# THE GARDEN OF EDEN WITH THE NEW JERUSALEM AS MODEL FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH IN AFRICA

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**Abstract**
*Biodiversity, which refers to the variety and multiplicity of life forms in the universe, is often endangered by human industrial activities. The growth in human population, the advancement of scientific technology and industrial activities, unplanned urbanisation, resource wars, poverty, human migration, environmental refugeeism, deforestation, desertification, climate change, global warming, etc all bring about destruction of plants, animals, organisms and other life forms as they happen. Take, for instance, the issue of a warming climate. As the climate warms, some organisms cannot cope with the heat, and so they die out. The creation of more human habitation and industries means more natural places have to be cleared, and in the process, animals and birds have their habitation destroyed. This paper argues that the divine creator, by creating the Garden of Eden and even when Eden was lost, promising a new heaven and a new Jerusalem, has provided a model for all life that he created on earth should be conserved and managed. The paper also shows the implications of environmental conservation for public health and the entire biotic well-being. The paper uses critical biblical hermeneutics and analysis to examine the issues above. The paper discovers that biodiversity is facing destruction and extinction. The paper concludes that the conservation of biodiversity can help to promote public health and biotic well-being on earth.*
**Keywords:** Africa, Biodiversity, Biotic, Conservation, Eden, Environment, Garden, Jerusalem, Health, Public, Well-being.

## Introduction

The world religions have played a role and can continue to play a role in mitigating the environmental crisis, fostering good public health, and promoting biotic flourishing. Many authors (Gottlieb, 2006; Berry, 2009; Berry, 1988; Ruether, 2005; Smith, 1997; Borde, Ormsby, Awoyemi & Gosler, 2023) have stated that religion can play a role in environmental conservation and, by implication, promote public health and biotic wellbeing. It is true that at times, some persons may have abused and used religion to degrade the environment. But that does not erase the core teachings of the religions,

which see God as the creator of planet Earth and all life on the Earth. The Christian religion in particular, of which the paper is concerned, promotes stewardship and conservation of environmental resources, as Hart (2004), Anah (2019), Menamparampil (2012), and Francis (2015) enunciate. All through the biblical records, there are stories, images, models, and examples that inspire environmental conservation of human and non-human lives.

God creates a diversity of plants, vegetative and tree life. Biodiversity is God's desire and its conservation is God's concern. In addition to plants, trees, and vegetation, God further commands: the waters to teem with living creatures, birds to fill the air, and beasts to fill the earth; and they are all commanded to flourish (Genesis 1:21-25). This paper uses critical hermeneutics and evaluative methods to argue that the resources of the Christian religion, such as the images/stories of the Garden of Eden and New Jerusalem, can be used to motivate people to conserve nature and all life on earth. In carrying out the purpose of this paper, a conceptual clarification is made, followed by an examination of the state of biodiversity conservation in Africa. The implication of this for public health is then presented. How the images of the Garden of Eden and New Jerusalem can help to inspire biodiversity conservation is then deciphered. When this has been done, the paper is brought to a conclusion.

**Conceptual Clarifications and Analyses**

The basic concepts that require clarification in this paper are Garden of Eden, New Jerusalem, Model, Biodiversity Conservation, and Public Health. The Britannica Editors (2026) write that the Garden of Eden in Genesis from the Hebrew Bible is the biblical earthly paradise in which Adam and Eve, the woman and man created first, lived, before they were driven out for their disobedience of God's command. The Britannica Editors (2026) state further that the word Eden probably comes from *edinu*, an Akkadian word borrowed from the Sumerian word *eden* (plain). EBSCO (2020) states that the Garden of Eden speaks of innocence and also the consequences of human action, as Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden for their disobedience.

It is stated in the Encyclopedia of Environment and Society (2007) that: "The Garden of Eden appears in the writings of the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the biblical creation story of Genesis, it is a beautiful garden of trees planted by God in the land of Eden and watered by a river. God intends that the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, live there in contentment and innocence" (para. 1). The Garden of Eden represents and stands for a place of peace, tranquillity, beauty, serenity, goodness, harmony and ecological flourishing. Adam and Eve are entrusted with the garden to keep and conserve while they are sustained by the resources of the garden. But they are not to deplete the garden as they are commanded to cultivate it, till it, and enhance the flourishing of all life in the garden.

