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## Ethical And Religious Dimensions in the Handling of Sacrificial Animals in Islam

Juniawan Mandala Putra<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Yusuf<sup>2</sup>,  
 Dicky Wahyudi<sup>3</sup>, Meinorizah<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Mercu Buana Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2,3</sup> Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 10 Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Universitas Terbuka Jakarta, Indonesia.

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Corresponding Author: Juniawan Mandala Putra, Universitas Mercu Buana Jakarta,  
 E-mail: [juniawanmp@gmail.com](mailto:juniawanmp@gmail.com)

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*Animal Handling*

*Qurban*

*Human Perception*

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### Abstract

This study examines how sacrificial animals (qurban) are managed from the viewpoints of humanitarian principles and Islamic teachings through a systematic review of existing literature. It draws on scholarly articles and field reports published from 2021 to 2025. In Islamic tradition, qurban is a key ritual that involves both spiritual devotion and social and ethical responsibility toward all living creatures. The concept of *Ihsan*—embodying excellence, compassion, and moral responsibility, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)—is central to this framework. In the context of qurban, *Ihsan* requires Muslims to handle animals humanely, carefully, and with minimal pain, aligning with modern animal welfare standards. Nonetheless, the literature review reveals a gap between ideal teachings and actual practice. Common issues include inadequate hygiene, rough or inappropriate handling, and limited awareness of the spiritual and ethical importance of qurban. These results underscore the necessity for stronger ethical internalization, better technical skills, and comprehensive educational strategies to improve both the humanitarian and spiritual aspects of qurban practices.

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### Introduction

The practice of *qurban* (animal sacrifice) constitutes a fundamental act of worship in Islam, embodying not only spiritual devotion but also ethical, social, and humanitarian values. Central to this practice is the principle of *Ihsan*—excellence and compassion—which requires that animals be treated with dignity and care throughout their lifecycle, including during slaughter. This principle is firmly rooted in Islamic teachings, as reflected in prophetic traditions that emphasise minimising pain and ensuring humane treatment. In contemporary discourse, these values resonate with the modern framework of animal welfare, particularly the concept of the “five freedoms,” which advocates for the protection of animals from suffering, distress, and harm (Redaktur, 2024) (Bastoni et al., 2024)(Martinouva et al., 2024).

Despite this normative ideal, empirical evidence indicates that the implementation of *qurban* practices often falls short of these ethical standards. Field reports and prior studies reveal recurring issues such as inadequate hygiene during slaughter, improper handling of animals, limited veterinary supervision, and insufficient understanding of humane slaughtering techniques. For instance, cases of animal health problems and stress due to poor handling practices have been documented, alongside findings that community awareness of hygiene and animal welfare standards remains inconsistent. While educational initiatives and training programmes—such as halal slaughtering certification and community-based outreach—have been introduced, their impact appears uneven and not yet fully institutionalised across different regions (Cipka et al., 2024) (Irawan, 2025).

In addition, the contemporary practice of *qurban* is increasingly characterised by procedural and ritualistic orientations, where the focus is often placed on the technical completion of slaughter and meat distribution rather than on the deeper ethical, spiritual, and humanitarian dimensions. In some cases, *qurban* is reduced to a symbolic or even instrumental activity, detached from its core values of empathy, social justice, and moral consciousness. This disjunction highlights a critical tension between the normative Islamic framework—grounded in *Ihsan* and *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*—and the empirical realities observed in practice (Faishal, 2024) (Al-ikqrham, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined aspects of *qurban* from theological, legal, and technical perspectives, there remains a limited integrative analysis that systematically connects Islamic ethical principles with empirical findings on animal handling and community practices. Existing literature tends to be fragmented, either focusing on normative religious teachings without sufficient empirical grounding or presenting descriptive field findings without deeper ethical interpretation. Therefore, a clear scholarly gap exists in understanding how the principle of *Ihsan* can be operationalised within contemporary *qurban* practices in a way that bridges religious norms, animal welfare standards, and social-humanitarian values (Basyir, 2024);(Purnamasari et al., 2025) (faylasuf, 2023).

