

## Socio-Economic and Environmental Impact of Indiscriminate Burials on Property Transactions in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Throughout history, almost all societies have employed different practices of disposing off the dead and one such form is cemetery or burial ground. In the western part of Nigeria, tradition demands that chiefs are not buried in public cemeteries but in secret locations preferably at home. However, this practice have been flawed and currently, not only chief are buried at home but anybody. Corpses are now buried indiscriminately in homes, front and back gardens without any recourse to the effect this practice have on the environment. .

In view of the foregoing, the study delved into the socio-economic and environmental impact of indiscriminate burial within residential neighbourhood on property transaction in Ado- Ekiti, Western Nigeria. Questionnaire were structured and administered on tenants, landlords, government officials and professionals alike. Stratified sampling technique was adopted in that the city of Ado-Ekiti being the state capital was found suitable and was subsequently divided into the twelve political wards. Two Hundred and Fifty (250) questionnaire were administered. Emphasis was played on buildings with evidence of tomb. Research findings proved that this practice was rampant especially in the core of the city and that no official (Planned) cemetery could be identified. The study identified the following demerits: environmental degradation; difficulty in land acquisition for public use; property devaluation; spiritual and psychological disturbance. Some of the coping measures suggested include: need for official provision of cemetery by government agencies, religious bodies and social organizations; need to enact enabling laws; public enlightenment and appeals and government at various levels to be more involved in the provision of mass housing to aid easy implementation of basic environmental laws among others

**Keywords:** burial-ground, environment, indiscriminate, property value, socio-economic.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Concurrent with the dramatic increase in the Nation's elderly population expected in coming decades will be a need to dispose off large numbers of our dead. This issue has religious, cultural and economic salience, but is not typically considered a planning problem.

Although cremation rates are rising in the Western World, burial is projected to remain the preferred alternative for the majority of the Nigerian populations and urban space for cemeteries is limited in many communities. Hence, the need for proper planning for the disposal of the dead.

Essentially, as population demographics change, environmental concerns intensify, and demand for urban space grows, future land use decisions will have to balance diverse set of social, cultural and environmental expectations, including taking into account burial practices.

From time immemorial, it has become Nigerian culture to bury their dead within the residential neighborhood without taking into consideration the consequences it would have on the environment in general and property transactions in particular. For instance researches had shown that underground and pipe waters could be polluted where such water is exposed to the graves.

When death occurs in our society, it is invariably a sad event, however the decaying of the corpse and beliefs about death make the presence of the dead person among the living unacceptable. Throughout history, almost all societies have employed different practices of disposing off the dead and one such form is cemetery or burial ground.

In the western part of Nigeria, tradition demands that chiefs are not buried in public cemeteries but in secret locations preferably at home. This practice emanated from the belief that opposing warriors might exhume the body of the chiefs and that could mean defeat or embarrassment to the town or traditional area. However, this practice have been flawed and currently, not only chief are buried at home but anybody. Corpses are now buried indiscriminately in homes, front and back gardens without any recourse to the effect this practice have on the

environment. If precaution is not taken now, there is the potential of an outbreak of epidemic. In most parts of Nigeria, water is distributed through PVCu pipes in the ground. Most often the pipe breaks either through pressure from vehicular traffic or even severe hot weather condition. These burst pipes do remain unattended to for days and bacteria are transmitted through the broken pipes to sources of use by the general public.

On the other hand, most Nigerians where pipe borne water is not forthcoming depend mostly on underground water in form of well, bore – holes, steam water supply and the likes. These sources of water supply come in contact with the remains of the corpse which directly or indirectly cause water contamination. This attitude of burying the dead within residential building makes property transaction more difficult.

It is in the view of the above, that the researchers have poised to work on the Socio – Economic and Environmental impact of indiscriminate burials on property transactions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is an understatement to say that much work had been done and written on the need to plan for the dead as well as the effect of sitting graveyards within the residential neighborhood on the environment and the human population. Effort is hereby made below to appraise some of these works.

Anim (2010) in his write up titled “Campaign against Burial of Corpses in Individual Homes at Kpando” believed that when death occurs in our society, it is invariably a sad event, however, the decaying of the corpse and beliefs about death make the presence of the dead person among the living unacceptable. He opined that throughout history, almost all societies have employed different practices of disposing off the dead and one such form is cemetery or burial ground. He defined cemetery as a large area set apart for burial or getting rid of dead bodies, normally situated on the outskirts of a town or village.

