

Public Cemeteries of Benin City: Examining a Neglected Dimension of Urban Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Creating a sustainable urban landscape demands adequate provision for all categories of land use and the effective management of such spaces. However, urban management in Nigeria appears to pay little attention to space for the dead as can be observed in the poor physical and environmental conditions of public cemeteries. This situation amounts to an omission of, as well as a failure in, the duty to plan for, and effectively manage, all urban land needs. This paper investigates the three public cemeteries in Benin City to ascertain their physical and environmental conditions and management practices. Data for this study was gathered through primary and secondary sources: the cemeteries and their surroundings were physically inspected; data on cemetery management obtained directly from the responsible local officials; other data came from literature, publications and the archives. The findings confirm all three cemeteries to be in a neglected state; are challenged by a dearth of skilled staff, the absence of modern equipment and management techniques; and, being fenced-off from public view and almost always in an overgrown state, effectively are excluded from the urban environment. The recommendations are for an overhaul of these facilities and the institution of modern management charged with a mission to create environmentally-friendly, physically attractive and visually accessible cemeteries.

Keywords: Land use planning, Public cemeteries, Cemetery management, Sustainable urban management, Benin City

1.0. Introduction

Planning for all land uses is a pre-requisite for the sustainable use, management and development of the urban landscape. It is for this reason that Keeble (1983) avers that a cardinal aim of town planning is the "Allocation of sufficient space for all urban needs". In the Nigerian milieu which is characterised by "unplanned land use and weak development control" (Omuta, 1988) all urban needs tend not to be given adequate attention leading Agboola and Agboola (1997) to conclude that Nigeria's cities have grown in spite of planning laws. Usually, public authorities in allocating state land directly or through state agencies, are mainly concerned with residential, industrial, commercial and institutional land uses such as schools, hospitals and stadia even as the population of the country grew from 70 million in 1973 to nearly 200 million in recent years. Again, given that land use in Nigeria's urban areas is usually shaped more by private players acting in the absence of the state regulatory framework (Ikejiofor, 2009; Aluko, 2011), the land use pattern is mostly not rationally founded. In such a situation, the low priority given to the cemetery may be seen as being reflective of the kind of attention given to its management.

The term "cemetery" is used to describe the resting place of departed people. It was the practice in the cemeteries of old to give earth burials to the deceased meaning that human remains were interred inside graves. In modern times, the cemetery definition has come to encompass more than earth burials. To illustrate, the Cemetery Regulation Act of Michigan State in the United States of America, for instance, states that: "cemetery means one or a combination of more than one of the following: "(i) A burial ground for earth interments(ii) A mausoleum for crypt entombments (iii) A crematory for the cremation

of human remains (iv) A columbarium for the inurnment of cremated remains". In Nigeria's Lagos metropolis also, modern cemeteries developed by private entrepreneurs such as Victoria Vaults, Ebony Vaults and Ikoyi Vaults and Gardens now provide for more than earth interments, especially following the trail-blazing passage of a law (Lagos State Government, 2013) approving cremation as a legal option of burial. The cemetery is an institutional land use which is a necessity in urban areas. Its effective management is both a statutory and environmental duty: the proper disposal of the dead being a civic duty, just as is the maintenance of a hygienic environment. The adequate provision and effective management of cemeteries is justified simply by the facts that: "Human death and burials are part of human life, while cemetery management is part of human settlement development" (South African Local Government Association, 2016).

The cemetery is a place of importance for many reasons apart from the obvious. In countries with an established tradition of good record-keeping and maintenance, cemeteries are heritage sites which possess cultural and historical value; they are also seen as places for recreation (Matero and Peters, 2003). In such jurisdictions where modern practices obtain, cemeteries are also places of solace, their environments lushly vegetated and offer a biodiversity which supports conservation and the ecosystem. In effect, the cemetery presents as an environmentally-friendly form of land use.

1.1. Human Burial and the Environment

The issues of death and burial can be viewed from the general as well as the municipal angles. In general terms, after death, there are certain obligations which the living owes to the dead. The first is to provide a good environment as a last resting place; second, to inter the remains of the deceased in a decent manner and third, to ensure that the prepared place of rest is decently and hygienically managed and maintained thereafter. From the municipal viewpoint, the burial of the dead is seen as an important and necessary public service which is compelled by law. The maintenance of good environmental standards and public hygiene lies behind the statutory provision for the disposal of deceased humans in a manner which would not pose a risk of epidemic outbreaks. Of necessity, the cemetery should be well located, well laid out, properly maintained and administered. The obligation for a decent handling of the dead is not only individually accepted, but cuts across cultures and societies.

