carefully implemented, restorative justice can serve as a bridge for dialogue, empathy, and forgiveness, helping communities reconstruct a shared sense of belonging. Okereke (2021) observes that such processes enable groups to create a collective story of their suffering and resilience, transforming conflict memories into lessons for coexistence. However, despite its promise, restorative justice in Taraba State faces serious obstacles, including weak institutional support, political interference, insufficient funding, and untrained mediators (Yahaya & Adamu, 2024). Without coherent frameworks and community empowerment, these practices risk being short-lived or manipulated. While interest in restorative justice is growing across Nigeria, there is still limited empirical research assessing its real influence on post-conflict resolution. This study therefore investigates how restorative justice mechanisms shape peacebuilding, rebuild trust, and restore coexistence between

farmers and herders in Lau and Karim Lamido, while also identifying the challenges that hinder their effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to examine restorative justice mechanisms and post-conflict peace building: a prognosis of herdsman-farmers conflict in Taraba State. It specifically seeks to:

1. To examine how restorative justice mechanisms influence post-conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas of Taraba State?
2. To assess the challenges affecting the effective implementation of restorative justice mechanisms in resolving farmers-herders conflicts in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas.

Literature Review

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice, as described by Ejeh (2022), is a process deeply grounded in communal values and designed to mend the wounds caused by conflict through dialogue, apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Unlike punitive systems that isolate offenders, restorative justice invites victims, offenders, and community members into a collective healing process that fosters reintegration and understanding. In conflict-prone areas such as Lau and Karim Lamido, this model has shown the potential to address long-standing grievances, restore dignity to victims, and promote accountability among offenders. Ejeh highlights that restorative justice draws its moral strength from African traditional systems where elders mediate disputes to restore harmony rather than apportion blame. Similarly, Nwankwo (2023) conceptualizes restorative justice as a relational approach prioritizing the rebuilding of trust and relationships over rigid legal enforcement. By allowing both victims and offenders to share their experiences and make amends, restorative justice transcends dispute resolution to become a transformative social process. In the context of farmers-herders conflict, where resentment and mistrust often sustain hostilities, this relationship-based approach becomes indispensable for reshaping perceptions and fostering enduring peace. Garba (2022) further emphasizes its inclusivity, noting that restorative justice decentralizes authority from state institutions to the community, empowering local actors to design reparative solutions that reflect shared realities. Aliyu (2023) and Onuoha (2023) expand this view, observing that restorative justice addresses psychological wounds through truth-telling while aligning modern peace frameworks with indigenous justice traditions. In a similar vein, Chika and Bamidele (2024) affirm that restorative justice unites accountability and reconciliation, presenting justice not as punishment but as a collective moral responsibility of the community.

Post-Conflict Resolution

Post-conflict resolution, according to Adelaja (2023), is a purposeful process of rebuilding societies after violence through restoring relationships, mending social divisions, and preventing renewed hostilities. It extends beyond the cessation of violence to encompass long-term transformation and social repair. Adelaja's study of communal clashes in the North-East reveals that peace building must combine social reintegration with economic rehabilitation to achieve sustainable outcomes. In agreement, Ndukwe (2022) defines post-conflict resolution

as a suite of strategies designed to rebuild trust, normalize relations, and embed peace after hostilities cease. He warns that peace efforts in Nigeria's Middle Belt often end at ceasefire declarations, neglecting reconciliation and justice, hence perpetuating cycles of recurring violence. Tanko (2023) offers a psychosocial perspective, noting that trauma and bitterness persist long after reconstruction, underscoring the need for emotional healing through dialogue, empathy, and mutual recognition. This is particularly relevant in farmer-herder settings where suspicion lingers long after physical violence ends. Expanding the discourse, Ameh (2023) envisions post-conflict resolution as a holistic process merging justice, dialogue, and inclusive development, where peace is sustained by tangible justice outcomes such as reparations, the return of displaced persons, and equitable resource sharing. Omowunmi (2024) stresses collaboration between state and non-state actors, asserting that traditional and religious leaders play vital roles in restoring trust because they embody shared values and moral legitimacy. Likewise, Garuba (2023) conceives post-conflict resolution as a transitional journey that turns former rivals into partners in reconstruction through behavioral change, remembrance, and collective reform. Together, these perspectives frame post-conflict resolution as a long-term, people-centered, and restorative endeavor aimed at rebuilding relationships, livelihoods, and peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas.

