AN AFRICAN DIASPORA INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL 47 AND PUBLIC HEALTH ECOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

Bazza. Mike Boni PhD
Department of History and International Relations, Veritas University, Abuja
danbazza68@gmail.com

Kanu, Anthony Ikechukwu, PhD
Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja
ikee_mario@yahoo.com

Pilani, Michael Paul, PhD
Department of Theology, Veritas University, Abuja
pilanim@veritas.edu.ng

Michael Sunday Sasa, PhD
Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja
dvc@veritas.edu.ng

Abstract

Environmental degradation and public health crises increasingly converge across contemporary Africa. Water pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, and poor sanitation reveal the interdependence of ecological wellbeing and human health. This article offers an African diaspora interpretation of Ezekiel 47:1–12 as a biblical-theological framework for addressing these challenges. The study employs a qualitative interdisciplinary design combining biblical exegesis, documentary research, and African diaspora theological interpretation, with ecological hermeneutics as the principal interpretive lens. The exegetical analysis examines Ezekiel 47:1–12 within its historical, literary, and canonical contexts, while documentary analysis engages scholarship in Old Testament studies, African biblical hermeneutics, environmental theology, and public health, alongside reports on water security and biodiversity. The study argues that, although the river flowing from the restored temple has traditionally symbolised Israel's restoration after the Babylonian exile, the passage carries profound ecological and public health significance when read through African diaspora hermeneutics. The analysis shows how biblical faith, cultural memory, and indigenous ecological knowledge illuminate the healing waters as symbols of environmental renewal and communal wellbeing. It further places Ezekiel's vision in dialogue with public health ecology, demonstrating that environmental restoration contributes to disease prevention, food security, biodiversity conservation, and communal resilience. The article argues that churches can advance ecological restoration through environmental education, water conservation, sanitation initiatives, and public advocacy. Ezekiel's vision thus provides a theological paradigm for integrating environmental ethics and public health policy in Africa.

Keywords: African diaspora hermeneutics; public health ecology; environmental theology; water justice; biodiversity; Ezekiel 47

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed extraordinary advances in science, medicine, and technology, yet humanity faces an equally unprecedented ecological crisis that threatens global public health (Kanu, 2017). Climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, freshwater scarcity, and emerging infectious diseases together demonstrate that human wellbeing cannot be separated from the health of the natural environment (Kanu, 2022). These challenges are particularly acute across Africa, where inadequate sanitation, polluted rivers, deforestation, and climate variability continue to undermine both ecological sustainability and public health. The World Health Organization consistently identifies unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation among the leading causes of preventable disease in developing countries (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). Cholera, typhoid fever, diarrheal diseases, malaria, and schistosomiasis remain closely associated with degraded ecosystems and poor environmental management. Climate change has further intensified droughts, flooding, food insecurity, and the emergence of zoonotic diseases (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023). These realities expose the artificial separation that has often existed between environmental conservation and healthcare policy.

Scholars from environmental science, public health, theology, and ethics increasingly argue that ecological restoration is not merely an environmental concern but a public health imperative. This interdisciplinary perspective, often described as public health ecology, recognises the reciprocal relationship between ecological integrity and human flourishing. Healthy forests protect watersheds, healthy rivers provide safe drinking water, and biodiversity contributes to food security and disease regulation (Kanu, 2023). Conversely, ecological degradation produces profound health consequences that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Biblical theology offers important resources for understanding this relationship. Contrary to earlier assumptions that biblical religion focuses exclusively on human salvation, recent scholarship demonstrates that Scripture consistently portrays creation as participating in God's redemptive purposes (Horrell, 2022). Among the most striking examples of this ecological vision is Ezekiel 47:1 to 12, where the prophet describes a miraculous river flowing from the restored temple, transforming barren landscapes into fertile ecosystems characterised by abundant life, thriving fisheries, and healing for the nations.