It is the view of environmentalists that the cemetery should be a healthy urban habitat just like other areas of the urban environment (Harker, 2012; Uslu et al, 2009). Of vital importance in the quest to make the cemetery more eco-friendly is the selection of an appropriate location. Achieving this objective requires addressing ecological concerns in choosing cemetery locations, in planning, design, maintenance and especially in burial practices which do not give rise to environmental problems such as pollution and the contamination of soils and groundwater. As Uslu et al(2009) state "Depending on the form of burial and the subsequent practices at the cemeteries, the burial areas can become areas threatening the environment, polluting underground water and creating negative effects on fauna and flora".

The environmental advantages of burial practice which foregoes chemical embalment and hardwood caskets have been pointed out by Harker (2012). Similarly, Uslu et al (2009) believe that ecological concerns would be taken care of if burial practice avoids embalment of corpses, uses biodegradable materials for coffins and actually protects the biodiversity of the burial area. It would appear then that traditional burial practice in ancient Africa which predates embalment and preservation technology, requiring that corpses be interred same day or not later than the second day (as in old Bini kingdom), was more environmentally friendly than what is widely practiced today in the same environment. Whilst the modern way, which is consequential to society's change from its agrarian origin to an industrial state has not totally displaced the traditional, it constitutes ecological challenges because of the introduction of embalment (to preserve bodies for months before burial), the use of coffins constructed with materials (e.g. pillows, metals such as zinc, copper lead and iron), soft coffin linings, burial clothing) which upon getting into the soil become pollutants. Burial practice in many parts of the country has changed from old tradition to a system which has long-term implications for ecology and environment.

In recognition of environmental and ecological concerns, Uslu et al (op cit) recommends that a suitable site for a cemetery must have: (1) a soil that is neither loose nor rocky; (2) located away from underground water basins and potable water; (3) a slope of 0 to 10% for easy decomposition; (4) the

land must not be flat in order to drain easily; (5) the soil must be water permeable with sufficient micro-organic activity within it. The authors add that “The main purpose is to decrease the negative impacts of the cemeteries on the underground water, natural vegetation and fauna existing in the burial area, to use materials biodegrading more rapidly and to minimize the ecological footprint of the individual”.

1.2. Origins of the Cemetery

In the course of humankind’s terrestrial existence, land has been found to be essential not only for sustenance, but also, for the repose of the departed. In spite of the existence of cremation in some cultures, earth burial remains the most widespread manner of handling human remains across the world, an enduring fact which is encapsulated in the Christian burial expression: “earth to earth, ashes to ashes and dust to dust” indicating the umbilical relationship between terrestrials and the *terrenum*. As humankind evolved from the stage of hunting and gathering to settled existence, places naturally became designated in communities and settlements as burial grounds or places for burying the dead. Cemetery is the new name for burial grounds. Fogli (2004) as cited in Uslu et al (2009) defines the functions of the cemetery as:

- i. Place of deposit and transformation of dead bodies without dangers for the public health.
- ii. Place of visit for those people wanting to remember a dead person and at the same time a symbol of the historical memory of a collectivity”.

1.3. Public Cemeteries in Nigeria

In pre-colonial times, amongst the conglomeration of over 450 ethnic groups which occupy the present-day Nigerian space the widespread cultural practice was to bury the dead literally amongst the living: either near or within their homes. This practice had spiritual, religious and cultural connotations. The belief was that the physically dead were considered still as having an existence as living dead which family members wished to have around them and be associated with. These beliefs are the bases for the practice of home burial.

Public cemeteries in Nigeria are essentially, therefore, the consequence of interaction between the British (colonialists as well as the church missions) and the many cultures of Nigeria. According to Duru (2013), due to “western influence however, the tradition of burying the dead in the family compound paved way for the use of public cemeteries. Public cemeteries started when missionaries acquired land to bury their colleagues. This was later followed by the acquisition of land to bury deceased church members. The development gave rise to government-owned cemeteries, and subsequently, private ones”. The very first cemetery in the Nigeria was established in the late 19th century in Lokoja, then the seat of government, and it is the final resting place of colonial administrators, soldiers, merchants, interpreters and missionaries. The colonialists discouraged home burials whilst encouraging the use of public and church mission cemeteries.