The next term that requires clarification is "New Jerusalem." Hahn (2009) states that in the Old Testament, the prophetic vision of a glorified city, the New Jerusalem, exceeded the restored city of Jerusalem after the exile, and so there is a greater reality of a city more noble than the old one; this new Jerusalem is celestial and heavenly, and is the spiritual capital of God's creation. The New Jerusalem is like Eden restored, as the beautiful scenic view and landscape in Eden are replicated in the New Jerusalem.

Collins (2005) states that: "A model of an object is a physical representation that shows what it looks like or how it works. The model is often smaller than the object it represents" (para. 1). A model is what represents something else. It points to something else. To say that the Garden of Eden is a model for biodiversity conservation is to say that just as Adam and Eve took care of the Garden and protected it from harm, so also humans are to work to conserve Eden, which represents the larger earth. Marais (2012) states that: "The New Jerusalem is the finality of God's reign and rule with His people, forever."(para. 1). The New Jerusalem is mentioned only in the book of Revelation and is seen as a culmination of God's salvific work and redemption. In the New Jerusalem, Eden is restored, and a life of eternal bliss, happiness and harmony among all creation is restored.

The African Development Bank Group (n.d) states that biodiversity conservation refers to protection from loss, safeguarding, management, and restoration of species and their natural habitats to foster biodiversity. Biodiversity is the short way of writing biological diversity. There are millions of species of different forms of life on Earth, and these include animals, plants, microorganisms, ecosystems, both seen and invisible forms of life and diverse entities on planet Earth. Sponsel (2008) writes that biodiversity is "the variety, variability, and processes of life at all levels from the genetic to the biosphere. However, usually the focus is on the number of species in an area or biome. (Biome refers to similar types of ecosystems, such as tropical rainforest)" (P. 179).

The CDC Foundation (n.d) writes that public health concerns protecting the health of whole populations such as a neighbourhood, a region, or even an entire country. Cleveland Clinic (2024) states that: "Public health is a field that's dedicated to improving our health and well-being. Public health experts assess the needs of particular groups, or populations, rather than the needs of any one person. This makes public health different from healthcare, which involves diagnosing and treating individuals. Such a big-picture approach allows public health efforts to benefit lots of people at once — including you and those you love" (para. 1). Public health has to do with groups of people and communities or the entire population. As presented in this paper, public health is impacted by the state of health of biodiversity.

What then is biodiversity and biodiversity conservation? Greenpeace Middle East and North Africa (2024) states that biodiversity is also called biological diversity and refers to the variety of all life on Earth, such as living things (bacteria, fungi, plants, animals,

insects, etc). Flint (1991, as cited in Phil-Eze, 2007) says that biodiversity is variability and variety of all animals, plants and microorganisms on Earth. Ikeke (2020) writes that all life on Earth in its different species and varieties is what biodiversity is all about. Table Debates (2025) states that: "Biodiversity conservation refers to all human activity aimed at the preservation of both the variety and variability of living organisms in a particular area of concern, or on earth in general" (para. 1). It is all anthropogenic efforts and actions to protect the varieties of different life forms on Earth. Humans will use some biodiversity in sustaining themselves, but it should be done sustainably.

**Biodiversity Conservation and Public Health in Africa**

It is imperative in this section to first state the situation of biodiversity conservation in Africa. World Health Organisation Regional Office for Africa (2023) rightly states that: biodiverse systems and well-functioning ecosystems foster healthy communities; and this healthy system provide varied ecosystemic services such as fresh water, food, medicine, clean air, nutrition security, diseases regulation, climate regulation, pollination, mitigating extreme events, forest services (natural watershed warden, regulation of quality and quantity of river water, and sustenance of life). According to the African Development Bank Group (n.d) Africa is rich with biodiversity, with diverse ecosystems and their species such as lions, elephants, giraffes, plant species, tropical rainforest, savannah, coral reefs, etc. The African Centre for Strategic Studies (2022) states that: "The African continent (20 per cent of the planet's land) is home to one-quarter of the world's mammal species and one-fifth of the world's bird species. At least one-sixth of the world's plant species are endemic to Africa. The continent also boasts 369 wetlands of international importance" (para. 1).

