

Planning for the Disposal of the Dead in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nigeria: A Review of Literature on Challenges and Policy Recommendations

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Abstract: Given that death is a natural occurrence, disposing of the dead especially corpses is an unavoidable and necessary part of human life. In order to appropriately dispose of the deceased, land use planning is crucial since improper handling could jeopardize environmental, psychological, and human health. In Nigeria, planning laws have not stopped urban growth due to urbanization and shifting societal attitudes. Public authorities usually only consider residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional land uses like schools, hospitals, and stadiums when allocating state land directly or through state agencies, despite the fact that the country's population has grown from 70 million in 1973 to nearly 200 million in recent years. The matters of death and burial require consideration from both a general and an urban management and planning standpoint. The development and execution of environmental policy on the disposal of the deceased should be localized, taking into account the characteristics of residents in certain areas. This evaluation determined that the living's planning for the disposal of the deceased encompasses creating a comfortable environment for the ultimate resting place, appropriately interring the remains, and ensuring that the subsequent management and maintenance of the designated resting area is conducted with dignity and hygiene. From a municipal standpoint, interring the deceased is regarded as an essential and obligatory public service.

Key words: Disposal of the Dead, Death, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria.

I. Introduction

Considering that death is a natural phenomenon, it is imperative to plan land use for the interment of the departed, as improper management may jeopardize human health, psychological welfare, and environmental integrity (Fernández & González-González, 2022). Bellocq (2020) discovered in Shanghai that cemeteries have been progressively displaced from the city center to accommodate urban development. In Nigeria, the location of cemeteries is frequently influenced by cultural and religious customs, with certain communities favoring burial sites next to places of worship or ancestral territories (Adéléyé, 2021). However, urbanization and population growth have put cemeteries relatively close to homes and business places. This proximity causes concerns over aesthetics, property values, and environmental hazards, including groundwater contamination and air pollution resulting from rotting carcasses (Piaggio, 2021).

Akin-otaku (2013) analyzes the Yoruba notion of "àjẹ," that hazardous spirits connected with the deceased can lead to anxiety and avoidance among some dwellers near cemeteries. Therefore, depending on location as well as cultural beliefs, cemeteries might alter land use patterns. Proximity to a cemetery could affect property values or impede development (Koppang, 2023). Conversely, well-plan cemeteries can become green places or beautify the surrounding region. In certain Asian countries, cemeteries have a negligible or positive effect on property values.

For instance, certain cultures see graves as quiet or sacred, potentially improving appeal. Given the cultural diversity across Nigeria, the effect of cemeteries on property values presumably vary according on geography and beliefs (Aliyu & Fakaa, 2021). Ezenwa et al. (2023) reveal that property near cemeteries is often considered less suitable for residential purposes. Fortunately, the extent to which it influences property values can differ across Northern and Southern locations. In Southern Nigeria, beliefs in some southern communities may equate cemeteries with spiritual uneasiness. This can dissuade potential purchasers or tenants, potentially reducing property values. For example, cemeteries are a disincentive to some potential buyers due to issues like the "creep measure," which is the mental anguish experienced near death and burial (Cole, 2015).

But in the northern part of Nigeria, Islamic as well as some Christian traditions in the north see graves as sacred resting sites. Distance might not be a major impediment, and property prices could be less influenced (Elabo, 2022). Respect for religious beliefs and cultural rituals around burial is vital. Therefore, cemeteries should be positioned at a distance that honors the sensibilities of neighboring neighbors while still being accessible for burials. Also, cultural ideas around death and burial traditions in Nigeria should be explored (Straka, Mischo, Petrick & Kowarik, 2022). Against this background, this study explored a review of literature on Issues and policy recommendations addressing the planning for the disposal of the deceased in the federal capital area, Nigeria.

II. Empirical Studies on Challenges of Planning For the Disposal of the Dead

Nigeria faces a challenge in balancing traditional burial practices with a growing population and environmental concerns. While burial is common, the limited land available in urban areas and its environmental impact require effective planning solutions (Opoko & Adeboye, 2021). Oyeleke and Oloukoi (2024) also demonstrate that traditional burial methods might have environmental effects as decomposition processes can contaminate soil and water supplies, especially in places with high water tables.