For centuries, interpreters have understood Ezekiel's vision primarily within the framework of Israel's national restoration following the Babylonian exile. The river symbolises divine presence, covenant renewal, and eschatological hope. While these interpretations remain indispensable, they need not exhaust the passage's theological

significance. Contemporary ecological hermeneutics has increasingly recognised that water, vegetation, biodiversity, and agricultural abundance are not incidental literary features but essential elements of the prophet's vision of holistic restoration (Kim, 2021). This article argues that Ezekiel 47 acquires even greater interpretive richness when read through African diaspora hermeneutics. African diaspora communities occupy a distinctive interpretive location shaped by biblical faith, African cultural memory, colonial histories, migration, and contemporary struggles for environmental justice. Many African worldviews understand environmental health and human health as mutually constitutive dimensions of communal life rather than separate concerns (Nabofa, 2022; Kanu, 2024).

The objective of this article is fourfold. First, it undertakes an exegetical study of Ezekiel 47:1 to 12 within its historical and literary context. Second, it explores the distinctive contributions of African diaspora hermeneutics for interpreting the ecological dimensions of the passage. Third, it places Ezekiel's vision in dialogue with public health ecology. Finally, it proposes practical theological implications for churches, policymakers, and environmental practitioners seeking holistic approaches to ecological and public health challenges across Africa. Across the continent, millions of people depend directly on rivers, wetlands, forests, and agricultural ecosystems for survival, yet these natural resources face unprecedented pressure from industrial pollution, urbanisation, extractive industries, and unsustainable land use. The consequences are not merely environmental but medical, social, and economic (Pilani, 2024). Water pollution increases disease burdens, ecosystem collapse threatens food security, biodiversity loss undermines traditional medicine, and environmental degradation disproportionately harms the poorest communities. Far from representing an ancient religious metaphor detached from present concerns, the river flowing from the temple offers a theological imagination for contemporary ecological renewal, one whose waters symbolise the inseparable relationship between healthy ecosystems and the abundant life God intends for all creation.

The article is structured into eight sections. Section 2 reviews literature on Ezekiel 47, African diaspora hermeneutics, public health ecology, and environmental theology, highlighting a scholarly gap. Section 3 explains the interdisciplinary methodology used. Section 4 establishes the historical and literary context of Ezekiel 47. Section 5 offers a detailed exegesis of Ezekiel 47:1–12, emphasizing the river from the Temple and its transformative effects. Section 6 interprets this passage from an African diaspora perspective, focusing on cultural memory and community wellbeing. Section 7 connects Ezekiel 47 to public health ecology, discussing clean water and environmental restoration. Finally, Section 8 summarizes the theological and policy implications for various stakeholders, concluding that Ezekiel 47 presents a vision where ecological renewal and human flourishing are interconnected.

Literature Review

Ezekiel 47 in Biblical Scholarship

Ezekiel 47 has long occupied a central place in biblical studies because of its vivid imagery of life-giving waters flowing from the restored temple. Classical interpretations emphasised the chapter's eschatological significance, viewing the river as a symbol of Israel's restoration, covenant renewal, and the re-establishment of Jerusalem as the centre of divine presence (Block, 1998; Allen, 1994). Classical commentators have generally understood the progressive deepening of the river as signifying the ever-expanding blessings of God that extend from the sanctuary to the entire world, a reading that remains theologically indispensable even as newer approaches broaden its scope. Recent scholarship, however, has increasingly recognised that Ezekiel's imagery extends beyond spiritual symbolism. Ecological hermeneutics draws attention to the remarkably detailed environmental descriptions within the passage, where saline waters become fresh, deserts become fertile, and fish populations multiply (Lyons, 2021; Van Vliet, 2024). This reflects a broader movement within Old Testament scholarship to recover Scripture's ecological dimensions, in which Ezekiel 47 functions as one of the Bible's clearest portrayals of ecological flourishing.

This development reflects a broader movement within Old Testament scholarship that seeks to recover Scripture's ecological dimensions. Rather than treating creation merely as the backdrop for human salvation, scholars increasingly argue that biblical theology presents humanity as an integral component of God's wider concern for the whole earth. Much of this literature nonetheless remains rooted in Western interpretive traditions. Although ecological readings have expanded significantly over the last two decades, comparatively little attention has been devoted to African diaspora interpretations that connect the prophetic vision with African environmental and public health realities, a gap this article seeks to address.