The church missions created cemeteries adjoining their premises for the interment of deceased converts. In these places, the various grave sites were marked with headstones, a practice previously unknown in these climes. The church burial grounds were not large and the spaces were soon filled up. These cemeteries were, however, not patronized by most of the congregants, an overwhelming number of whom preferred burying their dead in the old way.

Public commentary on the state of Nigeria’s public cemeteries has been very uncomplimentary. The definite impression conveyed is that these facilities are not well managed. Some of the commentaries are as follows:

“Public cemeteries in Lagos are in a decrepit state that makes it impossible for the dead to rest in peace. Perhaps the state of public cemeteries in Lagos is a clear indication that Nigerians have no value for history; no regard for culture; no knowledge of the importance of preservation, and no respect for the souls of the departed”.

Elusoji (2015) on Atan and Matori cemeteries in Lagos

“...the graves are overgrown with weeds and have become steady grazing grounds for sheep and goats that roam the premises”.

Duru (2013) on Atan cemetery, Lagos (second largest in Nigeria)

“The cemetery is overgrown with dry, elephant grasses, weeds, shrubs and climbers. The facility lies forlorn...residents use it as a refuse dump”.

Omegoh (2016) on the European Cemetery, Lokoja (first and largest in Nigeria)

“...these cemeteries have challenges of space, access and location. The existing cemeteries are old and overstretched. Used graves have been ‘unknowingly’ re-used... most of the cemeteries have not recruited new staff in the last 10 years...the system is left with an ageing staff with declining efficiency ...”

Douglas (2013) on public cemeteries in Rivers State, Nigeria

1.4. The Study Area

The study area is Benin City, administrative capital of Edo State, a sub-national governmental unit of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is a city occupied mainly by the Bini-speaking people of the Edo ethnic nationality. The city population in the last national census of 2006 was 1.15 million persons (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009) and applying the National Population Commission’s growth rate of 3.5% p.a. for urban centers in Nigeria, its 2017 population is estimated at 1.56 million persons which is projected to be 2 million by 2020 and 5.5 million by 2050. There are three public cemeteries in the city named 1st Cemetery, 2nd Cemetery and 3rd Cemetery and they constitute the subjects of this study.

Although Benin City falls into four different local government council jurisdictions, all three public cemeteries are located within only one of the four, the Oredo local Government Council. Before the 1980s local government reforms, all three cemeteries as well as the entire city fell under a single entity, the Benin City Council.