However, Daya, Butu, Shehu, and Sakariyau (2022) reveal there is a lack of long-term planning for cemeteries and alternate disposal techniques, as present infrastructure may not be able to accommodate the expanding demand. According to Mabin and Harrison (2023), Nigeria's present distribution of cemeteries reveals an uneven pattern, with some local councils having a disproportionately large concentration around their central business districts (CBDs) compared to others. This proximity leads to multiple adverse effects, such as health risks due to possible contamination of groundwater and soil by rotting bodies, unappealing odours, and pests, impacting the overall quality of life in nearby areas and property values impairment (Igboama, Hammed, Fatoba, Aroyehun & Ehiabhili, 2022).

The study by Leuta (2017) pointed out that putting cemeteries close to Central Business Districts generated concerns about sanitation, the condition of the air, and possible hazards for residents and workers in those locations. Additionally, it could be offensive to religious views or cultural sensibilities. But if cemeteries are far from CBDs, it could create difficulty for people, especially those without private mobility, to access burial grounds for funerals and grave visits.

The implications of unequal distribution can create difficulty for families completing burial rites; individuals living near the CBD may have limited access to burial grounds, generating logistical issues and emotional strain during cemetery visits. Also, environmental issues like as pollution, if suitable planning is not in place, distant cemeteries might raise worries about groundwater contamination (Nordh, House, Westendorp, Maddrell, Wingren, Kmec & Venbrux, 2023).

The study of Ejikeme (2020) revealed that cemeteries in Nigeria possess important cultural and religious relevance, acting as burial grounds for ancestors and settings for ceremonies. However, their presence also causes societal and cultural concerns for local inhabitants, like fear and ancestral reverence, pollution and sanitation difficulties, land use, and property prices. Allam & Allam (2020) also demonstrate that living near a cemetery has effects that contribute to social stigma, with some people avoiding these neighbourhoods or correlating them with negative. Also, constant exposure to memories of mortality creates anxiety or depression in some persons. Sodiya et al. (2021) reveal that property values around cemeteries in Nigeria are often lower than those in other locations. This can be a serious problem for homeowners as well as businesses in certain locations. Lower property values might make it hard for homeowners to sell their homes or acquire mortgages. It can also dissuade enterprises from locating in certain locations.

The study by Oyeleke and Oloukoi (2024) also highlighted that Nigeria confronts a rising issue in getting suitable property for future cemeteries. This is due to reasons such increased urbanization, cultural sensitivity and environmental concerns. Considering to that, a study by Akinbogun (2015) indicated that over 70% of large Nigerian towns experience serious shortages of the cemetery space, and land scarcity may spike up the cost of burials, inflicting a financial strain on families. Therefore, cities should make long-term planning for cemetery needs, incorporating increasing population and cultural sensitivity. The implications of unequal distribution can create difficulty for families completing burial rites; individuals living near the CBD may have limited access to burial grounds, generating logistical issues and emotional strain during cemetery visits. Also, environmental issues like as pollution, if suitable planning is not in place, distant cemeteries might raise worries about groundwater contamination (Nordh, House, Westendorp, Maddrell, Wingren, Kmec & Venbrux, 2023).

III. Urban Planning Strategies for the disposal of the Dead

There is no proper consideration of its ecological or physical planning dimension and ramifications. Effective management strategies can be adopted depending on perceived relevance, accessibility, and benefits. This is because, at the point at which an individual or an animal succumbs to death, the degradation of biological tissues commences. Attitudes towards parks, their utilization, and their physical activities are influenced by their physical aspects, such as trees, sports facilities, swimming pools, and playgrounds (Baran 2023). This is because a corpse or carcass is degraded by microbes that come from within (gastrointestinal tract) and from without (the surrounding atmosphere or soil) (Rashid & Pandit 2021), therefore disposing of the degraded body could constitute a land use issue.

Corpses are usually buried or cremation based on the prevailing cultural tradition. Cremation is a form of corpse disposal via which the dead body can be reduced to the bones, cinders, and chunks using strong heat (Wetzel, 2023). Daramola (2019) argued that even though cremation will render any remains non-infectious, sophisticated equipment and significant volumes of fuel are required to produce high enough temperatures (around 650 °C) for adequate lengths of time (typically 2.5–3 h) for total burning. It entails transferring the ashes of the dead into biodegradable urns to be interred underground. This permits ashes to nourish the environment. After the ashes have completely broken down, the ground will be ready for new ashes. Thus, the room for burnt ashes is infinite. Thus, cremation is less practicable than burial. Van Wyk, Ubomba-Jaswa and Dippenaar, (2022) noticed that the predominant mechanism of contamination is rainwater soaking through the soil and coming into touch with buried bones.