African Diaspora Hermeneutics

African biblical hermeneutics emerged partly as a response to interpretive traditions that overlooked African cultural experiences and indigenous knowledge systems (Adamo, 2019). African diaspora hermeneutics extends this conversation by incorporating experiences of migration, displacement, and cultural memory. A distinguishing feature of this approach is its holistic worldview. Unlike many Western approaches that sharply distinguish the spiritual from the material, African cosmologies generally understand human beings, nature, ancestors, and the divine as existing within an interconnected relational network (Kanu, 2024). Health therefore cannot be reduced to biological wellbeing alone but encompasses harmonious relationships between people, creation, and God, a perspective that resonates strongly with Ezekiel's integrated vision of restoration, in which sacred space, water, vegetation, animals, and human communities all experience healing together. African diaspora theology also

frequently emphasises memory as a source of resistance and renewal. Communities that remember ancestral relationships with rivers, forests, and communal land management may discover within Ezekiel's vision theological resources for confronting contemporary ecological degradation, resources that a purely historical or Western reading of the passage would be unlikely to surface.

Public Health Ecology

Public health ecology is an increasingly influential interdisciplinary field examining the reciprocal relationship between environmental systems and human health. It challenges earlier biomedical models that concentrated on disease treatment while neglecting environmental determinants of health. Safe drinking water reduces infectious diseases, healthy forests regulate climate and water cycles, and biodiversity contributes to pharmaceutical discovery and ecosystem resilience (UNEP, 2021). The concept aligns closely with the One Health approach, which recognises that human, animal, and environmental health are inseparable, an insight illustrated by emerging zoonotic diseases such as Ebola and COVID-19 (WHO, 2025). Africa presents numerous examples of this ecological-health relationship. Rapid urbanisation often overwhelms sanitation infrastructure, industrial pollution contaminates rivers that remain primary sources of domestic water, climate variability contributes to malnutrition and vector-borne diseases, and deforestation increases human contact with wildlife reservoirs of infection. Despite these realities, public health discussions frequently underutilise religious institutions as partners in ecological restoration, even though churches remain among Africa's most influential and trusted social institutions, possessing extensive educational networks and moral authority capable of mobilising communities around environmental stewardship (Kanu et al, 2025).

Environmental Theology and Water Ethics

Water occupies a central position throughout biblical theology, from the waters of creation in Genesis to the river of life in Revelation. Scripture consistently portrays water as a divine gift associated with life, cleansing, and renewal (Faramelli, 2021). Ezekiel 47 contributes uniquely to this discussion because the river originates not from human engineering but from God's dwelling place, implying that environmental restoration begins with recognition of divine sovereignty over creation. African theology similarly recognises water as possessing profound spiritual and communal significance, in that rivers frequently function not only as physical resources but also as symbols of communal identity, fertility, continuity, and divine blessing, so that water pollution constitutes both an ecological and a spiritual crisis rather than a merely technical failure of infrastructure.

Research Gap

Although substantial scholarship exists independently on Ezekiel 47, African biblical hermeneutics, and public health ecology, few studies integrate these fields into a

coherent interdisciplinary framework. Most exegetical studies remain historically oriented without engaging present ecological realities, public health research often neglects theological resources capable of mobilising community participation, and diaspora hermeneutics has largely concentrated on identity, migration, and liberation rather than ecological wellbeing. This article contributes to that gap by arguing that Ezekiel 47 presents ecological restoration and public health as inseparable dimensions of God's redemptive purposes, and that African diaspora hermeneutics offers a fruitful framework for recovering this holistic vision.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interdisciplinary design combining biblical exegesis, documentary research, and African diaspora theological interpretation. The exegetical component examines Ezekiel 47:1 to 12 within its historical, literary, and canonical contexts, attending to Hebrew vocabulary and the relationship between Ezekiel's temple vision and broader Old Testament traditions concerning creation and water. The documentary component draws on secondary scholarship in Old Testament studies, African biblical hermeneutics, environmental theology, and public health, alongside reports from international bodies on water security and biodiversity. Ecological hermeneutics serves as the principal interpretive lens, recovering ecological dimensions already embedded in Scripture's theological imagination rather than imposing contemporary concerns upon the text. African diaspora hermeneutics then provides the contextual lens through which the study interprets Ezekiel's vision, recognising the interpretive significance of African cultural memory, migration experience, and indigenous ecological knowledge.