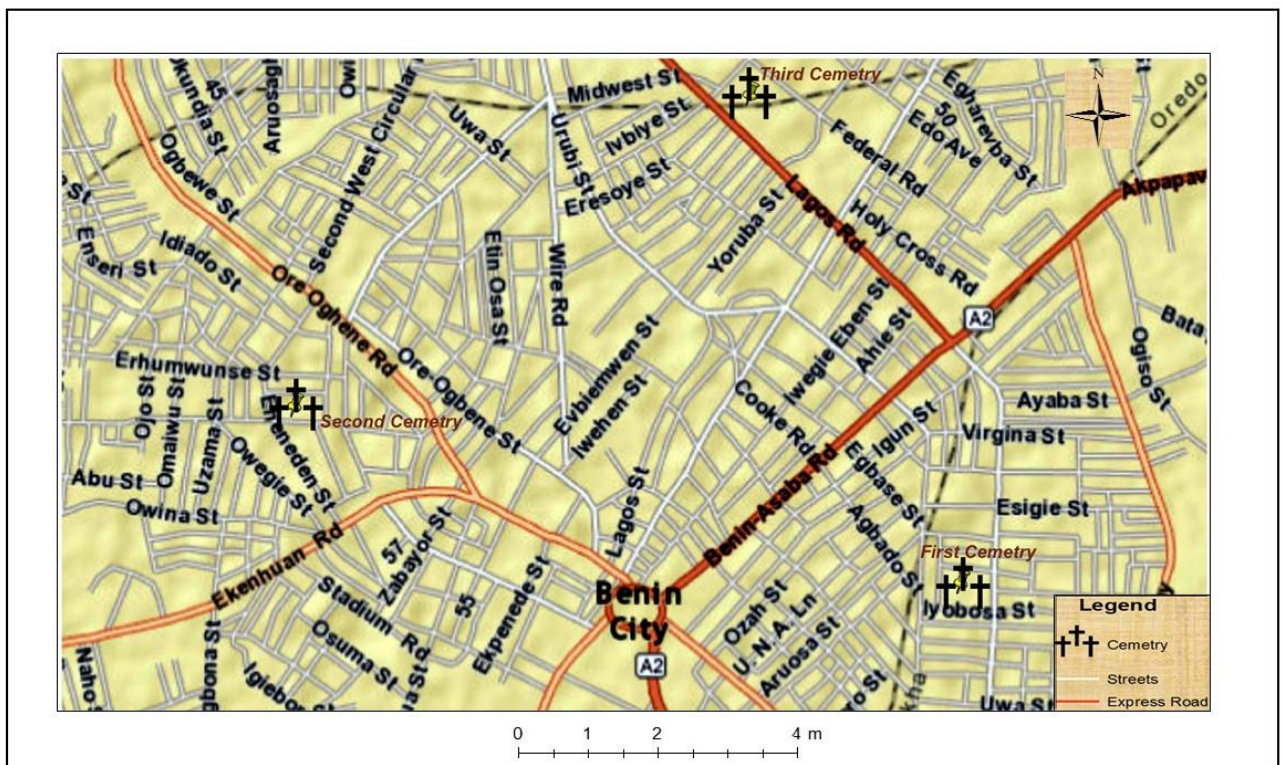


Figure 1: Location Map of the Public Cemeteries in Benin City

The thesis of this paper is that the cemetery is an important consideration in land use planning and urban management just as are schools, hospitals, markets and public buildings. Sustainable urban management calls for a sustainable cemetery policy. As asserted by Uslu et al (2009): “If cemeteries ... are treated as areas where ecological concerns have priority as is the case in all fields of life with respect to planning, management and design, they will be important sources of making the cities healthy, aesthetic and livable places”.

Against the background impression that public cemeteries in Nigeria are in a decrepit state, this paper investigates the three cemeteries in Benin City in order to ascertain their physical condition, subsisting management policies and practices with a view to suggesting improving measures in accordance with best practice. To achieve these objectives, the following issues would come up for resolution:

- (a) What is the state of the public cemeteries in Benin City?
- (b) What are the challenges of public cemetery management in Benin City?
- (c) What steps may be taken to improve public cemeteries in Benin City?

2.0. Material and Methods

The first two research questions recommended the gathering of primary data. The state of the cemeteries was established by physical inspections undertaken by the authors. A prepared list of questions was used as a guide in gathering data on management issues through interactions with the Oredo Local Government Council Parks and Environmental Department officials whose duty it is to administer the cemeteries. Particularly, data was sought as to annual funding, staffing, training, equipment deployed, income from burial fees and annual running costs. Archival data was also sought as to the acreages of the cemeteries and legal responsibility for their management. On the third research question which addresses ways in which the cemeteries can be improved physically, functionally and managerially, recourse was made to literature, other publications and the archives. This particular issue is treated in the discussion section. Data is presented in descriptive tables, photographs and by satellite imaging.

3.0. Results and Discussion

3.1. State of the Cemeteries and Cemetery Management

3.1.1. Physical Inspection Report

Physical inspections were made of each of the three cemeteries. Note was taken of the internal and external environments, the physical condition of the fences, gates and the structures seen. The results of the physical inspections are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3 and in Table 1. The archives and responses from cemetery management officials are the sources of the data presented in Table 2.

Figures 1-3 which display the entrances to the cemeteries are indicative of their environmentally unattractive and neglected states. Table 1 presents a description of the environment, the structures and available facilities and security arrangements.

It was observed during the inspection that all of the cemeteries are surrounded by residential areas. All of the cemeteries are fenced off from the public by sandcrete block walling.