Daramola (2017) noted that the disposal of corpses represents an increasingly recognised source of pollution that needs to be accepted and addressed. Particularly in Nigeria, it is documented that disposal of the dead poses environmental and human health risks

Sustainability of urban planning strategies for the disposal of the Dead

Liveability is considered more realistic compared to sustainability as it is focused on immediate action for increasing a community's quality of life through combining aspects of social and physical experiences in a locality (Pang 2024). Within urban environments, urban parks are regarded as significant ecosystems, as they provide multiple benefits, such as air purification, water purification, the reduction for noise and wind, the control of micro-climate, habitat for wildlife, and the psychological and social well-being of urban citizens (Misiune et al. 2021). Visits to urban parks are mainly influenced by their physical characteristics, cover of vegetation, psychological variables (Wan et al. 2020), and different facilities (Wan et al., 2020). The perceived advantages from urban parks are impacted by their real advantages and their alleged significance (Wan et al. 2020). Pang (2024) advocated the 'indistinguishable niche,' a new concept in environmentally friendly planning and product design for a heavily populated urban area. Planning for the disposal of the dead becomes a key sustainability challenge as the world landscape gets increasingly populated.

Disposal of the deceased is an integral component of human existence; it is a necessary activity that are unable to be averted (Arnarsdóttir & Árnason, 2019). some of the features of a great the cemetery scenery, as given by Lees (Oluwafemi 2018), involve planning to suit the site surroundings by taking clues from its appearance, working with the current topography, use of pathways as organizing elements, creating limits to defines spaces, the introduction of soft and hard landscaping components, use of native and low maintenance plants, use of sustainable facilities and maintenance strategies, embracing environmentally friendly internment, providing amenities for ceremonial purposes, green open space for community events, reciting the deceased, provision of passive possibilities of recreation for the being alive, etc. Green burial is a system of burying that helps contributes optimally to the local ecology and as well assures a non-disturbance of natural plant life (Oluwafemi 2018).

Perspective from global and Africa on planning for the disposal of the dead

From a global viewpoint, irrespective of one's religious or philosophical beliefs, burial is considered by numerous societies to be the most polite and respectable manner to send off the departed and to provide the family a distinct grave to visit (Parkes, Laungani & Young 2015; Baan, Allo, & Patak 2022). The major problem with the conventional burial method is that it takes up a lot of room, which becomes worthless once utilized (Evans & Sadler 2008). Because cemeteries vary from other land uses, it is crucial to recognise this while planning for the dead. Thus, several states of the world have produced many rules governing the preparation and creation of their deceased (Abd Elrahman & Asaad 2021).

Basmajian and Coutts (2010) have, therefore, concluded that the administration and planning of the deceased should be directed by defined cultural, religious, humanitarian, social, economic, and environmental principles. These strategic factors include the choice of the burial location, the expense of disposing of the dead, their closeness to places of memorialisation, the availability of open space for green spaces and natural habitats, historic elements, and biodiversity.

Enssle and Kabisch (2020) also underlined the necessity for planning and management for the deceased to address sustainability by ensuring that cemeteries are sustainable in all dimensions of well-being. Thus, the following concepts were listed: social, which refers to a social system's capacity to function with a high degree of harmony and well-being; cultural, which shows social equity and protects cultural values; environmental, which provides large swaths of green space; and economical, which involves boosting the local economy and strengthening the local skill base.

Government authorities have great control over where new cemeteries should be established and how older cemetery should be enlarged because of land use and zoning regulations. However, the elements influencing the planning and administration of the dead are intricate. Cemeteries affect firmly held views and feelings since they are cultural landscapes (Niță, Iojă, Rozyłowicz, Onose & Tudor 2014).

In the US, private companies manage and own the majority of cemeteries. Cemeteries deal with a range of interest groups as entities with a distinctly public function, which is owners, managers, funeral directors, religious congregations, planners, politicians, site owners, and the general public. Everyone is apprehensive about the location of new cemeteries, their design, and how expansion will be managed, creating the atmosphere tough for planners working on burial-related issues (Afla & Reza, 2012). Several African phrases are used to denote death. Some individuals interpret death as being beckoned or coming home, ceasing breathing, bidding farewell, rejoining the fathers, sleeping or relaxing, etc.