Historical and Literary Context of Ezekiel 47

Ezekiel ministered during one of the darkest periods in Israel's history. Following the Babylonian invasions of Judah in 597 and 586 BCE, Jerusalem was destroyed and Solomon's Temple reduced to ruins. The destruction of the Temple produced not merely a political catastrophe but a theological crisis, since the Temple symbolised God's dwelling among the people. Ezekiel interpreted this tragedy as the consequence of covenant unfaithfulness, yet judgment never becomes his final word. Beginning especially in chapters 33 to 48, the prophet announces a reversal in which God promises to gather the scattered people, renew their hearts, and restore the land. Ezekiel 47 forms the ecological climax of this larger restoration narrative. The restoration Ezekiel envisions extends far beyond rebuilding physical structures. It encompasses the renewal of covenant relationships, political stability, social justice, agricultural productivity, ecological abundance, and divine presence, so that the prophet presents restoration as holistic rather than merely religious in character.

Ezekiel 47 occurs within the prophet's elaborate vision of the new Temple, chapters 40 to 48, which describe a measured sanctuary, renewed worship, and finally the life-giving river emerging from beneath the Temple. The sequence is significant. The

Temple is described first because God's presence constitutes the source of all subsequent renewal; only after divine presence is re-established does the river begin to flow. The water first appears as a small trickle beneath the Temple threshold (47:1 to 2), then gradually increases through four successive measurements (47:3 to 5) until it becomes an immense river impossible to cross. The prophet then observes the transformation the river produces (47:6 to 12), as barren land becomes fertile, the Dead Sea comes alive with fish, and medicinal leaves provide healing. The literary movement deliberately emphasises expansion, since divine blessing never remains confined to sacred space but moves outward until the entire environment participates in God's life-giving purposes.

The river's point of origin also carries theological weight. Unlike ordinary rivers arising from mountains or rainfall, this river flows directly from beneath the Temple, communicating that genuine life originates from God's presence rather than from political reform or technological innovation alone. The river flows eastward toward the Arabah and eventually into the Dead Sea, a direction that recalls humanity's exile from Eden even as it shows God's restorative presence pursuing creation into its most devastated condition.

Exegesis of Ezekiel 47:1 to 12

The River Emerging from the Temple (47:1 to 2)

The vision begins with the prophet brought back to the Temple entrance, where water issues from below the threshold toward the east. The Hebrew noun *mayim*, water, appears repeatedly throughout the chapter, emphasising water as the dominant theological symbol. In the Hebrew Scriptures, water consistently signifies life, blessing, and new creation, while its absence signifies curse and death. Initially the water is only a trickle, a detail of real importance. God's transformative work frequently begins in ways that appear small before producing comprehensive transformation. For African contexts, this symbolism carries practical significance, since environmental restoration frequently begins with modest initiatives such as community tree planting, local sanitation campaigns, or protection of springs, interventions that often generate increasingly extensive ecological benefits.

The river's point of origin also carries an ethical message. Unlike ordinary rivers arising from mountains, springs, or rainfall, this river flows directly from beneath the sanctuary. Ancient readers would immediately recognise the symbolism, since throughout the Ancient Near East temples frequently represented cosmic centres where heaven and earth met. Creation flourishes when humanity recognises divine ownership of the earth rather than assuming autonomous control over it, and environmental exploitation often reflects precisely this illusion of ownership rather than a posture of responsible stewardship.

The Increasing Depth of the River (47:3 to 5)

One of the chapter's most memorable features is the progressive measurement of the

river. A heavenly guide measures one thousand cubits four times, and at each stage the river deepens, from ankle-deep to knee-deep to waist-deep, until it becomes an uncrossable river. Many commentators observe that these measurements carry symbolic rather than engineering significance (Allen, 1994). The river grows without receiving tributaries, so its increasing volume cannot be explained by natural processes; its source remains entirely divine. Ecologically, the imagery also reflects how healthy ecosystems generate cumulative benefits, as restored watersheds improve soil fertility, vegetation stabilises climate, and biodiversity strengthens resilience. The prophet eventually reaches a point where the river becomes impossible to cross, an image that challenges modern tendencies toward purely technocratic domination of nature and instead invites humanity to participate humbly within God's ecological order. Theologically, this progression illustrates that God's restorative activity continually exceeds human expectations, and human beings can no longer master or control the river but must submit themselves to its life-giving power.