In some communities, *qurban* has been celebrated more as a cultural festival than a spiritual act. Few truly internalise the meaning of piety, sacrifice, and social compassion, as stated in the Qur’an (*Surah Al-Hajj - 37-45 - Quran*):

“It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah, but it is your piety that reaches Him.”

This verse clearly affirms that the moral and spiritual consciousness underlying *qurban* is more significant than its outward ritual form. However, in some communities, *qurban* has increasingly been celebrated as a cultural festival rather than a transformative act of devotion and compassion. Consequently, only a limited number of participants deeply internalise the values of self-sacrifice, social responsibility, and solidarity with the vulnerable—values exemplified by the prophetic legacy of Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

Based on this identified gap, the present study aims to analyse the ethical and religious dimensions of sacrificial animal handling in Islam by integrating normative Islamic teachings with empirical evidence drawn from recent studies and field reports (wahadi, 2025). This research examines the principle of *Ihsan* as a fundamental ethical foundation governing the treatment of animals in the practice of *qurban*, while assessing the extent to which contemporary *qurban* practices align with established animal welfare principles. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore the broader humanitarian and spiritual implications of *qurban* within modern Muslim societies,

particularly in relation to moral consciousness, social responsibility, and compassion toward all living beings.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design through a literature review approach. The qualitative method was selected because the focus is on interpreting and contextualising Islamic views on *Ihsan*, animal welfare, and humanitarian values within the context of qurban practices. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, qualitative research is well-suited for exploring socially and spiritually constructed meanings rather than for quantitatively measuring variables. This literature-based approach offers a detailed examination of how Islamic spiritual ethics relate to humane animal management practices. "Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore moral and spiritual meanings embedded in social and religious contexts." (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Collection and Analyse Techniques**

Research data were collected through a systematic literature review using a structured, transparent approach. Academic sources were retrieved from major databases, namely Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), using combinations of keywords such as *qurban*, *animal welfare*, *Ihsan*, *Islamic slaughter*, and *humanitarian values in Islam*. The reviewed literature was limited to reputable, peer-reviewed publications—including journal articles, conference proceedings, and official institutional reports—published between 2020 and 2025, available in either English or Bahasa Indonesia, and explicitly addressing qurban practices, animal welfare, halal slaughter, or Islamic ethical values. Non-academic sources, publications lacking clear methodologies, duplicated records, and studies without ethical or empirical relevance were excluded.

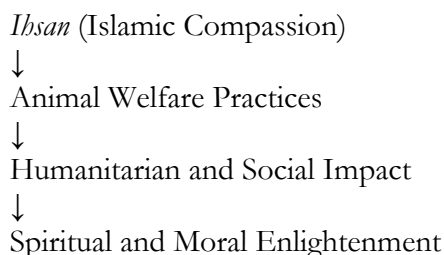
The literature selection process was conducted in several stages, beginning with an initial identification that yielded approximately 120 articles, followed by title and abstract screening that reduced the number to around 65 studies, and full-text assessment that resulted in approximately 30 eligible articles. From these, 15 key articles were ultimately selected for in-depth analysis. Data were analysed thematically by categorising findings into four main themes: the principle of *Ihsan* in the treatment of sacrificial animals, Islamic applications of animal welfare, the social and humanitarian dimensions of qurban, and the spiritual and moral values embedded in the practice. This thematic approach enabled a holistic understanding of Islamic discourse on qurban and animal welfare.

### **Data Validity**

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing insights drawn from Islamic primary texts (the Qur'an and Hadith), contemporary academic literature, and empirical reports on qurban practices in Indonesia. This triangulation approach enhances the credibility and interpretive rigour of the findings.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this research reflects the interrelationship between Islamic ethics, humane treatment of animals, and social solidarity:



This framework illustrates that the application of *Ihsan* in qurban transcends ritual obligations, promoting both animal welfare and human moral growth.

## Findings

The following table presents findings from a literature review summarising the main studies related to the ethical, religious, and practical dimensions of Qurban. This table highlights the key contributions of previous research regarding Islamic teachings, animal welfare, slaughter practices, community cleanliness, legal perspectives, and the social significance of the Qurban ritual. This summary provides an initial overview of existing knowledge and serves as a basis for thematic analysis and further discussion.