Farmers-Herders Conflict

The farmers-herders conflict, as described by Okorie (2023), represents a recurring pattern of violent clashes between nomadic or semi-nomadic herders and sedentary crop farmers, driven primarily by competition over access to land, water, and grazing routes. Okorie links the persistence of these clashes to ecological and demographic pressures such as population growth, environmental degradation, and climate change, which have forced herders to migrate into farmlands in search of pasture. Her fieldwork across Taraba and Benue States reveals that this struggle for survival often turns violent, destroying livelihoods and eroding the inter-communal harmony that once defined these agrarian societies. Isaac (2022) interprets the conflict as a manifestation of governance failure, where poor state regulation of land use, migration, and rural security leaves both groups unprotected. In the absence of clear grazing policies or functioning dispute resolution mechanisms, communities resort to self-help frequently escalating disputes into full-blown violence. In Lau and Karim Lamido, this institutional vacuum has entrenched cycles of mistrust and retaliatory attacks. From a cultural standpoint, Babatunde (2023) frames the conflict as a collision between two contrasting worldviews: farmers, who regard land as ancestral and immovable, and herders, who see it as a migratory resource vital for their herds. Such divergent perceptions, often misinterpreted as provocations, intensify misunderstanding and perpetuate violence, pointing to the urgent need for culturally sensitive peace interventions that respect both agricultural and pastoral livelihoods.

Historically, the farmers-herders conflict in Taraba State particularly in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas has evolved from minor disputes into entrenched and militarized cycles of violence. What began as occasional quarrels over grazing paths or crop destruction gradually intensified with the shrinking of arable land and water sources caused by climate change. By the early 2000s, these confrontations had become organized, involving ethnic militias and political opportunism. Danjuma (2023) observes that local elites often

exploit such tensions for political gain, manipulating ethnic identities to mobilize support and deepen division. In communities where political allegiance coincides with ethnicity, reconciliation becomes fragile and short-lived. Similarly, Olaniyan (2024) attributes the persistence of hostilities to the systemic exclusion of pastoralist communities from development initiatives, which fuels resentment and reinforces stereotypes of herders as intruders. This marginalization, according to Ogbuefi (2022), has escalated the conflict into a humanitarian crisis, displacing thousands, crippling rural economies, and disrupting social services such as education and healthcare. Collectively, these insights frame the farmers-herders conflict not as a singular issue but as a complex intersection of environmental stress, governance failure, and identity politics, demanding multidimensional and sustainable peace building responses.

Peaceful Coexistence

Peaceful coexistence, as described by Obaji (2023), refers to a state of mutual tolerance and non-violent engagement among individuals or groups who share the same environment despite their cultural, ethnic, or livelihood differences. It extends beyond the mere absence of conflict to embody values and systems that make disagreement manageable through respect, empathy, and dialogue. In the aftermath of farmers-herders conflicts, peaceful coexistence demands a deliberate effort to understand and accept the distinct ways of life that define these groups. Zango (2022) describes coexistence as a socially negotiated process built on cooperation, compromise, and mutual recognition, noting that in regions like Taraba State, where historical grievances and resource pressures linger, sustainable peace requires shared experiences such as community forums, cultural exchanges, and intergroup collaborations that foster understanding and reduce hostility. Audu (2023) adds that peaceful coexistence is an ongoing process grounded in justice, fairness, and access to equal opportunities, arguing that peace can only thrive through transparent institutions and equitable land policies. In Lau and Karim Lamido, these frameworks are vital for mending deep emotional and social fractures. Similarly, Ibrahim (2024) views coexistence as a post-conflict goal focused on rebuilding trust and healing psychological wounds, while Usman (2023) and Chidiebere (2023) stress its developmental importance as the bedrock of rural progress. They advocate for peace education, youth involvement, and joint economic ventures that encourage cooperation and shared prosperity. Altogether, these perspectives reveal peaceful coexistence as a continuously nurtured relationship built on dialogue, justice, and cultural understanding.