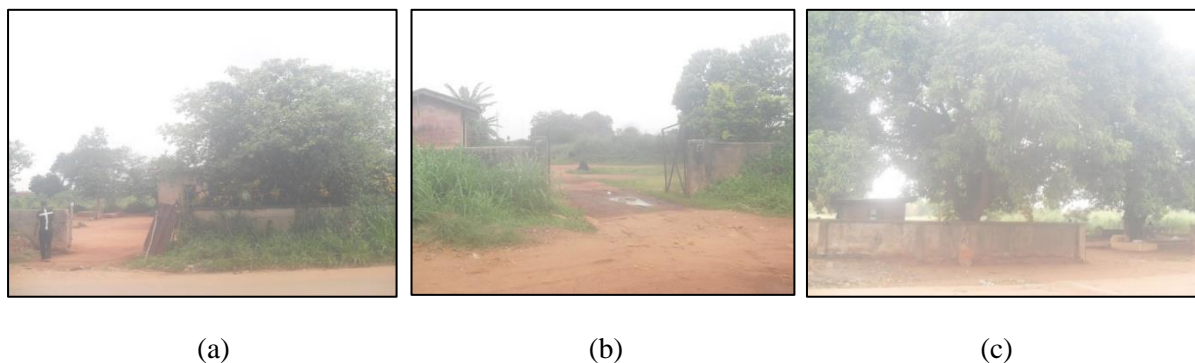


Figure 1: (a) Entrance Gate of First Cemetery (b) Entrance of Second Cemetery (c) Entrance Gate of Third Cemetery

Table 1: State of the Cemeteries

	First Cemetery	Second Cemetery	Third Cemetery
Environment	Overgrown, with, tombstones barely visible	Accessed by unpaved, bumpy road, unkempt surroundings, overgrown	Thick undergrowth covering tombstones and entire cemetery space
Structure	Broken down gate, broken fence/no fence in sections, small gatehouse	Only structures are gatehouse, iron gates and wall fence all in poor condition	Wall fence broken in sections
Facilities	No directional signs, no paved paths /internal roads, No sign of electricity, water supply	No directional signs, no paved paths /internal roads, No sign of electricity, water supply	Decrepit, unfurnished gatehouse; no internal roads seen; no paved paths. No electricity/ water supply, No directional signs
Security	In daytime, no signs of security seen	In daytime, no signs of security seen	No lighting anywhere; only one attendant seen in daytime

Table 2: Benin City Public Cemeteries: Location, Size and Fees

Name	Location	Land Area (m ²)	Ownership	Internal Capacity	Vacant Space	Official Burial Fees(₦)	
						Cemetery Burial	Home Burial
1st cemetery	1 st Cemetery Road	45,074	Oredo Local Government Area	N/A	N/A	6,000.00	11,000.00
2 nd Cemetery	2 nd Cemetery Road	24,389	Oredo Local Government Area	N/A	N/A	6,000.00	11,000.00
3 rd Cemetery	3 rd Cemetery Road	60,514	Oredo Local Government Area	N/A	N/A	6,000.00	11,000.00

N/A: Information not available

3.2. Interview Results

Data on cemetery management as garnered from interactions with local government officials are as follows:

3.2.1. Operational Data

In embarking upon this study, the expectation was that reliable data would be made available on issues pertaining to cemetery management over the preceding ten years. Such important information was expected in relation to annual budgets, maintenance, available plots and level of patronage. The contrary was proven to be the case as virtually no data could be accessed after six months of waiting. Even basic information such as the acreage of each cemetery and their establishment dates were unavailable.

Maintenance action in the past eight years has been virtually non-existent save for when the three cemeteries were recently cleared of bushy undergrowth following public complaints about their unkempt state. It transpired from interviews of officials responsible for the cemeteries that some management challenges are being faced. These are treated in the discussion section.

3.2.2. Management Policies and Operations

The law requires that a certificate of cause of death be presented for each deceased person. The system offers the option of burial at the cemetery or burial at the deceased's residence for which different fees are charged by the local government. Where burial is to take place at home, the local government must beforehand inspect and approve the suitability of the venue; and where it is adjudged unsuitable, say due to objections by concerned parties or where the ownership of the burial site is in dispute, permission would be denied.