No	Name	Title	Findings
1	Kusnadi (2022)	Thematic Interpretation of Qurban Worship (A Study of Surah al-Hajj: 36)	The act of qurban represents the fulfillment of Allah’s divine command and an expression of gratitude for His blessings. It symbolises human responsibility as rational beings endowed with life and divine will. Through qurban, believers demonstrate obedience (ta‘abbud) and gratitude, affirming faith and ethical accountability within the divine order.
2	Komariah et al. (2022)	Identification of Sacrificial Animal Characteristics in Mosque Complexes in the Bogor Urban Area	The majority of sacrificial animals consisted of Bali cattle aged $\geq 4$ years (33.3%), thin-tailed sheep aged 2.5–3.0 years (28.9%), and Jawarandu goats aged 2.5–3.0 years (37.8%). All animals met Islamic legal (sharia) requirements, being healthy, mature, and free from physical defects prior to slaughter.
3	Utami et al. (2024)	Safe, Healthy, Wholesome, and Halal-Based Slaughter of Sacrificial Cattle	The community of Tegalgede Village, Summersari District, Jember Regency demonstrated an improved understanding and practical capability in conducting qurban slaughter in accordance with Islamic law while observing the principles of safety, hygiene, wholesomeness, and halal (Aman, Sehat, Utuh, dan Halal).

4	Kusuma et al. (2021)	Slaughtering and Educational Outreach on Qurban Animals	Most individuals in South Tangerang had not fully implemented proper personal hygiene practices during slaughter or meat handling. Public compliance with government regulations—particularly concerning hygiene standards—remained low, indicating limited awareness and enforcement.
5	Tangkonda et al. (2023)	Ante-Mortem and Post-Mortem Examination of Sacrificial Animals at Al-Faidah Musholla, Kupang (2022)	Ante-mortem and post-mortem examinations showed satisfactory results. All sacrificial animals were healthy, met Islamic legal requirements, and produced meat that was safe and suitable for human consumption.
6	Haris et al. (2023)	Sacrificial Animals and Their Management Before Eid-ul-Adha	One of the most common problems reported by animal owners is anorexia (loss of appetite), mainly caused by abrupt changes in feeding practices. Other contributing factors include stress, fear, and infections. Proper feeding history assessment and suitable diet provision are essential to prevent animal distress and health deterioration.
7	Hasibuan et al. (2024)	Islamic Legal Study on the Substitution of Sacrificial Animals with Monetary Payment	Based on MUI Fatwa No. 37 of 2019 and scholarly consensus (ijma') across the four Sunni schools, substituting sacrificial animals with money is impermissible. The essence of qurban lies in iraqah ad-dam (the act of slaughter), which cannot be replaced by financial compensation.
8	Medan (2024)	Islamic Investment in Sacrificial Animal Farming Businesses	The profit-sharing arrangement in sacrificial cattle farming in Klumpang Village is considered equitable, with a 50:50 profit distribution. Financial risk, particularly capital loss, is borne by investors, reflecting cooperative Islamic business principles.
9	Ibrahim et al. (2022)	Preferences of Sacrificers in Selecting and Procuring Qurban Animals for Eid al-Adha	Cattle are preferred for group sacrifices, while sheep are more commonly chosen for individual offerings. Selection decisions are influenced by financial capacity, ease of animal handling, and local cultural wisdom.

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10	Wheeler (2022)	Animal Sacrifice and the Origins of Islam	The study provides a detailed historical account of the camel sacrifice performed by Prophet Muhammad, which later became a model for Hajj sacrifices. Integrating Qur'anic, biblical, classical Arabic sources, zooarchaeological evidence, and Arabian rock art, the research sheds light on sacrificial practices dating back approximately 1,400 years.
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To deepen analysis, the findings are thematically synthesised according to the study's conceptual framework, which includes: (1) *Ihsan* (ethical compassion), (2) animal welfare practices, (3) social–humanitarian aspects, and (4) spiritual–moral values. This method facilitates the detection of patterns, overlaps, and discrepancies among the reviewed studies.