The African Centre for Strategic Studies (2022) states that it is estimated that 20% of the land surface in Africa will be degraded by pollution, soil erosion, salinisation and loss of soil fertility or vegetation; the Congo Basin is depleted of 500,000 to 1.2m hectares annually. Writing about the Central African Forests, De Bruin (2015) writes that: "The constant rise in logging concessions, many of which are illegal, the voluminous bush meat trade, and poaching are putting the animals of the forest in huge jeopardy. As with so much of Africa's wildlife, the ivory of forest elephants is becoming a valuable commodity, and poaching is reducing their numbers rapidly" (para. 2). Greenpeace Middle East and North Africa (2024) states that biodiversity loss results from human activities and climate change.

Much of the destruction of biodiversity or their endangerment comes from anthropogenic activities. The African Centre for Strategic Studies (2022) states that the drivers of biodiversity destruction in Africa include mining, destructive farming, dangerous fishing practices, and logging. Much of Africa, as in the Niger Delta, Ikeke (2020) writes, suffers from biodiversity destruction caused by the exploration and exploitation activities of oil companies. In a place like the Niger Delta, oil companies care very little about the environment and biodiversity. They slowly attend to oil

spillage. They fell trees to give room to pipelines and their equipment. They flare gas day in and day out. Sponsel (2008) writes that causes of biodiversity loss include: European colonialism, industrialisation, globalisation, economic development, coercive and rampant missionisation from Christian and Islamic groups. Wherever there are mining activities or extractive industries, as you find in much of Africa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, Namibia, Equatorial Guinea, etc there is bound to be destruction of biodiversity, as the extractive industries often care little or nothing for biodiversity. All that matters to them is the profit that they are going to make.

Diverse solutions have been proposed for biodiversity conservation in Africa. The WHO Regional Office for Africa (2023) states that there should be enhanced surveillance, stringent monitoring and regulation of trade in wildlife, treatment of zoonotic diseases and public education that empowers individuals to make the right decisions. For the African Development World Bank Group (n.d), through technical assistance, knowledge generation, capacity building, policy advisory, finance, wildlife conservation, and natural capital cultivation, biodiversity can be conserved. Similar suggestions are given by the following authors Bezeng et al. (2025) "(i) accelerate data collection, data sharing and analytics for informed policy and decision-making; (ii) innovate education and capacity building for future generations; (iii) enhance and expand protected areas, ecological networks and foundational legal frameworks; (iv) unlock creative funding channels for cutting-edge conservation initiatives; and (v) integrate indigenous and local knowledge into forward-thinking conservation strategies"( para. 1).

It should be clear from the above that biodiversity and healthy biodiversity, for that matter, play a great role in good public health and biotic wellbeing. When biodiversity is destroyed and endangered, the multitude of services that come from healthy ecosystems and their diversities of life are also endangered or vitiated. The implications for public health come in various ways. Take, for instance, as the African Centre for Strategic Studies (2022) states, much of the rural population in Africa depends on natural ecosystems for water, food, and energy to secure their livelihood and health. You can imagine that as the natural ecosystems are degraded from the various factors listed above and others, their state of health is endangered and public health facilities come under stress. The African Centre for Strategic Studies (2022) states further that the Congo Basin, which is called the second lung of the world, absorbs up to four (4) per cent of global emissions of carbon, and this offsets more than the continent's yearly emissions. You can see the implications of this. Human beings need to breathe in oxygen to survive and also emit carbon dioxide. Destruction of forests affects human health; the more trees are destroyed, the more physical entities that provide oxygen for humans are reduced. Biodiversity is important for human health and wellbeing. Greenpeace Middle East and North Africa (2024) writes that: "Biodiversity is the life-support system of our planet. We rely on it for food, energy, medicine, fresh water and soil purification, pest control, breaking down waste and many, many more. Without it, the

environment couldn't provide us with the things we need to survive" (Sec. 3).