Restorative Justice in Post-Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Coexistence Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria: The Nexus

The application of restorative justice in addressing post-conflict situations between farmers and herders in Nigeria has attracted significant empirical attention as violent clashes increasingly disrupt rural peace and development. Over the past decade, more than 3,600 people have reportedly died in these confrontations across the Middle Belt, with Taraba, Benue, and Nasarawa States among the worst affected (International Crisis Group, 2023). Restorative justice provides an alternative framework that prioritizes healing and relationship restoration over punitive measures. In rural societies where kinship and interdependence are deeply ingrained, this approach resonates with long-standing cultural values of reconciliation. Kambanda (2022) empirically demonstrated that restorative justice processes foster mutual

acknowledgment of harm and responsibility among disputing parties, thereby enhancing prospects for peaceful coexistence. This has particular relevance in agrarian communities such as Lau and Karim Lamido in Taraba State, where historical interdependence between farmers and herders in trade, security, and social relations has been eroded by cycles of violence and mistrust.

Empirical research shows that conventional justice mechanisms in Nigeria often fail to address the relational and emotional dimensions of farmer-herder conflicts. Court processes are slow, adversarial, and often inaccessible to rural dwellers. Ngugi (2021), in a comparative study conducted in Kenya, found that traditional reconciliation mechanisms anchored on apology, restitution, and forgiveness achieved more enduring peace than formal court rulings. Similar indigenous systems, including the “Ibegwu” council among the Idoma and the “Gaa” forums in Northern Nigeria, once provided platforms for dialogue and restorative engagement. However, as Agbaje and Sani (2023) observed, these mechanisms have gradually been displaced by bureaucratic state systems that lack cultural sensitivity and community ownership. The reactivation of such local restorative frameworks could provide practical, culturally grounded alternatives for rebuilding social bonds and addressing the root causes of conflict between farmers and herders in Taraba State.

Restorative justice also proves effective in multi-ethnic environments by encouraging inclusive participation among victims, offenders, and the wider community. Empirical evidence from Toure (2023) in Mali demonstrated that inclusive inter-communal dialogues enhanced accountability and reduced violent recurrences in ethnically diverse areas. Similarly, Banda (2021), in a study from Zambia, found that when traditional leaders endorsed restorative initiatives, community compliance and trust in peace processes improved substantially. In the Nigerian context, traditional and religious leaders hold comparable moral authority that can legitimize peace building interventions. Their participation is particularly vital in areas like Lau and Karim Lamido, where state-led interventions often encounter skepticism due to historical neglect and perceived bias. Integrating these local actors into formal peace frameworks can strengthen legitimacy and deepen community participation in restorative justice processes.

Moreover, the transformative power of restorative justice lies in its ability to link reconciliation with socio-economic renewal. Hassen (2022) empirically showed that pastoralist communities in Ethiopia experienced a 40% reduction in violent incidents after jointly implementing resource-sharing agreements, such as common grazing schedules and water points. Similar evidence-based strategies could be adapted in Taraba State through the establishment of joint farming cooperatives, shared marketplaces, and participatory land-use committees. These mechanisms would not only reduce competition over scarce resources but also rebuild interdependence and economic collaboration between farmers and herders. Ultimately, restorative justice represents a pragmatic and culturally consonant pathway toward sustainable peace—one that dehumanizes adversaries, restores social trust, and reaffirms the shared destiny of Nigeria’s rural communities.

Challenges Affecting the Effective Implementation of Restorative Justice in Resolving Farmers-Herders Conflicts in Nigeria

The implementation of restorative justice strategies in resolving farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria faces complex challenges that undermine both their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Although restorative approaches align closely with the communal values of

many rural societies, translating these ideals into practice has been constrained by systemic, social, and political factors. The African Union (2017) reports that pastoralist communities across Africa remain largely marginalized within national policy frameworks, resulting in poor institutional recognition of their needs. This marginalization has made it difficult to integrate pastoralist mobility and land-use realities into formal peace building systems. Consequently, restorative justice initiatives that depend on dialogue, mutual recognition, and shared accountability often lack the institutional support necessary for full implementation. In Taraba State, where most conflicts occur in hard-to-reach rural settlements, weak governance structures and policy neglect further limit the reach and legitimacy of restorative interventions.