### ***Ihsan* as an Ethical Foundation: Normative Strength Versus Practical Inconsistency**

Throughout the literature, *Ihsan* regularly appears as the key ethical principle guiding the treatment of sacrificial animals. Normative research highlights that qurban is more than a ritual duty; it is an act rooted in moral virtue, demanding compassion, skill, and responsibility. Theological perspectives support this view, framing qurban as an expression of obedience and moral duty. (LastName & Ahmad, 2017). Empirical findings highlight a gap between normative ideals and actual practice. Some communities show a good grasp of humane slaughter methods, while others have limited awareness and inconsistent application of *Ihsan*-based principles. This difference indicates that, although *Ihsan* is well-understood, it has yet to be fully integrated into daily practice.

### **Animal Welfare Practices: Compliance with Standards vs Technical Deficiencies**

A second key theme involves implementing animal welfare principles. Multiple studies show that, in many instances, sacrificial animals adhere to basic shariah standards regarding health, age, and physical condition. Veterinary inspections, as well as ante- and post-mortem examinations in specific areas, verify that animals are suitable for slaughter and safe to eat. (Fuseini, 2023). However, opposing evidence underscores ongoing technical deficiencies. These encompass poor hygiene, mishandling during transport and slaughter, and limited understanding of pre-slaughter animal care, such as feeding routines and stress management. These inconsistencies indicate that although formal adherence to religious standards is usually met, the overall commitment to animal welfare—especially in reducing stress and suffering—is inconsistently applied.

### **Social and Humanitarian Dimensions: Ritual Distribution vs the Empowerment Gap**

The literature highlights the social role of qurban in resource redistribution and building community bonds. In many settings, qurban helps underprivileged groups gain access to meat and promotes social cohesion. (Ariyadi, 2025). A key pattern emerges concerning the depth of its humanitarian impact. Multiple studies indicate that the practice often remains distributive rather than becoming transformative. Although it meets short-term needs, it rarely fosters long-term community empowerment. This reveals a conceptual limitation in current practice, in which qurban is treated as a charitable ritual rather than a strategic instrument for social development.

### **Spiritual and Moral Values: Symbolic Affirmation vs Substantive Internalisation**

From a spiritual standpoint, qurban is commonly seen as a way to nurture taqwa (piety), sincerity, and self-sacrifice. The reviewed studies reliably confirm its importance in strengthening religious identity and moral consciousness. (Rizal & Irman, 2025). However, empirical observations indicate some level of symbolic reductionism. In certain instances, qurban is carried out as a yearly duty without fully internalising its ethical and spiritual significance. This is evident in practices that prioritise completing the procedure over understanding its deeper meaning. As a result, the potential for qurban to foster empathy, discipline, and spiritual development is often underexploited. (Sh Shikhaliev, 2026).

When examined together, these themes consistently show a gap between Islamic ideals and actual practices. Although *Ihsan* offers an ethical framework that encompasses animal welfare, social justice, and spirituality, its practical implementation is often fragmented. Additionally, the study shows that current qurban activities typically occur in separate areas—religious regulation, technical handling, or social sharing—rather than as a cohesive ethical approach. This disjointedness hampers the full realisation of qurban as outlined in Islamic teachings.

### **Discussion**

Research on the practice of qurban (animal sacrifice) indicates that, in general, the community continues to observe Islamic law appropriately, although several technical and educational challenges remain. Kusnadi (2022) emphasised that the qurban ritual represents both the implementation of Islamic law and an expression of gratitude to Allah. Similarly, Komariah et al. (2022) found that the majority of sacrificial animals—such as Bali cattle, thin-tailed sheep, and Jawarandu goats—complied with syariah requirements in terms of species and age. Meanwhile, Utami et al. (2024) reported that the community of Tegalgede Village has developed adequate understanding and practical skills in performing the slaughtering of sacrificial animals safely, hygienically, wholesomely, and in accordance with halal principles.

However, Kusuma et al. (2021) reported contrasting findings: most residents in South Tangerang had not yet adopted appropriate personal hygiene practices during the slaughtering process, indicating a relatively low level of awareness of cleanliness and compliance with government regulations.