He believed that cemeteries serve multiple purposes; besides disposing of bodies, it is a place where relationship between the family and dead is established and maintained. Consideration is taken from visits to the grave and planting flowers and decorating the pot. He went further by analyzing the environmental impact of burial ground on the residential neighborhood. He took Kpando as a case study. It was emphatically mentioned that a significant number of burial ground contaminate our water resources. The decomposition of buried human corpse could have a negative impact on the ground water, due to contamination that occurs as a result of organic residue and pathogens that are generated during the decomposition process. Germs and viruses and other substances from decomposing Corpse could move through the ground water and the use of the soil, according to Anim (2010) could be harmful to health causing diseases such as diarrhea, typhoid, fever, cholera and infections hepatitis. Anim (2010) posited that research had revealed that 80% of all illnesses in developing countries are water related. Also, one-quarter of the children born in developing countries would have died before the age of 5 years mostly from water related diseases.

In his finding centered on Kpando, Ghana, Anim (2010) recommended among others as follows:

- ❖ The Kpando District Assembly should pass legislation prohibiting burial of Corpse in homes and back gardens.
- ❖ The Kpando District Assembly should invest in the establishment of a public cemetery. A dedicated committee be set up to manage and maintain the asset as an income generating venture.
- ❖ Existing rural community cemeteries such as Gadza, Aduzi, Fesi etc. could sell plots in their cemeteries to others who do not hail from those communities at commercial rates and such proceeds would be used to maintain the cemetery.
- ❖ Environmental awareness programme should be implemented and community education be pursued on the effect of burial grounds in homes and back gardens

Balogun (2010) reiterated the importance of water to humanity. He linked up the survival of human population to the degree of quality water that is available. He emphasized that a considerable/sizeable number of the population has died or at least suffering from one sickness or the other as a result of water pollution. He however attributed indiscriminate sitting of grave yard within the residential neighbourhood as one of the causative agents of water pollution. He concluded by recommending that a legislation be enacted to ensure the use of public cemetery if at all this environmental menace is to be curtailed.

In the work of Basmajian, et al (2010) which was centered on “Planning for the Disposal of the Dead” the authors noted that concurrent with the dramatic increase in the nation’s elderly population expected in coming decades would be a need to dispose off larger number of their dead. They believe that the issue has religious, cultural and economic salience, but is not typically considered a planning problem. Though cremation rate according to them are rising, burial was projected to remain the preferred alternative for the majority of the U.S. population and urban space for cemeteries was believed to be limited in many communities. The authors outlined issues related to cemeteries and burial, by describing a good number of alternatives to traditional cemeteries and explain how planners might usefully contribute.

The result and conclusion of their work showed that alternatives to the cemeteries were emerging, but remain limited. Some according to them require changes to laws or public perceptions, planning practice to be advanced by case studies showing how to integrate burial grounds into existing communities and how to alter public policy to permit alternative to burial. As personal views of Basmajian et al (2010) it is believed that as population demographics change, environmental concerns intensify, and demand for urban space grows, future land use decisions would have to balance a diverse set of social, cultural and environmental expectations, including taking into account burial practices. They provided alternatives to traditional burial in a cemetery. These include burial in a multiple-use cemetery, natural burial, entombment in a mausoleum, cremation, with the ashes preserved in a columbarium or scattered elsewhere, and burial in grave that would be reused in the future.

However, from the findings of Egunleti (2008) on the “Critics of the factors affecting real Estate Market in Nigeria” it was argued among other things that one of the discouraging factors which pose as impediment to booming in real estate business in Nigeria is the attitude of burying corpses within residential neighbourhood. This culture had been seen to reduce the market value of prospective properties. Also, the writer discovered that the culture of siting burial ground within residential building leads to serious litigation even long time after such transactions had been concluded. This, he said was as a result of the belief that any building with burial ground of either the father or the mother is being regarded as a family house which is rarely sold or at least very difficult to dispose. Research findings showed that buildings with grave yard(s) are prone to problems when they are meant for sale.

He however recommended that relevant government agencies must embark on enlightenment programmes towards making use of public cemeteries. Also, the author believed the enactment of relevant laws would go a long way to ameliorating the misnomer.