The three cemeteries have been always under the management of the local government, but in 2011, the state government intruded into the management of 3rd Cemetery (the largest of the three) by making

an arrangement with a private firm to run a portion of it ostensibly on a PPP arrangement. The impact of this arrangement was not externally visible as the 6-hectare cemetery space remained unappealing. Besides, this arrangement does not benefit the local government in any way as the fees for cemetery space do not come to its coffers; local government staff are not trained in the new systems and equipment introduced by the operator and this arrangement cannot, by any means, represent a long-term strategy to address cemetery management problems.

The cemeteries are still being managed by old methods which are labour intensive, technologically backward and wanting in new ideas. Indeed, cemetery management policy can be described as being as moribund as the cemeteries themselves. The common characteristic of overgrown bushes, broken fences and the absence of basic services, tell the story of neglect. Officials reveal that in the past five years, the now overgrown cemeteries have been cleared just once following complaints from members of the public. The impression created is that the cemeteries are places where the dead are interred and thereafter forgotten. This may explain why they are not serviced by public utilities (electricity, water) and there are no structures on site which offer shelter of any kind to visitors and even the few cemetery staff save for the little huts at their entrances. The current level of staffing as shown in Tables 3 and 4 are indicative of the operational capacity (personnel) of the cemeteries and their capability (equipment) for servicing a city population of over 1.5 million and for maintaining the large acreage of the cemeteries which call for a sizeable standing grounds maintenance team with modern equipment.

Table 3: Staffing of the Cemeteries of Benin City

Role of Staff	First Cemetery	Second Cemetery	Third cemetery
Supervisor	1	1	1
Clerk	1	1	1
Diggers	4	4	5
Total	6	6	7

Table 4: Equipment Deployed by Cemetery Grounds men

Type of Equipment	Purpose
Pick axes	Excavation
Shovels	Excavation/Infilling
Wheel Barrows	Removal of excavated soil
Cutlasses	Bush clearing

3.3. Findings

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

First, all the three cemeteries are in a state of physical and environmental neglect. Second, cemetery management is facing challenges of funding, staffing, modern equipment, basic infrastructure, services and new ideas. Third, constitutional responsibility for the “establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm” (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 4th Schedule) belongs to local governments, in this case, the Oredo Local Government Council, through its Parks and Environment Department.

Arising from the findings, the discussion is divided into two parts. First, it looks at the reasons for, and the implications of, the poor condition of these cemeteries, and second, it considers the need and prospects for improvements in the physical appearance, facilities and management quality.

3.3.1. Reasons and Implications of Neglect

First, local governments as a tier of government are plagued by the problem of adequate capacity. Whilst poor capacity is a general public service problem in the country (Asiodu, 2013, 2015; Igbuzo, 2015), the malaise is accentuated at the state and local levels (Igbuzo, 2015) and this cannot but affect cemetery management.

Second, funding and political interference by the state are worthy of mention. From interactions with officials, the cemeteries of Benin City have a perennial problem of inadequate funding. This may have precipitated the decision of the past state administration (2008-2016) to introduce a PPP arrangement as regards 3rd Cemetery. The funding problem is vital as it would tend to affect the availability of resources, effective management and maintenance, the absence of which are reflected in the present state of the cemeteries.

There are two fundamental problems of local governance in all of Nigeria. Under the country's revenue-sharing arrangement, the three tiers of government: federal, state and local respectively receive monthly 52.69%, 26.72% and 20.62% of monies accruing to the federation account. In addition to their allocation, local governments raise revenue from constitutionally-permitted sources such as market charges, cemeteries, permits and so on. There is, therefore, a reason to believe that local governments are financially equipped to handle their responsibilities if prudence, accountability and prioritisation were applied in practice. In the absence of evidence of budgetary allocations for cemeteries, a definitive position cannot be taken on the adequacy of funding.

However, a real problem is that the state, a second-tier authority, oversees the activities of local governments within its jurisdiction, in the process of which constitutionally allocated funding for the latter is channeled through a joint bank account operated by both tiers of government. In the course of accessing these funds, the local governments allege that they do not always receive the full benefit of their granted resources, with the state tending to take away a lion's share under the guise of financing joint projects. This is the local governments' rationalisation of their inability to pay their workers on a regular basis leading to a backlog of unpaid salaries and the stultification of projects. Given also, the poor accountability in the local government system (Human Rights Watch, 2007), the prospects of a rejuvenation of cemetery management appear dim. With the ready availability of the home burial option, it is highly unlikely that public cemetery services would be self-sustaining even when properly managed. The prospects are that this municipal service will in the foreseeable future need to be heavily subsidised.