In addition, aspects of animal health inspection yielded encouraging outcomes. Tangkonda et al. (2023) reported that both ante-mortem and post-mortem examinations conducted at Al-Faidah Musholla confirmed that the sacrificial animals were healthy and the meat was safe for consumption. Conversely, Haris et al. (2023) identified cases of anorexia among sacrificial animals due to sudden changes in feeding patterns and inadequate owner knowledge, highlighting the importance of proper feed management prior to slaughter. From a legal perspective, Hasibuan et al. (2024) reaffirmed that, based on the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and ijma' ulama, substituting sacrificial animals with monetary value is impermissible, as the essence of qurban lies in the act of sacrifice itself (*iraqah ad-dam*). Overall, these findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive understanding of qurban that encompasses religious, technical, health, and social dimensions to ensure its proper and holistic implementation within the Islamic framework.

### **The *Ihsan* Gap: Why Ethical Principles Are Not Fully Operationalised**

Conceptually, *Ihsan* is understood as a comprehensive ethical framework in the practice of Qurban, as it integrates compassion, technical competence, and spiritual responsibility. Nevertheless, research findings indicate that its implementation remains uneven and inconsistent. (Kamaly & Rahmawati, 2025).

This gap can be explained by several interrelated factors. First, the growing formalisation of religious practices has led to an excessive focus on procedural and legal (*syariah*) compliance, while the internalisation of ethical values is often overlooked. Second, the low level of public awareness regarding humane slaughter methods and animal welfare principles further constrains the realisation of *Ihsan* in practice. Third, the absence of consistent institutional regulation and weak monitoring mechanisms also constitute major barriers to its effective implementation. (Pilgram, 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings challenge the assumption within normative religious frameworks that ethical values will naturally manifest through ritual practice. Instead, they highlight that the actualisation of *Ihsan* is highly dependent on institutional support, educational processes, and the capacity to adapt ethical principles to specific social contexts.

### **Animal Welfare: Between Religious Compliance and Ethical Expansion**

The findings demonstrate that while most qurban practices fulfil basic *syariah* requirements, they do not consistently meet broader animal welfare standards. This indicates a disconnect between religious compliance and contemporary ethical expectations (Akbar et al., 2025). In practice, adherence to legality often ensures ritual validity, yet it does not automatically translate into ethical excellence, particularly in relation to minimising animal suffering throughout the sacrificial process.

This condition largely stems from a restrictive understanding of *halal* that focuses on permissibility in a legalistic sense, while insufficiently engaging with the equally important principle of *thayyib*, which implies goodness, wholesomeness, and ethical responsibility. Such a narrow interpretation reduces animal welfare to a secondary consideration rather than recognising it as a moral obligation embedded in Islamic teachings. From the perspective of *Ihsan*, however, ensuring animal well-being is not merely an additional ethical layer but an essential dimension of worship itself. Acts of sacrifice are therefore meant to reflect mercy, care, and moral consciousness toward living beings, aligning ritual practice with spiritual integrity (Nafis, 2019).

Theoretically, this study extends the concept of animal welfare within Islamic discourse by highlighting its multidimensional nature—encompassing not only physical well-being but also ethical and spiritual responsibility. It therefore helps bridge the gap between Islamic ethical teachings and modern animal welfare science.

### **Social Dimension: Why Qurban Remains Distributive Rather Than Transformative**

Empirically, qurban functions as an important mechanism for redistributing resources and reinforcing social solidarity, particularly through the distribution of meat to economically vulnerable communities. This practice temporarily alleviates food insecurity and strengthens communal bonds during religious festivities. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the socio-economic impact of qurban remains largely short-term, distributive, and consumptive, rather than producing structural or transformative change within recipient communities (Muslih et al., 2025).

This limitation can be largely attributed to the dominance of a charitable, relief-oriented model of implementation. Within this framework, qurban is primarily understood as an act of generosity aimed at meeting immediate needs, rather than as a strategic instrument for long-term empowerment. While such charity-based approaches are effective in addressing short-term deprivation, they do not sufficiently engage with the underlying causes of poverty or inequality. Moreover, the absence of integrated frameworks that connect qurban practices to wider socio-economic development strategies—such as local economic strengthening, skills development, or community-based enterprise—further constrains its transformative potential. Without institutional coordination and long-term planning, qurban remains disconnected from broader development agendas that could amplify its social impact (Padli & Sahroni, 2026).

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings extend existing perspectives on qurban as a social institution, suggesting that its humanitarian function should evolve from distributive charity towards sustainable empowerment in line with Islamic principles of social justice.