Having reviewed the aforementioned works, it can be deduced that siting of burial ground within the homes is a common phenomenon at least among Africans. It had also been proved that the culture of burying corpses in the house has cultural and historic value. In addition past research works had shown that siting grave-yards within residential neighbourhood has negative impact on the environment as well as human population.

Sequel to the above, it is the intention of the prospective researcher to look into the socio-economic and environmental impact of indiscriminate siting of burial ground on property transactions.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

For the purpose of this work, the concept of Urban Renewal was considered most appropriate considering the negative effect of indiscriminate siting of burial ground on the neighborhoods under consideration and Nigeria settlements in general.

The term “Urban Renewal” was coined by an American housing Economist Miles Colean. Scholars believe that the term has several possible meanings and that the concept is as old as cities themselves. Urban renewal has been defined as a deliberate effort to change the urban environment through planned scale adjustment of existing cities to present a future requirement for urban living and working (Grebler, 1965).

Others have even suggested that urban renewal should cover three types of programmes, namely:

- (i) Rehabilitation: That is, bringing substandard structures up to a prescribed standard.
- (ii) Conservation: This involved both rehabilitation and spot clearance in order to upgrade an area.
- (iii) Development: This involves demolition, clearance and reconstruction of an entire area.

The reason for public action and subsidies for the renovation of deteriorating area have necessitated the development of theoretical framework for urban renewal. But with the growth of city and regional planning into a major branch of thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Economists were foremost in advancing theoretical bases for urban renewal.

Other theories relevant to the study are the Social theory and Neighborhood concept. While the Social theory describes how the residents contribute to the poor state of the environment, the Neighborhood concept proffers the way and manner our neighbourhoods are supposed to be planned to discourage neighborhood derelict.

#### **3.1 The Social Theory**

The contribution of social theories lies in pointing out that slums result from various forces outside the control of the residents. Some, on the other hand contend that slums are created by slum prone people with in-grained slum mentalities and habits. Consequently, the argument continues placing such people in clean and new building will be ineffective. Others prefer to leave the poor where they belong because of the fear of keeping proper maintenance of area higher than their standard of living (Lloyd, 1979).

### **3.2 Neighbourhood Concept**

The concept was first outline by Clearance A. Perry in 1929 (Beyer, 1965). Although, the neighborhood may be regarded as a micro planning space, its delineation is not always limited to the need for smaller planning units or more functional service area. Rather, the neighborhood concept is guided by the need for providing a focal point for a feasible programme for bringing people together to discuss local problems of mutual concern. Such a focal point must be convenient and acceptable to all. The place that best meets their requirements is the Primary School. Thus, the neighborhood may be defined as the equivalent of a Primary School district which is bounded by major thoroughfare and within a walking distance from home. In term of design, the application of the neighborhood concept is guided by six principles. These include size, boundaries, open spaces, local shops and internal circulation street system.

These theories are considered appropriate as they find solution to the problem of urban slum and distortion which indiscriminate sitting of burial ground can cause.

## **4. THE NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT**

The environment is oneself, the point at which one is found at a time, the surroundings, the more distance places, other health components for its flourishing or otherwise (Afolabi, 2005).

Agbola (2008) opined that the environment is inclusive of the physical and human as well as the natural and the built. It is the surrounding, external conditions influencing development or growth of people, animals or plants, living or working conditions. Hence, any natural or human induced perturbations to the earth's environment, affecting land use, land cover and biodiversity is degradation.

The disturbing trend of environmental degradation and global warming were due largely to the rising levels of industrial and commercial activities especially in the major Cities of Nigeria such as Lagos, Port Harcourt , Ibadan , Kano , Kaduna , and Warri. According to Onibokun and Agunbiade (1986), this disturbing trend is attributed to the concentration of investments in the major cities by successive governments and the consequent of population and economic activities in those cities. However, some current issue that pose threat to sustainable environmental development like global warming, desertification as a threats the wetland, ozone layer depletion, gas flaring, incessant building Failure and collapse, poor waste disposal including the deads, etc. Several clarion calls had been made to government and individuals to see to what can be done to ameliorate all these threats to the environment.