Healing the Dead Sea (47:8 to 10)

Perhaps the most dramatic transformation occurs when the river enters the Dead Sea, one of the harshest environments known in the ancient world, whose extreme salinity prevented ordinary aquatic life from surviving and made it a powerful symbol of sterility and death. Ezekiel proclaims an astonishing reversal in which the waters become fresh, fish multiply abundantly, and fishermen spread their nets along the shoreline. This imagery resonates strikingly with contemporary African ecological crises, where rivers contaminated by industrial waste, mining, and untreated sewage often resemble Ezekiel's Dead Sea, with wetlands disappearing, fisheries declining, and communities experiencing rising disease burdens. The prophet's vision challenges contemporary readers not to accept environmental degradation as irreversible; faith nurtures ecological hope, and hope inspires restorative action.

Trees for Food and Healing (47:12)

The chapter concludes with one of Scripture's most comprehensive pictures of ecological abundance, in which the fruit of the trees provides food and the leaves provide healing. Several themes converge here. The trees bear fruit continuously, symbolising sustainable provision rather than seasonal scarcity. The river also sustains diverse vegetation, illustrating the ecological richness accompanying healthy freshwater systems. Finally, the healing leaves point to biodiversity as a source of medicine, an insight that modern pharmacology continues to confirm, since countless contemporary medicines originate from plants whose preservation depends on healthy ecosystems (Zalanga, 2023). For African societies, where traditional medicinal knowledge remains deeply connected with indigenous biodiversity, this insight carries particular relevance, since forest destruction threatens not only wildlife but centuries of accumulated medical knowledge. The vision ultimately points toward what may be called ecological shalom, the harmonious flourishing of God, humanity, and the entire created order.

An African Diaspora Interpretation of Ezekiel 47

Biblical interpretation is never undertaken in a cultural vacuum. African diaspora hermeneutics begins from the recognition that the lived experiences of Africans and peoples of African descent constitute legitimate contexts for biblical interpretation, shaped by histories of slavery, colonialism, migration, and persistent struggles for environmental justice (Masenya, 2022). Within this framework, Ezekiel 47 becomes far more than an ancient description of Israel's restoration. It becomes a living theological narrative that speaks to communities seeking healing after centuries of displacement and environmental injustice. Just as Israel experienced exile from its land, many African peoples have experienced different forms of exile through forced migration, colonial dispossession, and environmental degradation, so that the prophet's vision of restoration resonates deeply with African diaspora experience.

Throughout African societies, water carries significance beyond biological necessity, functioning as a source of communal identity, livelihood, and religious symbolism (Kanu et al., 2026). Rivers historically sustained agriculture, fishing, and communal ritual life, and diaspora communities continue to carry these memories across continents even when physically separated from ancestral landscapes. Reading Ezekiel 47 through this cultural memory reveals the temple river not merely as a miraculous phenomenon but as God's restoration of the conditions necessary for communal flourishing, and it speaks directly to African communities whose rivers have been polluted through mining, oil exploration, and rapid urbanisation. The healing waters become symbols of ecological justice, calling faith communities to participate actively in restoring degraded ecosystems rather than accepting environmental destruction as inevitable.

A second contribution of African diaspora hermeneutics is its communal orientation. Many African theological traditions understand salvation as encompassing the wellbeing of the entire community rather than the individual believer alone, so that health, prosperity, and suffering are understood communally (Kanu, 2024). This corresponds closely with Ezekiel's vision, in which the river blesses the entire ecosystem rather than selected individuals, as the land becomes fertile, the sea becomes healthy, and communities thrive together. Such comprehensive restoration reflects what many African philosophers describe as relational existence, in which human beings flourish only when their relationships with God, one another, and creation remain healthy, so that environmental degradation represents not merely an ecological failure but also a disruption of communal life.