State authorities in Nigeria tend to interfere in the political leadership of local governments, using the executive offices and, by implication the resources, for patronage of political party stalwarts and loyalists (Agbodike et al, 2014; Maja-Pearce, 2014). Such a situation has tended to create unfocused leadership, poor administrative practices and poor overall governance. The Edo State Government decision to outsource management of 3rd Cemetery to a private firm can be classified as an act of political patronage, interference and a usurpation of the constitutional duty of the local government. This arrangement not only deprives that authority of revenue, but prevents the development of capacity amongst the staff. Indeed, whilst the constitution allows the state to supervise local governments and even make laws which apply to them, the entry of the state into the management of 3rd Cemetery is more of an act of intrusion, rather than supervision.

Third, there is the problem of staffing and skilled personnel. With part of its responsibilities given out in political patronage, cemetery management is affected. A focused administration which has access to its funds is a necessity for developing the staff and personnel which would enable the achievement of set objectives. In so far as those requirements are not in place, the organisation would remain handicapped.

Obviously, at the existing level of operations and resource constraints, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the system to deliver quality. The question of manpower training which is important for improved performance on the job (of course with better equipment and technology) would seem impossible in the circumstances.

Fourth, there is a tradition and predilection for home burials in the city. However, some people opt for burial in the public cemetery. Residents who originally came from other parts of the country often transport their deceased to ancestral homes in other parts of the country for burial, usually not in public cemeteries but in the homestead whilst some others opt for the cemetery. The home burial option may be a factor in why due attention is not been given to cemetery management. But it can be argued also that the poor visage of these neglected cemeteries could be due to people's continued preference for

home burial. An image change for the cemeteries should bring a change to the way that they are perceived.

3.3.2. Exploring Steps for Improvement of the Public Cemeteries

The cemeteries of Benin City need improvement in terms of physical condition, equipment, basic services and utilities and management. Above all, they have to be made visually accessible and best practice compliant. This argument for improvement can be sustained on several grounds.

First, the neglect of public cemeteries amounts to a neglect of the environment. Good environmental management cannot be achieved without the inclusion of every aspect of the environment. The objective of good environmental management must lie in delivering a sustainable landscape. A sustainable urban environment, the sustainable use of urban land cannot be achieved if a part of the environment is in a decrepit state.

Second, society must understand and accept that it is a duty owed by the living to the departed to have properly run cemeteries. The quality of public cemeteries constitutes a veritable index of the developmental state of any society. Sir William E. Gladstone (1809-1898), four-time British Prime Minister, is credited with the dictum: "Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land and their loyalty to high ideals". This pronouncement underscores the duty which the living, whether as individuals or as a society, owe to the departed.

Third, cemeteries offer services, the effectiveness of is determined by the quality of management. In explaining the need for a decent handling of the dead, the South African Local Government Association (2016, op cit) states that: "... cemetery management is part of human settlement development". By this admission, other aspects of human settlement management such as housing, transport and so on are not more important than the cemetery dimension. The quality of management required in the handling of cemeteries is as great as that deployed in other activities considered also to be of importance.

Fourth, sandcrete block wall fencing built around the public cemeteries should be removed because it shuts them off from public view and helps to create the impression that they are not part of the urban landscape, but rather are like backwoods, places shut off from public access and every urban amenity. This situation is ironic in that it contradicts the African (and also Nigerian) cultural belief that the dead are buried amongst the living because, in spite of their physical absence, they are still seen as having a presence desired by the living. Visual accessibility would support the idea of closeness of the dead to the living. Additionally, the present walling style aids superstitious beliefs about the dead and the perpetuation of myths. Furthermore, hiding cemeteries from public view and behind high walls enables criminal activities like the nefarious desecration of graves, especially with the poor security staffing and absence of security lighting at night.

3.4. Creating Environmentally Sensitive Cemeteries

Another way in which cemeteries can be improved in an era of concern for sustainable development is to make them environmentally sensitive. In the case of Benin City, the already established urban structure places some restrictions on the extent to which the cemeteries can be modernised. For instance, as a result of unregulated urban growth patterns, all three cemeteries are now hemmed in by residential development, whereas this type of land use should not be in living quarters. This situation limits the pursuit of the ideal of creating environmentally sensitive cemeteries which would complement and promote a sustainable urban environment. However, in pursuit of this ideal, the *vision* should be to make the public cemetery a complementary part of the urban landscape. Appropriately, the *mission* should aim creating physically and visually accessible cemeteries which are able to offer all-round security to the interred as well as to visitors. Environmental sensitivity can be pursued in the following ways.

