



Policy Brief:

The Future of Burial Space in Zimbabwe – A Growing Land Crisis in Urban Areas



Executive Summary

The increasing number of annual deaths in Zimbabwe is leading to a growing demand for burial spaces, putting pressure on available land. Given that many Zimbabweans oppose cremation and the reuse of old graves due to cultural and spiritual beliefs, cemeteries are rapidly consuming land that could otherwise be used for agriculture and development in urban areas. This policy brief projects the long-term implications of burial practices on land availability and explores sustainable solutions to balance cultural traditions with land conservation.

Introduction

As Zimbabwe's population grows and urbanization expands, the demand for burial space is becoming an unsustainable land use issue. Traditional cemeteries are rapidly expanding, encroaching on agricultural land and limiting future development opportunities. This increasing demand for burial sites poses a threat to sustainable development and food security. Additionally, due to cultural beliefs, many Zimbabweans reject cremation and cemetery reuse, further exacerbating the need for new burial spaces.

Target Audience

- Parliamentarians and policymakers
- Urban and rural planners
- Traditional and religious leaders

Objective of the Policy Brief

To project the impact of burial space consumption in Zimbabwe.

Cultural and Religious Beliefs on Burial Practices

Cultural and religious traditions in Zimbabwe strongly influence burial practices. Cremation is widely rejected due to beliefs in ancestral spirits and deep respect for the deceased. Many fear that disturbing human remains may bring misfortune, making exhumation or grave reuse unacceptable. Additionally, communities oppose repurposing cemetery land for agriculture or development, as gravesites hold profound spiritual significance. These beliefs make it challenging to introduce alternative burial methods despite growing land shortages.

Evidence Analysis

Annual Death Registrations and Projected Burial Space Needs

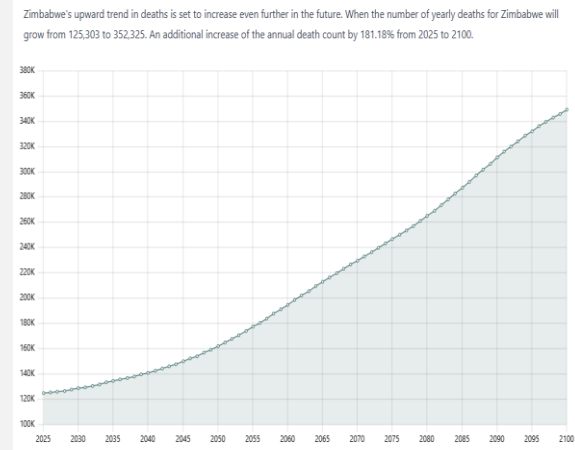
According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), the number of deaths registered annually has risen due to factors such as disease outbreaks, road accidents, and natural causes. The following data from 2020 - 2024 shows the number of deaths per year:

- **2020:** 126,360 deaths
- **2021:** 138,736 deaths
- **2022:** 124,999 deaths
- **2023:** 124,412 deaths
- **2024:** 124,718 deaths

Source: <https://database.earth/population/zimbabwe/deaths>

Considering the five-year average of 127,845 deaths per year, with each grave requiring 3 square meters, the annual land consumption for burials amounts to 383,535 square meters. This growing demand for burial space raises concerns about sustainable land use, particularly as urban areas expand and available land becomes increasingly scarce. As the population continues to grow, the burial rate is expected to rise, placing pressure on land resources especially in urban areas. The following Figure 1 presents a projection of deaths from 2025 to 2100, highlighting the increasing need for burial space planning and alternative solutions.

Figure 1: *Future Population Deaths In Zimbabwe (2025-2100).*



Source: <https://database.earth/population/zimbabwe/deaths>

As the burial rate is projected to rise annually to 352,325 burials, the demand for burial land will increase correspondingly.

With an initial estimate of 125,303 burials annually, and each individual requiring 3 square meters of land, the total burial space consumed per year amounts to 375,909 square meters. At this higher rate, the total land required per year would surge to 1,056,975 square meters. This growing need for burial space highlights the pressing concern of land allocation and long-term planning for cemeteries, particularly as Zimbabwe faces an ever-expanding population and the inevitability of mortality.

Policy Options and Recommendations

1. Introduce vertical burial structures to minimize land use.
2. Provide incentives for voluntary cremation while respecting cultural sensitivities.
3. Educate communities on sustainable burial practices.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe faces a burial space crisis due to population growth, urbanization, and cultural resistance to alternative burial methods. As cemeteries consume increasing amounts of agricultural land, policymakers must act now to ensure culturally appropriate and sustainable burial solutions. Sustainable alternatives, such as cremation and vertical cemeteries, must be explored.

References

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- Chikowore, P. & Dube, R. (2021). "Cultural Perspectives on Cremation and Burial Practices in Zimbabwe."
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