Empirical evidence also shows that the gradual erosion of traditional authority has weakened indigenous conflict resolution systems that once provided social order. Agbaje and Sani (2023) found in their field study across Benue and Taraba that the declining influence of community elders, traditional chiefs, and religious leaders has significantly reduced the capacity of local mediation forums. Historically, these figures played a pivotal role in enforcing restitution and promoting reconciliation after disputes. However, the imposition of state-led governance without meaningful integration of these customary systems has diminished their authority. As a result, community-based restorative initiatives now operate with reduced legitimacy, leaving many conflicts unresolved at the grassroots level. The absence of these traditional mechanisms has created a vacuum that formal judicial systems have struggled to fill, especially given their procedural delays, cost implications, and detachment from local realities.

Mistrust among stakeholders compounds these challenges. Ahmed's (2021) ethnographic study in Anguwar Jaba, Keffi, revealed that repeated cycles of violence have fostered deep suspicion not only between farmers and herders but also toward peace facilitators and government representatives. Many participants perceive dialogue forums as politically motivated or biased, undermining the authenticity of reconciliation efforts. In such polarized environments, victims fear retribution, while offenders doubt the fairness of the process, making genuine dialogue difficult to sustain. Aigbe and Esezobor (2023) further argue that the politicization of conflicts has worsened this mistrust. Political actors often exploit the farmers-herders crisis for electoral advantage, framing disputes in ethnic or religious terms. This manipulation entrenches divisions and obstructs restorative efforts, as community-based solutions are sidelined in favour of elite negotiations that rarely address local grievances.

Beyond the social and political barriers, economic hardship and institutional weaknesses present further obstacles. Akah and Odey (2021) note that in conflict-affected communities like those in Taraba and Obanliku, widespread poverty, food insecurity, and competition for land and water make reconciliation secondary to survival. When livelihoods are destroyed and displacement persists, peace initiatives risk appearing abstract or irrelevant. Furthermore, Akomolafe and Usman (2023) highlight the absence of robust data and monitoring systems as a major limitation, making it difficult to assess the outcomes of restorative projects or replicate success stories. The failure to link restorative justice with broader development and agricultural policies also reduces its impact. Akeredolu (2023) observes that while conflicts severely disrupt food production and local economies, restorative programmes often function independently of land reform, resource management, or security policies. Without integration into these frameworks, restorative justice remains largely symbolic rather than transformative. Addressing these interlinked challenges therefore requires a holistic, evidence-driven, and

community-rooted approach that reconnects justice, development, and governance to sustain peace between farmers and herders in Taraba State and across Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two interrelated theoretical frameworks: Restorative Justice to provide a comprehensive understanding of how post-conflict healing and structural change can foster lasting peace between farmers and herders in Taraba State.

Restorative Justice Theory

Restorative Justice Theory offers a moral and relational lens for addressing harm and rebuilding trust in societies torn apart by violence. Originating in the 1970s through the works of Howard Zehr (1990) and John Braithwaite (1989), the theory reimagines justice not as retribution but as restoration. It argues that wrongdoing fractures relationships and community harmony, and that true justice involves repairing these bonds through dialogue, accountability, and empathy. Zehr (2002) identifies this process as one built on acknowledging harm, meeting the needs of all affected, and engaging community members in meaningful participation. Empirical studies, such as McCold and Wachtel (2003), confirm that restorative approaches lead to deeper healing and greater satisfaction among parties than punitive systems, especially in close-knit or interdependent societies.

Applied to the farmers-herders conflict in Lau and Karim Lamido, the Restorative Justice framework captures the essence of reconciliation within African communal values. Traditionally, Nigerian societies have relied on dialogue, mediation, and restitution facilitated by elders and local leaders, processes that mirror restorative principles. These indigenous systems emphasize the moral duty to restore peace and preserve relationships rather than inflict punishment. However, critics such as Daly (2002) and Zernova (2007) caution that restorative processes can be vulnerable to power imbalances and coercion if not properly facilitated. Despite these concerns, the theory provides a culturally congruent pathway for rebuilding fractured relationships between farmers and herders through dialogue circles, truth-telling sessions, and cooperative community projects. In essence, restorative justice serves as both a moral philosophy and a practical tool for transforming hostility into empathy and collective healing.