Emmanuel, Paschal and Onyinye (2021) claim that death, in addition to upending living men's connections with one another in society, also launches a murderous attack on them. Planning for the dead has not received adequate consideration in Nigeria. Berrisford (2011) reinforced this sentiment when he remarked that municipal planners have forgotten about it, notably in most African nations. However, according to Okorie, Ogba, Iwuala, Arua, Felix, and Nwosumba (2022), local governments in Nigeria are mandated by the 1999 constitution to provide amenities for the public, such as cemeteries. According to Grabalov and Nordh (2022), people should have the choice of selecting between burial and cremation while managing the deceased. Prohibitive funeral expenditures should not punish the grieving.

Policy Recommendation

Planning for the departed has not received enough attention in Nigeria, Adama's study (2020) supports the premise that this is especially true in most developing nations. Yet, according to Saulawa, Danjuma, Musa and Haruna (2016), the Nigerian federal government has required local governments to supply services like a public cemetery for the people. Oluwafemi (2018) continued by noting that, as of at the moment, nothing has been done by the local government concerning preparing the cemetery for the deceased in Akure, Nigeria. The urban environment's sustainable usage, upkeep, and growth need planning for all land uses. This is why Maskell and Lorenzen (2004) believe that providing sufficient space for all urban needs is a key goal of town planning. Not all urban demands have received proper consideration in the Nigerian setting, and they are typified by unplanned land use and loose development regulation (Owoeye & Popoola 2017).

Accordingly, Alkali (2005), planning restrictions have not hindered urban growth in Nigeria. While the population of the nation has grown from 70 million in 1973 to almost 200 million in recent years, living other sectors that include dead preparing policies, government officials usually concentrate solely with residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional land uses such as schools, hospitals, and stadiums whenever allocating state land directly or through state agencies. The goal of the legal need for disposing of dead persons in a method that wouldn't enhance the danger of epidemic breakouts is to preserve proper environmental standards and public cleanliness.

The cemetery must be strategically positioned, creatively constructed and well-managed. In addition to being universally acknowledged, the responsibility to treat the departed decently transcends nations and groups. Environmentalists feel that dead policies, like other urban environmental policies, help to a healthy urban ecology (MacGregor-Fors, Gómez-Martnez, Garcá-Arroyo, & Chávez-Zichinelli 2020; Grabalov & Nordh 2022). The choice of an appropriate location is vital in the quest to make the cemetery environmentally conscious. To attain this goal, rules that encourage ecological considerations in cemetery location selection, planning, construction, upkeep, and burial practices that do not result in environmental challenges including pollution and the contamination of soils and groundwater are needed.

More importantly, the following suggestions are what should be done to improve cemetery management and land use. There should be adoption of multi-story cemeteries to maximize land use in urban areas. Encouraging eco-friendly burial methods, such as natural or biodegradable caskets, to reduce land and environmental impact. Designing of cemeteries as parks or community spaces to optimize land use while respecting cultural practices. Implementation of clear regulations on burial space allocation and cemetery expansion to prevent overcrowding, Digitizing Burial Records, promoting cremation as a space-saving option, offering both cultural and environmental benefits. And educating communities about alternative burial methods and sustainable practices to address the growing demand for burial spaces.

The Specific ideas on what policies that should be implemented to better manage cemetery spaces, especially in growing cities are as follows:

- 1 Cemetery Land Zoning and Allocation: Establish designated zones for cemetery spaces in urban planning, ensuring enough land is set aside in growing cities for future use. Limit the conversion of cemetery land to other purposes.
- 2 Land-Use Efficiency Policies: Implement policies that encourage vertical cemeteries or multi-tier burial systems in urban areas to optimize the use of limited space while maintaining cultural practices.
- 3 Cremation and Alternative Burial Policies: Introduce incentives for cremation and eco-friendly burial methods (e.g., natural burials), offering tax breaks or subsidies for families who choose these alternatives to reduce land demand.
- 4 Cemetery Maintenance and Expansion Fund: Establish a dedicated fund, sourced from burial fees or taxes, to support ongoing maintenance and planned expansion of cemeteries, ensuring long-term sustainability.
- 5 Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Encourage collaboration between government and private sectors to develop well-managed, efficient cemetery spaces in urban areas, with proper regulatory oversight.
- 6 Public Education and Awareness Campaigns: Launch nationwide campaigns to educate citizens about sustainable burial options and the importance of conserving cemetery spaces for future generations.
7. Smart Technology for Land Management: Implement digital mapping and cemetery management software to track burial plots, optimize land use, and ensure fair allocation of cemetery space in growing cities.

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