African diaspora interpretation also encourages dialogue between biblical theology and indigenous ecological knowledge. Long before contemporary environmental science emphasised biodiversity conservation, many African communities practised sustainable land management through sacred forests, seasonal farming systems, and customary protection of rivers and wildlife, traditions that share common principles of

respect for nature, communal responsibility, and intergenerational stewardship (Zalanga, 2023). These values resonate strongly with Ezekiel's vision, in which creation is never portrayed as an unlimited resource for human consumption but as God's gift whose flourishing sustains human life. African diaspora hermeneutics accordingly encourages constructive dialogue between biblical revelation and indigenous ecological ethics, a dialogue that neither romanticises traditional cultures nor dismisses modern scientific knowledge but seeks complementary wisdom capable of addressing contemporary ecological crises.

Finally, African diaspora churches increasingly occupy influential positions within global society, operating schools, hospitals, and development initiatives alongside worship. Ezekiel's temple river offers a powerful metaphor for this vocation, since just as life flows outward from God's sanctuary, churches are called to become centres from which ecological healing radiates into society, making environmental stewardship an essential dimension of Christian discipleship rather than an optional social concern.

Ezekiel 47 and Public Health Ecology in Contemporary Africa

One of Ezekiel 47's most significant contributions to contemporary theological ethics lies in its holistic understanding of health. Modern healthcare has often concentrated primarily on diagnosis and treatment of disease, sometimes overlooking the broader ecological conditions that sustain or undermine wellbeing. Ezekiel presents a different vision in which health begins with healthy creation, corresponding closely with contemporary ecological public health, which recognises that environmental conditions shape patterns of disease, nutrition, and life expectancy. Safe water remains one of the most important determinants of public health. Across many African countries, contaminated water contributes to cholera, typhoid fever, diarrhoeal diseases, and numerous parasitic infections, while poor sanitation allows pathogens to circulate within vulnerable communities (WHO, 2024). In Ezekiel's vision, healing begins when polluted waters become fresh, anticipating the public health principle that clean water saves lives. Faith communities therefore possess theological grounds for supporting watershed protection, improved sanitation, community boreholes, rainwater harvesting, river conservation, and hygiene education, activities that should be viewed not merely as humanitarian projects but as participation in God's continuing work of healing creation.

The abundant fish and fruit trees of Ezekiel's vision also illustrate that biodiversity contributes directly to human wellbeing. Healthy ecosystems provide food, medicine, climate regulation, and clean water, while biodiversity loss increases food insecurity and heightens vulnerability to environmental disasters. Africa contains some of the world's richest biodiversity, yet deforestation, illegal mining, desertification, and overfishing continue to threaten these resources, so protecting biodiversity becomes an act of theological obedience as well as ecological responsibility. The prophet's vision reminds readers that flourishing ecosystems are themselves manifestations of divine

blessing, and that their loss diminishes not only ecological resilience but also the material and spiritual resources on which human communities depend. Climate change has intensified droughts, flooding, and forced migration throughout many African regions, producing malnutrition, infectious disease outbreaks, and psychological trauma (IPCC, 2023). Although Ezekiel did not address climate change in its modern scientific sense, his vision nevertheless offers a theology of ecological restoration that remains profoundly relevant, since God's intention is environmental renewal rather than destruction. Communities of faith therefore have moral responsibilities to support climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, and reforestation. Finally, an emerging field within public health recognises that healthy natural environments contribute significantly to psychological wellbeing, since exposure to green spaces reduces stress and anxiety while strengthening social cohesion. Ezekiel's vision depicts not merely physical survival but abundant flourishing, in which the restored landscape becomes a place of beauty, productivity, security, and hope, reminding contemporary readers that ecological restoration also nurtures emotional, spiritual, and communal resilience alongside physical health.

Theological and Policy Implications

The interpretation advanced in this study carries several practical implications.