Restorative Justice Theory provides the relational and community-based mechanisms for rebuilding trust and restoring harmony at the interpersonal and communal levels. The theory allows for a holistic approach to peace building in Lau and Karim Lamido, one that recognizes the emotional wounds of past conflicts while confronting the socio-economic and institutional injustices that perpetuate them.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how restorative justice has been applied in resolving farmers-herders conflicts in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas of Taraba State. This approach provided an avenue to capture the lived experiences, emotions, and reflections of individuals and groups directly affected by the conflict. Through focus group discussions, farmers and herders shared their experiences, perceptions of justice, and stories of reconciliation following years of hostility. Key informant interviews with traditional rulers, religious leaders, peace committee members, and local

officials further revealed how community-driven peace mechanisms have promoted forgiveness, dialogue, and trust-building. The combination of these methods provided rich, first-hand insights into how restorative justice principles have been integrated into local dispute resolution, highlighting their role in fostering peaceful coexistence and rebuilding social relationships that had been fractured by violence.

The research was carried out in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas, two regions that have experienced recurrent clashes between farmers and herders due to disputes over farmlands, grazing corridors, and access to water resources. Lau lies in the northern part of Taraba State, bordering Adamawa, while Karim Lamido is surrounded by Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, and Plateau States. Both areas are agrarian and highly diverse in ethnicity and religion, conditions that often fuel tension but also encourage cooperation when properly managed. Fieldwork was conducted in six selected communities: Gwomu, Bambur, and Munga Lalau/Doso in Karim Lamido, and Donadda, Katibu, and Didango in Lau, which have been known conflict flashpoints. A total of 72 participants took part in the study, including farmers, herders, traditional and religious leaders, peace committee members, youth and women leaders, NGO representatives, and local government officials. Data from the focus group discussions and interviews were thematically analysed, revealing a gradual shift from retributive responses to reconciliatory practices rooted in dialogue and mutual understanding. The findings showed that restorative justice approaches have helped to re-establish trust, reduce violent reprisal, and strengthen community-led peace building structures in the study areas.

Data Presentation and Analysis

How Restorative Justice Mechanisms Influence Post-conflict Resolution and Peaceful Coexistence Between Farmers and Herders in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas of Taraba State

Findings from the interviews and focus group discussions revealed that restorative justice mechanisms have become a cornerstone for rebuilding trust and restoring peace between farmers and herders in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas of Taraba State. Across Donadda, Katibu, Didango, Gwomu, Bambur, and Munga Lalau/Doso, respondents consistently described how dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation have gradually replaced hostility with mutual understanding. Both farmers and herders spoke passionately about how these approaches have changed the dynamics of their relationships.

A farmer in Katibu reflected during an interview, saying:

Before these peace meetings started, we lived in constant fear. Whenever we saw herders passing near our farms, we prepared for trouble. But when the elders brought us together to talk, something changed. We realised that they were also tired of the fighting. During one meeting, a herder stood up and said, “We have lost people too, and we want peace.” That was the first time I saw them not as enemies but as fellow human beings.

Similarly, a herder in Gwomu echoed this sentiment, noting:

When the peace committee invited us to sit with the farmers, we were suspicious at first. But after everyone spoke their truth about the cows that strayed, the farms that were destroyed, and the people who died, we began to understand that both sides had suffered enough. Talking helped us heal. It helped us see that revenge would only make things worse for everyone.

These voices reveal a deep emotional shift among participants, showing that restorative justice has reintroduced empathy and communication in communities once divided by violence.

Participants also highlighted that practical restorative measures such as compensation, public apology, and symbolic acts of reconciliation have become crucial in rebuilding fractured relationships. In Didango, both farmers and herders narrated instances where local peace committees facilitated dialogue and settlement without involving the police or courts.