Some of the implications of biodiversity loss to Africa are well stated by the African Centre for Strategic Studies (2022) as follows: human intrusion into forest places can create viruses, etc. When biodiversity is affected, it affects the health and life of people. The more people get sick as a result of the degradation of biodiversity, the more it puts public health facilities under strain. The state of biodiversity then affects public health. Rim-Rukeh (2009) opines that the importance of biodiversity includes water resource protection, soil formation and protection, nutrient storage and cycling, water disposal, climate regulation, maintenance of ecosystems, pollination of flowers, food source, medical resources, wood products, ornamental plants, eco-tourism, cultural values, research and education. The fact is that all the ecosystemic services that biodiversity provides for humans are crucial for protecting the population of people. When ecosystems are diseased or degraded, they affect the health of humans and, by implication, the state of public health.

Osunderu (2022) has shown from cases in Ogun and Lagos States of Nigeria that the forest resources that traditional medical practitioners depend upon are being affected by climate change, and as the trees and plants they depend on are destroyed, human wellbeing and security are affected, and this impacts public health. This can lead to public health emergencies; the more people are sick they more they put strain on public health facilities. Oyekunle ( 2024) notes that biodiversity is undervalued and its implications for public health are less known, as it is continuously degraded by overexploitation, pollution, extraction, population growth, poverty, etc. In a work that connects environmental degradation to public health concerns, Adeosun et al. (2024) indicate that climate change in Nigeria leads directly to heat-related diseases, death, mental health problems, injury, and phenomena like flooding, food insecurity, and displacement that affect the lives of people. What happens to the environment and, by extension, the biodiversity in it affects the health of people and public health concerns.

**The Garden of Eden with the New Jerusalem as Model for Biodiversity Conservation**

Rivers and streams flowed in the Garden of Eden. Adam was given the assignment to name the animals. Adam and Eve were to eat from the trees in the Garden. There are also rivers and streams in the New Jerusalem. There was the presence of the tree of life in Eden, and in the New Jerusalem there will be a tree of life. The presence of God is manifest in the Garden of Eden, and his presence will fill the New Jerusalem, which will unite with the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21). There are precious stones in the Garden of Eden and in the New Jerusalem. The images in both the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem as depicted in vision are strikingly similar. Both are the abode of the divinity, the supreme being, God. Both are places of bliss, harmony, peace, and all diversities of life; humans, plants, animals, birds, flowers, etc live in co-existence and harmony. The New Jerusalem is generally seen as Eden restored, or paradise regained.

The mandate given to human beings (Adam and Eve) and by extension all their descendants has not ceased. Christians generally see the whole earth as God's garden. Metaphorically, the Garden of Eden is not limited to that particular spot in which Adam and Eve lived their lives. The story of the Garden of Eden should not be separated from the first account of creation in Genesis 1, in which man and woman are tasked with having dominion over the earth. The Encyclopedia of Environment and Society (2007) states that the Garden of Eden, which is also called the garden of God, points to contentment for humans and renewal for God's people after the Babylonian captivity. In the Encyclopedia of Environment and Society (2007) just mentioned, it is related that the location of the garden is hypothetical, and is a symbol of harmony between humans and God, between humans and nature and a model for botanical gardens, and all these should drive species conservation. Magezi (2021) notes that: that Eden is a call to Christian stewardship, as humans are created and called by God in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 to take care of the earth, the entire environment with all living and non-living creatures. Human beings are called to ecosystem management and to allow the earth to flourish. The responsibility of taking care of all life on Earth in its diversity remains, and humans are to be inspired by the image of the Garden of Eden to work for biological conservation. They should also be inspired by the New Jerusalem, which speaks of the supernatural restoration that is coming in the future. But humans have the duty now, not waiting for that future alone. They are the instruments that God will use to restore the Earth from a degraded state. Ndoga (2022) writes that Genesis 2:15 provides an ecological mandate and strategy for humans to take care of the earth. The Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem should be an inspiration to make cities and urban locations places of beauty, serenity and harmony. There ought to be more green spaces in cities and towns than just populating everywhere with buildings, industries, and factories. There should be the creation of more serene environments with water springs, fountains, trees, plants, etc where people can sit and reflect. Eden and the New Jerusalem should be an inspiration to engage in a green revolution that makes human habitation more peaceful and serene. Tonstad ( ) says that both Genesis and Revelation are books that have ecotheological motives, as the God who created in Genesis and blessed creation is also the same God who heals a broken earth in Revelation and restores access to the tree of life. Both creation in Eden and the New Jerusalem, which is the earth restored, should impel humans to be environmental conscience and conserve the diversity of life on earth, not simply for human selfish interest but for the entire cosmic good.