### **Spiritual Dimension: Symbolic Practice and the Decline of Moral Internalisation**

The study further identifies a growing tendency toward the symbolic reduction of qurban, wherein the ritual is performed primarily as an annual religious obligation, with limited engagement with its deeper spiritual and ethical significance. In such contexts, qurban risks being perceived merely as a formal requirement linked to the Islamic calendar, rather than as a meaningful act of devotion that demands personal reflection and moral commitment (Syahrin et al., 2025).

This can be understood within a broader sociological context, where religious practices in modern societies often become routinised, leading to an emphasis on external performance rather than internal transformation. As a result, the moral and spiritual potential of qurban—particularly in fostering empathy, self-discipline, and consciousness of God (*taqwa*)—is not fully realised (Harjawati et al., 2025).

Taken together, these findings support and extend existing theories of religious practice and spirituality by demonstrating that ritual observance alone is insufficient to generate ethical transformation. Rather, the moral efficacy of religious rituals depends on meaningful internalisation—where symbolic acts are consciously linked to values, intentions, and lived ethical commitments. When such internalisation is absent, rituals risk becoming hollow performances, stripped of their transformative ethical function.

### **Conceptual Integration and Theoretical Contribution**

One of the key contributions of this study lies in demonstrating that the four dimensions of the conceptual framework—*Ihsan*, animal welfare, social, and spiritual—are not implemented in an integrated manner but instead function in a fragmented way in practice (Niessen, 2025). Although *Ihsan* is theoretically positioned as a unifying ethical principle, its practical separation from technical, social, and spiritual dimensions results in only a partial realisation of Qurban. Consequently, this study proposes an integrated understanding of qurban as a comprehensive ethical framework in which ritual practice, animal welfare, social justice, and spiritual growth are mutually reinforcing and interdependent (Vinding et al., 2018). In this regard, the study not only reinforces existing Islamic ethical frameworks but also expands them by highlighting the importance of aligning normative values with empirical practices. (Alfawzan et al., 2024).

The findings of this study also generate several important implications at both practical and policy levels. From a practical perspective, the results highlight the urgency of enhancing public

literacy regarding the concept of *Ihsan* as the ethical foundation of qurban, including a deeper understanding of humane animal handling and slaughter practices. This effort should be accompanied by the strengthening of technical training in halal slaughter that goes beyond legal validity to explicitly integrate ethical considerations and animal welfare principles. Moreover, the spiritual dimension needs to be more intentionally incorporated into qurban education through value-based reflection, ethical intention, and a consciousness of worship, in order to prevent qurban from becoming a purely procedural or routine practice.

At the policy level, these findings underscore the need to develop standardised national guidelines for *qurban* implementation grounded in *Ihsan* and animal welfare principles. Such guidelines could serve as a common reference for communities, religious institutions, and *qurban* organisers to ensure more ethical and responsible practices. In addition, the roles of religious authorities and government institutions should be strengthened in monitoring, regulation, and capacity building to promote more consistent and sustainable *qurban* practices. Furthermore, policy frameworks should encourage the development of productive *qurban* models that move beyond short-term distribution to community empowerment and long-term, sustainable social impacts.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the treatment of sacrificial animals in Islam encompasses not only the ritual dimension of slaughter but also a profound moral and humanitarian responsibility. The principle of *Ihsan* (benevolence), as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), obliges Muslims to treat animals with compassion—from their selection and feeding to the process of slaughtering. This aligns with the modern concept of animal welfare, which emphasises ethical treatment and the prevention of suffering among living beings. Such practices have been shown to positively impact meat quality, public health, and the spiritual development of the Muslim community.

Nevertheless, field observations reveal that deviations still occur in qurban practices, including poor personal hygiene, the use of blunt instruments during slaughter, and the neglect of empathy and spiritual reflection. The qurban ritual is often perceived merely as an annual obligation rather than as a meaningful act of piety and social solidarity. Therefore, a more educational and regulatory approach is required to ensure that qurban is performed not only in accordance with syariah principles but also in a civilised and compassionate manner that reflects Islam's universal message of rahmatan lil 'alamin—a mercy to all creation.

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