A herder explained:

When my cattle entered a farm and destroyed crops, the farmer was very angry. He wanted to arrest me. But the elders called both of us. I explained my side, and the farmer spoke about his loss. At the end, I agreed to pay compensation. The elders asked me to apologise before everyone, and I did. After that, the farmer said, "Let us end this matter here. We have both learned something." Since then, we have not fought again.

A farmer in Bambur shared a similar story, saying:

When we handled our problems through dialogue, it changed the way we lived. I remember one time we sat from morning till evening talking about our grievances. People cried, people forgave, and by the end of the day, we shared food together. That is how peace should be built—not through guns or threats but through understanding.

These testimonies demonstrate how restorative justice has transformed interpersonal and communal relations, helping to restore dignity, repair harm, and renew hope for lasting coexistence.

The narratives gathered from both farmers and herders revealed a shared belief that restorative justice has laid the foundation for sustainable peace in Lau and Karim Lamido. The findings showed that while tensions occasionally resurface, communities now possess local frameworks for dialogue that prevent small disputes from escalating into violent conflicts.

A village elder in Katibu summed it up during a group discussion, saying:

Restorative justice has taught us that peace is not the absence of anger but the presence of understanding. Before, we used to see each other as threats, but now, we talk, we trade, and even attend each other's ceremonies. The scars are still there, but we are learning to live with them together.

Another herder in Gwomu added: We now know that justice is not only about punishment, it is about finding ways to live again without fear.

These powerful words capture the essence of what restorative justice has achieved in these communities: not a perfect peace, but a human one, built on truth, forgiveness, and the courage to coexist despite past wounds.

Challenges Affecting the Effective Implementation of Restorative Justice Mechanisms in Resolving Farmers-herders Conflicts in Lau and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas

Findings from the field revealed that although restorative justice mechanisms have made significant contributions to rebuilding peace between farmers and herders in Lau and Karim Lamido, their effective implementation remains fraught with challenges. Across all the communities visited, participants repeatedly mentioned that limited trust, weak institutional support, and inconsistent leadership hinder the smooth operation of these peace efforts.

In Bambur, a farmer noted during a group discussion:

Sometimes we come together to settle disputes, but after the meeting, people go back and start gossiping or accusing the other side of lying. It is difficult to build trust when people still carry anger from the past.

A herder in Katibu shared a similar frustration, adding: We talk about peace in the meeting, but once we return to the bush, we hear rumours that the farmers are planning revenge. It makes it hard to relax or believe that the peace will last.

These sentiments underline the deep psychological scars left by years of violence, which continue to undermine efforts at genuine reconciliation. The findings also showed that while peace committees exist, their capacity to manage complex conflicts is limited by lack of resources and inconsistent support from local authorities. Many respondents lamented that mediation sessions often depend on voluntary efforts, without logistical backing or enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with agreed resolutions.

Participants also identified political interference, corruption, and selective justice as major barriers to the success of restorative processes. Several respondents alleged that local politicians sometimes exploit the conflict to gain political advantage, making impartial resolution difficult. In Didango, a youth leader explained:

We have seen cases where political figures take sides, especially when the conflict involves their supporters. When the elders call for dialogue, some people refuse to attend because they believe the outcome is already decided.

A farmer in Gwomu added: If a herder damages my farm and we agree on compensation, some powerful people intervene and cancel it. How can there be justice when some people are above the law?

These accounts reveal that the credibility of restorative mechanisms is weakened when political influence overrides fairness. Moreover, corruption among local enforcement agents further undermines trust. One herder lamented: When you report a case to the police, they ask for money before they act. If you cannot pay, your case is ignored. That is why people prefer to settle matters themselves, even if it is not always fair.

Such narratives highlight the interplay between governance failures and community-level conflict resolution efforts, showing that restorative justice cannot thrive in an environment where accountability is weak and power is abused.

The findings also exposed how poverty, trauma, and recurring violence continue to obstruct sustained peace. Many participants observed that hunger and lack of economic opportunities make communities vulnerable to renewed clashes. In Munga Lalau/Doso, a farmer emotionally recounted:

How can people talk about peace when they have no food? When a man cannot feed his family, small issues turn into big problems. Even if you settle a matter today, tomorrow hunger will bring another fight.

Similarly, a herder in Donadda said: Some of us lost everything, our cattle, our homes. When people are desperate, they listen to anyone who promises protection or revenge.