First, biblical theology should recover a holistic doctrine of salvation that includes the renewal of creation alongside the redemption of humanity, since Ezekiel 47 demonstrates that ecological restoration belongs intrinsically to the biblical vision of salvation. Second, churches should integrate environmental stewardship into pastoral ministry and Christian formation, emphasising humanity's responsibility as caretakers of God's creation through preaching, catechesis, and youth programmes. Third, theological institutions across Africa should strengthen interdisciplinary engagement between biblical studies, environmental science, and public health, so that future church leaders are prepared to address ecological crises alongside traditional pastoral concerns. Fourth, governments and policymakers should recognise faith communities as strategic partners in achieving environmental sustainability and public health goals, given their extensive grassroots networks for sanitation campaigns and environmental education (Kanu & Pilani, 2024). Fifth, African diaspora organisations should serve as bridges connecting global environmental advocacy with local African ecological initiatives, using their transnational networks for research collaboration and resource mobilisation. Sixth, church-based water and sanitation programmes should be prioritised as concrete, replicable models of ecological shalom, since they translate theological conviction directly into measurable public health outcomes.

Taken together, these implications suggest that ecological restoration and public health advocacy are not peripheral to Christian mission in Africa but central to it. A church that proclaims healing for the soul while remaining silent about polluted rivers and vanishing forests offers an incomplete gospel. Ezekiel's vision instead calls the church toward a fuller witness in which spiritual renewal and ecological renewal advance together.

Conclusion

Ezekiel's vision of the river flowing from the restored temple remains one of Scripture's most profound portrayals of holistic renewal. Although originally addressed to an exilic community longing for restoration, its theological significance extends far beyond its immediate historical context, presenting a vision in which God's presence transforms not only human hearts but rivers, landscapes, and ecosystems. This study has argued that an African diaspora interpretation reveals fresh dimensions of this prophetic vision by bringing the biblical text into dialogue with African ecological realities, indigenous environmental knowledge, and contemporary public health challenges (Anthony and Michael, 2026).

Ezekiel 47 anticipates many concerns now emphasised within ecological public health. The healing river symbolises environmental restoration that prevents disease, secures food systems, preserves biodiversity, and strengthens communal resilience, offering not merely a religious metaphor but a theological imagination capable of informing contemporary environmental ethics and public health policy. For African churches and diaspora communities, the passage issues both a promise and a vocation, the promise that God remains committed to the renewal of creation despite its present degradation, and the vocation that communities of faith are called to participate actively in that divine work through environmental stewardship and public health advocacy.

Ultimately, the temple river points toward a vision of ecological shalom in which humanity lives in reconciled relationship with God, neighbour, and the whole created order, a vision urgently needed as Africa confronts the intertwined challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and water insecurity. By recovering Ezekiel's holistic theology of healing, the church may become, like the river itself, a source of life flowing into a thirsty world. Such a recovery demands neither a retreat into abstract spirituality nor an uncritical embrace of secular environmentalism, but a genuinely theological environmentalism, rooted in Scripture, informed by African ecological memory, and answerable to the public health needs of the communities it serves.

References

Adamo, D. T. (2019). African biblical hermeneutics: Developments and directions. *Old Testament Essays, 32*(2), 271-289.

Allen, L. C. (1994). *Ezekiel 20-48*. Word Books.

Anthony, I. A., Michael, P. P. (2026) Role of African Union in Addressing Global Challenges Through the Lens of Genesis (11:1-9) - Theological and Socio-Political Insights. *JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations*, 17(1), 536-552.

Block, D. I. (1998). *The book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*. Eerdmans.

Faramelli, N. (2021). Water, justice and biblical ethics. *Theology Today, 78*(4), 335-349.

Horrell, D. G. (2022). *Ecological hermeneutics: Biblical, historical and theological*