First, for the existing cemeteries, protective, but alienating sandcrete block fencing have to give way to low-height vertical railings which allow visual access; the environment always kept clean and lighted up; paved paths created; onsite tomb location facilities made available; directional signs provided and

aesthetics improved. Visual access and neatness would enable the realisation that cemeteries are part of the urban landscape and not a symbol of urban blight, which impression, their present conditions convey. Old and collapsed tombstones have to be repaired and tidied up. In so doing specifications have to be issued as to design, height, colour and material in order to achieve quality, durability and a level of uniformity which would provide aesthetic appeal.

Second, for new cemeteries, planning and design must change to reflect modern methods. A conscious effort must be made to plan and design the cemetery as the institutional land use which it is. It has to be integrated into the urban landscape, made accessible, be aesthetically pleasant, ecologically friendly and properly landscaped, possibly as part of a comprehensive urban open space design. The South African Local Government Authority (op cit) succinctly captures this concept in the following manner: "From the outset, new cemeteries should be conceived for multiple uses, and integrated into urban areas as green space for parks and recreational activities as well as burials". In this manner, the cemetery is integrated into the urban landscape and land used as cemetery cannot be regarded as being lost to urban use. Such land can therefore be seen as having been planned, developed and used in a sustainable way.

4.0. Conclusion

Working from the premise that Nigeria's public cemeteries are generally neglected as suggested by their poor appearance and published commentary, this paper set out to examine the condition and management status of the three public cemeteries in Benin City. The findings are that the cemeteries, without exception, are neglected and poorly managed; that there is a need for an overhaul; and for new, environmentally sensitive cemeteries with modern standards of design and management which would complement the urban landscape.

Given the relatively short history of urban planning and public cemetery management in Nigeria, it would be unrealistic to compare these first generation public cemeteries to those in climes where the preservation of historic burial grounds and cemeteries has been established for centuries. Benin City's cemeteries are, therefore, far from being places of cultural, historical, scientific and scenic importance and value as can be found in older countries. However, whilst the present cemeteries need upgrading and better management, tomorrow's need to be planned, designed, constructed and managed to reflect ecological and environmental concerns, if it is acknowledged that the world now has become a global village in which the common objective is not only to undertake sustainable development, but also, to ensure that all development remain sustainable.

The implications which arise from this study are: First, the poor state of public cemeteries in Benin City suggests that the urban environment is not being properly managed. Second, the utter neglect of public cemeteries is a failure by society to do its duty by the dead and uphold high ideals of enlightenment as enunciated by Gladstone. Third, better managed and maintained cemeteries offer the possibility of discouraging the practice of home burials which, even though founded on cultural belief, is not beyond the influence of modernity.

It is, accordingly, recommended that: First, the public cemeteries of Benin City should be overhauled and made to complement the urban environment instead of the rural outlook which they currently depict. Second, management of 3rd Cemetery should be returned by the Edo State Government to the Oredo Local Government since its intervention in 3rd cemetery amounts to interference, not supervision. Third, cemetery management would benefit from the adoption of modern administrative techniques and technology which should bring about better resource management, better record-keeping, improved managerial capacity and greater accountability.

An Important Area for Investigation

The lack of public water supply in the city since the 1990s has encouraged the widespread use of boreholes in the alternative. Health risks might exist in the extensive use of borehole water, almost always without treatment, in residential areas which also are places of interment. Given the observation of Uslu (2009) on the need "to decrease the negative impacts of the cemeteries on the underground water, natural vegetation and fauna existing in the burial area, to use materials biodegrading more

rapidly and to minimize the ecological footprint of the individual”, the scenario in the study area might present a source of contamination of underground water, not only by cadavers, but also, non-biodegradable burial materials mostly consisting of metals (such as zinc, copper lead and iron), soft coffin linings and burial clothing which constitute sources of pollution upon entering the soil. These public cemeteries, being located in residential areas, is also a matter of concern.

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