## **5. COMPONENTS OF PROPERTY TRANSACTION**

Appraisal Institute (2002) defined real property as all interests, and right inherent in the ownership of physical real properties, the bundle of rights with which the ownership of the real estate is endowed. In some instances, real property is defined by statute and synonymous with real estate. Olusegun (2000) opined that in any urban setting properties are expected to appreciate in value from time to time but regrettably he identified some human activities on land like indiscriminate sitting of burial ground within the urban neighborhood as factor aiding urban slum and land value depreciation. However, Akomolede (2006) identified the following as some of the transactions taking place on land. These include land sales and purchase, property Mortgage, Environmental landscaping and mapping, Property and environmental development, property management, compulsory land acquisition, land use economy, property valuation, and a host of others

## **6. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE**

Essentially, Ado-Ekiti was chosen and the sample size of Two Hundred And Fifty (250) was considered appropriate. Hence, Two Hundred and Fifty questionnaire were administered on the residents of different neighbourhoods within the city. Effort was made to retrieve 189 out of the total number of questionnaire administered. The conclusions were made based on the retrieved questionnaires. Stratified sampling technique was considered appropriate while data were sourced through reconnaissance survey, personal observation, direct interview, administration of questionnaires and use of published and unpublished documents. Data were presented and analyzed through the use of Tables, Charts, and line diagrams on one side and use of description statistics respectively

### **6.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Having administered and analysed the questionnaire, the following form the summary of findings:

- The research findings showed that people in Ado-Ekiti especially in the core (old) settlements like Irona, Odo-Ado, Falegan, Okebola, Okela and the likes are found of burying corpse within the house (compound)

- It was discovered that the habit was borne out of cultural beliefs as well as religious influence. For instance Moslems are fond of this habit.
- Most of the tombs especially ones that were not dressed are gradually becoming very difficult to recognize, such that event had arisen whereby the same tomb was dug for another person.
- The notable effects of sitting burial grounds indiscriminately within the residential neighbourhood on the environmental and property transaction in particular are as follows:
  - Effect on property value: Burials within residential neighbourhood had considerably reduced or removing completely economic value of such property. A house with tomb is interpreted as family property and as such does not easily sell in the property market.
  - Effect on Development: Indiscriminate siting of burial ground within residential neighbourhood generally retards Physical Development. This was confirmed with reference to the Fajuyi-Iworoko (Adebayo) road when it was dualised, the burial ground around Fajuyi foot-dragged the progress of the project.
  - Effect on compensation settlement: Where properties inhabiting burial ground were to be acquired or /and compensated, the process posed problem as there was yet to be a standard rate or method of assessment for burial grounds.
  - Environmental degradation and pollution: Research findings showed that indiscriminate digging of burial grounds within residential neighbourhood has turned such area an eye sore and they most cause pollution for example when the underground water pipe passing through a tomb get busted, the water becomes polluted, as well as where well are dug within such neighbourhood.
  - Domestic Accident: Research findings showed that situation has arising whereby someone sleeping on a burial ground within the residential neighbourhood and the tomb got sunk. It caused physical and it psychological damage on the victim.
  - Effect on Urban Renewal process: It makes the process of Urban renewal very tedious and costly. This atimes brings about exorbitant compensation on them.
  - Water borne diseases were found to be pronounced among the inhabitants which were traceable to this bad habit.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having highlighted the adverse effects indiscriminate siting of burial grounds within residential neighbourhood on the environment and property transactions, it is desirable to proffer the following recommendations with a view to ameliorating the negative effects:

- There is need for public enlightenment and an appeal on the side of government and its agency. This will cut across highlighting the side effect of burying deads within the residential neighbourhood.
- Government needs to take it upon itself to develop cemetery at good locations to be allocated to the public at little or no cost.
- Religious organizations are also enjoined to development private cemetery to provide a conducive final resting place for their dead. Families are also encouraged to develop cemeteries.
- There is need for government to go into mass property/ estate development. This will enable it to enforce the law. For instance in government estates, it is forbidden to bury corpses within the Estate.
- There is need for Urban Renewal in some parts of Ado-Ekiti where this bad habit is popular. This is necessary to put a face lift on already degraded environment. These places include okesha, okebola, Olokuta, Oke-Ila, Igbagba and Atikankan among others.
- Government may be required to legislate against this bad habit. Implementation must be seen to be thorough. No favouritism and sacred cows should be encouraged.
- Water borne disease were found to be rampant due to this environmental unfriendly practice hence, there is need for government to provide portable water for the masses as well as carrying out free medical treatment

## 8. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, this research work has uncovered the fact that the rate at which indiscriminate siting of burial ground within residential neighbourhood in Ado-Ekiti is degrading the environment was alarming. In other words, the research showed that the effect of digging tombs within residential neighborhood was more of negative than positive. While it was also confirmed empirically that the act of indiscriminate siting of burial ground within the residential neighbourhood was rampant within the city of Ado-Ekiti. It is recommended therefore that government agencies must try as much as possibly to carry out enlightenment programme as well as sponsoring research works on this subject in order to discourage this menace so as to maintain a sustain environment.