perspectives (2nd ed.). T&T Clark.
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *Climate change 2023: Synthesis report*. IPCC.
Kanu, A. I. & Pilani, P. (2025). "Theology and environmental stewardship: Implications of Jeremiah (2:7) for Africa's ecological crisis." *Ohazurume: Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization, 4(1):* 153-170.
Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike philosophy and environmental ethics. Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development, 12*(3), 45–60.
Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* philosophy and human rights violations in Africa. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.* 3(7): 117-136.
Kanu, I. A. (2022). *African Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment.* London: AuthorHouse.
Kanu, I. A. (2022). *African Eco-Philosophy: Cosmology, Consciousness, and the Environment.* London: AuthorHouse.
Kanu, I. A. (2022). *African Eco-Theology: Meaning, Forms, and Expressions.* London: AuthorHouse.
Kanu, I. A. (2022). *African Ecological Spirituality: Perspectives on Anthroposophy and Environmentalism. A Hybrid of Approaches.* London: AuthorHouse.
Kanu, I. A. (2022). "African Eco-Spirituality: An Igwebuike Indigenous Response to Modern Ecological Crisis." *TOLLE LEGE: An Augustinian Journal of Philosophy and Theology,* 4(1): 1-51.
Kanu, I. A. (2022). "Nigeria and the Question of Climate Change." *Ekpoma Review: Philosophy and Theology Journal. 9. 1-12.*
Kanu, I. A. (2023). ***African Indigenous Environmental Conservation Strategies and Climate Change Mitigation.*** A Thesis for the Award of Doctor of Climate Change and Sustainable Development, Selinus University of Sciences and Literature, London.
Kanu, I. A. (2024). "Colonialism and the Igbo Struggle with Climate Change." *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 22(1): 1349-1367.
Kanu, I. A. (2024). "The Value of Space (EBE) in Igbo Eco-Spirituality." *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 22(1): 1653-1666.
Kanu, I. A. (2023). "The ecological value of Igbo spirituality." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin, Volume 51, Number 1 & 2, Spring/Summer.* pp. 47-54.
Kanu, A. I. (2024). African eco-theology and environmental ethics. In A. I. Kanu (Ed.), *African eco-theology: Meaning, forms and expressions* (pp. 1-18). Association of African Public Administrators and Scholars.
Kanu, A. I., Pilani, M. P., Kanu, C. C., & Bazza, M. B. (2025). Perceived impact of farmers-herders conflict on food availability in North Central Nigeria. ***Journal of Home Economics Research*** *(JHER), 32*(2), 126–136.
Kanu, I. A., & Pilani, M. P. (2024). Semiotic hermeneutic of "new wine, new wineskins": Symbols, philosophy of development and Africa. *Dialogue and Universalism, 35*(2), 151–164. https://doi.org/10.5840/du202434225

Kanu, I. A., Pilani, M. P., & Nwadialor, K. L. (2025). African Union's peace and integration initiatives in the light of Ecclesiastes (4:12): Intersection of politics and biblical wisdom. *Journal of African Union Studies, 14*(3), 161–179. https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2025/14n3a8

_____. (2026). Exploring the African Union's response to climate change, pandemics, and migration challenges through the prism of Genesis 11:1–9: Theological and socio-political insights. *Journal of African Union Studies, 15*(2), xx–xx. https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2026/v15n2a2

Kim, Y. (2021). Ezekiel and ecological restoration. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 83*(3), 401-423.

Lyons, M. A. (2021). The book of Ezekiel: A help or a hindrance for environmental ethics? *Horizons in Biblical Theology, 43*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1163/18712207-12341420

Masenya, M. (2022). Ecological hermeneutics and postcolonialism. In H. Marlow & M. Harris (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Bible and ecology* (pp. 49-62). Oxford University Press.

Nabofa, M. Y. (2022). Indigenous ecological wisdom and environmental sustainability in Africa. *Journal of African Religions, 10*(3), 281-299.

Pilani, M. P. (2024). Environmental stewardship and dignity of labour in Gen 2:4b–15 and its challenges for Nigeria. *Theology and Science, 22*(4), 774–789. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2024.2399901

United Nations Environment Programme. (2021). *Making peace with nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies*. UNEP.

Van Vliet, G. (2024). Living water in Ezekiel 47. How eco-hermeneutics raise climate awareness among Christian youth. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 80*(2), Article 9942. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i2.9942

World Health Organization. (2024). *Water, sanitation, hygiene and health. Global status report*. World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2025). *Global report on health and climate change*. World Health Organization.

Zalanga, S. (2023). African indigenous knowledge systems and biodiversity conservation. *African Journal of Environmental Studies, 17*(2), 85-102.