It is imperative to remark here that the mandate to have dominion over creation and creatures, which provides the basis also for stewardship, should not be misconstrued as domination or exploitation. Much of the Christian tradition, such as the World Council of Churches, the Vatican, and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, have all condemned exploitative abuse of nature. Paul (1971) in *Octogesima Adveniens* writes that: “By an ill-considered exploitation of nature, he [humanity] risks destroying it and

becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation ... flight from the land, industrial growth, continual demographic expansion and the attraction of urban centres bring about concentrations of population difficult to imagine." (no. 21). In a similar vein, Francis (2015) condemned a throw-away culture that has filled the earth with garbage. While noting that to have dominion does not amount to exploitation. They ought to do this knowing that as they do this, they also contribute to improving both human and public health in Africa.

From the above, it is imperative to state how the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem serve as a model for biodiversity conservation. When you look at the Garden of Eden in pictorial and scenic form, you find streams and rivers, trees and plants and vegetation, plants and animals, birds living in peace and serenity. There is no violence in the Garden. It is the same imagery that you find in the New Jerusalem, Eden restored. Humans should take the scenes and landscape of the above and replicate them on earth. Earthly cities should not just be filled with buildings; there should be a real transition to a green economy and deliberate efforts to green the cities. Streams and rivers should be allowed to flourish. Natural waterways should be allowed to flourish. There should be deliberate attempts to plant more gardens, plants and vegetation in empty spaces. Just as there is deliberate effort to plant trees to slow down desertification, so also there should be more planting of trees as in Eden, to beautify the towns and cities. As Adam and Eve acted as stewards in the Garden, so human beings are to act as stewards in taking care of forests, trees, streams, rivers, animals, birds, etc. Both Eve and the New Jerusalem should inspire humans to be protectors of green spaces and the protection of the diversity of life on earth. A model serves as an example. Eden and the New Jerusalem show human beings what they should strive for on earth. Eden and the New Jerusalem cannot be replicated exactly as they are presented in the biblical text, but human beings can be inspired to work to create an environment in which peace flourishes among human beings and the diversities or plants and animals on earth. Humans should create bird and animal sanctuaries and have restricted areas where humans don't encroach for agriculture or industries.

The image of Eden and the New Jerusalem should inspire re-afforestation programmes in Nigeria and beyond. Government in Nigeria and in other African countries should create environmental parks and a serene environment where people can find time to rest to reduce stress. Eden and the New Jerusalem are clean and peaceful places. There must be environmental laws and regulations that promote a clean environment and facilitate access to clean water as in Eden. Environmental laws should be enforced to protect from air pollution. It is painful to note that in a country like Nigeria, the air, especially in the Niger Delta, is polluted with gas flaring and other oil extractive activities. All these impede public health and the safety of people. The image of Eden and the New Jerusalem should drive the desire to protect public health facilities and the people from all forms of environmental pollution. The health of Adam and Eve in the Garden depended on the health of the garden and the environment in the garden.

## Conclusion

The paper examined the state of biodiversity in Africa. It was shown that biodiversity is facing serious threats and much biodiversity has also been destroyed. It was shown that biodiversity is often endangered or degraded by human factors such as industrial growth, agricultural activities, urbanisation, deforestation, violence and war, etc. It was also revealed that healthy biodiversity contributes to a healthy society and people. When biodiversity is poisoned, degraded and endangered, it affects people's health as humans depend on services rendered by biodiversity for their health and survival. When human health is affected negatively, it invariably affects the state of public health facilities, as people depend on public health facilities for health and well-being. The paper argued for the need for the conservation of biodiversity for the numerous functions it performs for humans and the entire ecosystemic good. The image of the Garden of Eden with the New Jerusalem in the bible that stands for eco-peace, harmony, serenity, and beauty was proposed in the paper as motivation for biodiversity conservation. Both the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem are places of diversity of life, and God has mandated humans to cultivate the garden, a task which is equally reflected in the New Jerusalem, Eden restored. The attitude of humans should not be to wait for the New Jerusalem to come only, but they should join God in creating that New Jerusalem as they work for ecological restoration of the Earth through engaging in a green revolution.

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