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**Data Presentation and Analysis**

The following tables and chart are used to demonstrate data presentation and analysis.

**Table 1: Where do you prefer to bury your dead?**

Choice of place of burial	Frequency	Percentage
Cemetery	64	33.86
Within the house	112	59.26
No preference	10	5.29
Indifferent	3	1.59
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Field Survey by Authors, 2010

This table provides respondents choice of mode or place of burial. From the field survey majority agreed to bury their corpse within the house (59.26%) while 33.8% of the correspondents prefer to bury their corpse in the various cemeteries. No preference and indifference amounted to 5.29% and 1.59% respectively. This table explains the fact that people still believe to bury their dead within their residential neighbourhoods.

**Table 2: Why do people prefer to bury within the compound?**

Reason for burring within the compound	frequency	Percentage
It is cultural/ Religious	87	77.67
To honour the dead	20	17.86
Fear of stealing the dead in the cemetery	4	3.57
Indifferent	1	0.89
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Field survey by Authors, 2010

This table explains why people prefer to bury their corpses within the residential neighbourhood. Some of the reasons given- cultural belief (77.67%), honour to the dead (17.86%) fear of theft of their corpse in the cemetery (3.57%) and indifference (0.89%). The behavior of this table can be interpreted that people bury in the house basically for cultural/Religious beliefs.

**Table 3: Problem posed by indiscriminate burial within the residential Neighbourhoods**

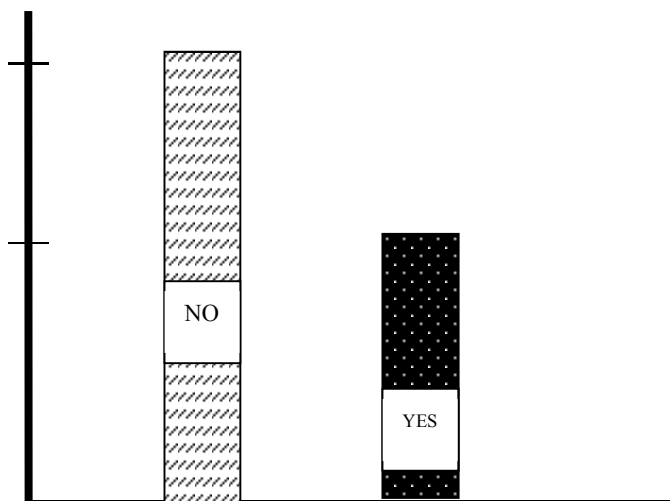
Option	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Reduction on property value	66	58.93	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Environmental degradation	92	82.14	1 <sup>st</sup>
Pollution	51	45.54	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Physical / psychological damage	4	3.57	7 <sup>th</sup>
Problem to urban renewal	27	24.11	4 <sup>th</sup>
High cost of compensation	18	16.07	5 <sup>th</sup>
Misuse cost of compensation	9	8.09	6 <sup>th</sup>

*There is evidence of multiple choices in table three above.*

*Source:* Field survey by Authors, 2010

The above table shows that out of those respondents that condemned burying corpses within the residential neighbourhood (112), they variously gave probable problems that the attitude may cause. By ranking we have environmental degradation (82.14%), Reduction n property value (58.93%), Pollution (45.54%), problem of Urban Renewal (24. 11%), High cost of compensation (16.07%), Misuse of land use (8.04 %) and physical and psychological damage (3.57%).

FIGURE 2: IS BURYING WITHIN A RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD A PROBLEM ?



**SOURCE;** Field survey by Authors, 2010

The figure above shows that the greater number of the respondents does not see burying with a residential neighbourhood as a problem. This implies that it may become a herculean task to change peoples' orientation against this culture.

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