Respondents also pointed out that some victims of past violence still struggle with trauma, making it difficult to fully embrace reconciliation. A local pastor in Karim Lamido explained: We ask people to forgive, but some lost their children, their homes, and everything they owned. Without counselling or real support, forgiveness is not easy.

These testimonies reveal that peace is fragile when emotional wounds remain unhealed and basic livelihoods are uncertain. The overall picture that emerged from the fieldwork is that while restorative justice mechanisms offer a promising pathway toward peace, their success depends on strengthening institutional support, ensuring fairness, addressing poverty, and healing the emotional and structural wounds that continue to threaten coexistence in Lau and Karim Lamido.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the first objective, which examined the *restorative justice mechanisms employed in resolving farmers-herders conflicts in Lau and Karim Lamido*, revealed that dialogue, mediation, compensation, and reconciliation meetings form the core of these peace building efforts. These mechanisms were reported to have fostered partial reconciliation and improved communication between conflicting groups. However, their overall impact remains constrained by lingering mistrust, political interference, and limited institutional support. This aligns with the views of Musa (2022), who argued that restorative justice thrives only in environments where both parties perceive fairness and transparency in the mediation process. Similarly, Dada (2023) found that the sustainability of peace in agrarian conflicts depends largely on the sincerity of dialogue and the neutrality of mediators. The findings from Lau and Karim Lamido corroborate these positions, as communities expressed that while they value the peace dialogues, the absence of structured follow-up and monitoring weakens their long-term effectiveness. The study therefore confirms that restorative justice, though conceptually effective, struggles operationally when institutional trust and leadership accountability are fragile.

The second objective, which focused on the *challenges affecting the effective implementation of restorative justice mechanisms*, showed that persistent issues such as political manipulation, economic hardship, trauma, and corruption continue to undermine conflict resolution outcomes. Respondents consistently identified the influence of political actors as a key impediment to impartial peace building. This finding supports the assertion of Ibrahim (2022), who observed that local political elites often exploit inter-group conflicts for electoral advantage, thereby frustrating grassroots peace efforts. Likewise, Omole (2023) maintained that without economic empowerment and psychosocial rehabilitation, communities emerging from violent conflict remain vulnerable to relapse. The experiences of the participants in Lau and Karim Lamido confirm this view, as many lamented the lack of compensation for lost livelihoods and the absence of trauma-healing interventions. Thus, the findings strengthen the position of earlier scholars that restorative justice cannot succeed in isolation but must be supported by transparent governance, community empowerment, and institutional integrity to foster durable peace between farmers and herders.

The findings of this study align with both Restorative Justice and Conflict Transformation theories, highlighting that peace building between farmers and herders requires more than dialogue and reconciliation. While restorative mechanisms help repair harm and rebuild trust, their effectiveness depends on fairness, inclusivity, and transparency. At the same time, sustainable peace necessitates addressing deeper political, economic, and structural issues, as recurring challenges like corruption, poverty, and trauma continue to undermine efforts. Together, these theories underscore that lasting coexistence relies on both repairing relationships and transforming the conditions that sustain conflict.

Conclusion

The study concludes that restorative justice mechanisms in Lau and Karim Lamido have played a meaningful role in reducing tensions and supporting short-term conflict de-escalation. However, their overall impact remains constrained by deep-rooted structural weaknesses, political interference, widespread poverty, and limited institutional capacity. Although dialogue and reconciliation initiatives are present, they are often undermined by mistrust among stakeholders and inconsistent support from relevant authorities. Consequently, these mechanisms have not yet achieved their full potential in delivering lasting peace. For sustainable conflict resolution, there is a clear need to strengthen institutional frameworks, insulate peace processes from political manipulation, and address underlying socio-economic conditions that continue to fuel instability in the study area.

Recommendations

1. Government and local authorities should strengthen and institutionalize restorative justice frameworks through adequate funding, capacity building, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure fairness and neutrality in conflict resolution.
2. Integrated peace building programmes should be introduced to combine reconciliation efforts with livelihood restoration and trauma-healing support for both farmers and herders, thereby addressing the root causes of mistrust and recurrent violence.

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