



SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

**SALGA**

*Inspiring service delivery*

# **GOOD PRACTICES IN CEMETERIES MANAGEMENT**

*Building Local Government Capacity  
in Cemeteries Management*

**2016**

## About this publication

Knowledge and Information Sharing is one of the six mandates highlighted in the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) Strategy (2012–17) and refers to building and sharing a comprehensive hub of local-government knowledge and intelligence that will enable delivery of other SALGA mandates and goals. The development of knowledge products is a powerful tool for learning, capacity development and performance improvement.

The purpose of this project is to identify, source and document good practices on cemetery management from municipalities and partner organisations in South Africa.

Further, this publication is intended to provide guidance to municipalities on good practices in cemetery management by sharing local and international examples, and combining existing good practice and other background information with a series of informative interviews.

Key learnings and recommendations that are presented in this publication incorporate previous SALGA research findings and interviews conducted with cemetery managers from metro municipalities.

## Acknowledgments

The knowledge presented in this document is as a result of collective effort, research and time spent by a number of role players.

The SALGA Community Development Directorate is acknowledged for the research undertaken, baseline provided and input made into this document.

Recognition and thanks are given to the Buffalo City Metro Municipality, City of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni Metro Municipality and Mangaung Metro Municipality for their information and feedback, the content of which has been integrated into this document. We also acknowledge municipalities who have contributed, and academic Tsepang Leuta, who does cemetery research.

The SALGA Knowledge Management Unit is acknowledged for consolidation of inputs, packaging and publishing of this document.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>4 - 4</b>
<b>About the South African Local Government Association</b> .....	<b>5 - 5</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>6 - 6</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>7 - 8</b>
1.1 History of cemeteries and funerals in South Africa .....	7 - 7
1.2 Custodianship and legislation .....	7 - 8
1.3 Cemeteries in modern South Africa .....	8 - 8
<b>Chapter 2 Management in the cemetery sector</b> .....	<b>9 - 10</b>
2.1 Land scarcity is a critical issue .....	9 - 9
2.2 Day-to-day cemetery management .....	9 - 10
2.3 Memorialising heroes .....	10 - 10
<b>Chapter 3 Challenges in cemeteries management</b> .....	<b>11 - 15</b>
3.1 Challenges for metropolitan municipalities .....	11 - 12
3.2 Challenges for smaller municipalities .....	13 - 14
3.3 Low uptake of alternative burial methods .....	14 - 14
3.4 Insufficient budget for cemetery services .....	15 - 15
<b>Chapter 4 International and local good practices</b> .....	<b>16 - 18</b>
4.1 International examples of contestations for space .....	16 - 17
4.2 Environmental and legislative aspects of cemetery planning in Europe .....	17 - 17
4.3 South African municipal responses to cemetery challenges .....	17 - 18
4.4 Finding creative solutions .....	18 - 18
<b>Chapter 5 Applying alternative burial options in the local context</b> .....	<b>19 - 22</b>
5.1 Focus on sustainable burial options .....	19 - 20
5.2 Political leadership and community involvement are important .....	20 - 20
5.3 Local municipal case studies .....	20 - 22
5.3.1 Case Study 1: Ekurhuleni Municipality (costing and pricing).....	21 - 21
5.3.2 Case Study 2: Maluti-a-phofung Local Municipality (informal cemeteries).....	21 - 21
5.3.3 Case Study 3: eThekweni Metro Municipality (re-use of older cemeteries).....	21 - 21
5.3.4 Case Study 4: Mangaung Metro Municipality (vandalism and theft).....	21 - 22

<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Key learnings and recommendations .....</b>	<b>23 - 32</b>
6.1	Interviews with Cemetery Managers from Metro Municipalities.....	23 - 26
	6.1.1 Safety and security .....	24 - 24
	6.1.2 Record keeping .....	24 - 24
	6.1.3 Revenue and funding .....	24 - 25
	6.1.4 Funeral practices .....	25 - 26
	6.1.5 Space .....	26 - 26
6.2	Key lessons from interviews with cemetery managers .....	27 - 27
6.3	Good practices in cemetery management .....	27 - 29
6.4	A holistic guiding principle: sustainability .....	29 - 31
6.5	Recommendations from interviews and SALGA Summit .....	31 - 32
<b>Conclusion</b> .....		<b>33 - 33</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....		<b>34 - 34</b>
I.	References .....	34 - 34
II.	Interviews .....	34 - 34

## FOREWORD

South African municipalities are faced with a number of challenges with regard to cemetery management. These can be grouped into the following categories:

- 1) shortage of land for cemeteries;
- 2) cemeteries located on unsuitable land: planners are generally faced with the challenge of finding suitable land for cemeteries, since land use for residential and commercial areas take pre-eminence over cemeteries; and
- 3) insufficient budgets for cemetery management and purchase of new land.

SALGA conducted a study titled “The State of Cemeteries in South African Cities” (2012). The study proposed alternative methods of burial as a means to circumvent the challenge posed by conventional in-ground burial on limited land for cemeteries. The alternatives suggested in the study included cremation and stacking. Some municipalities, such as eThekweni, City of Cape Town and City of Tshwane, have attempted to find solutions to challenges mentioned above.

In 2014 SALGA entered into partnership with the University of Pretoria in order to escalate and fast-track the solution process on cemetery challenges and their related effects on communities. Some of these effects, such as the impact of cemeteries on water, have been overlooked. Within the context of this partnership, SALGA has commissioned a study that aims to address the impact of cemeteries on water and geographic information system (GIS) planning. In a nutshell, the study focuses on the following:

- 1) The impact of cemeteries on water
- 2) GIS planning (site suitability)
- 3) Lessons for replications
- 4) Changing mindsets (citizen science)
- 5) Integrated development planning (IDP), cities’ expansion plans vis-à-vis other development priorities
- 6) Effective use of the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) for cemeteries

In addition to the 2012 and 2014 studies mentioned above, this publication marks the third initiative of SALGA to ignite innovation within and assist municipalities across the country to improve their respective cemetery management and, in the main, address the shortage of burial space. Issues that municipal innovation will have to deal with include cemetery records management, costing and pricing, informal cemeteries, re-use of older cemeteries, vandalism and theft.

In the 2016–2017 financial year, SALGA will be hosting a Cemetery Management Conference which will serve as, among other things, a platform for showcasing and exchanging knowledge, innovation and best practices. The conference is action focused. Key stakeholders participating include the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights (CRL Rights Commission); the Consumer, Funeral, Financial Insurance Monitoring Support Agency (COFFIMSA); the Institute of Environment and Recreation Management (IERM); and the South African Cemeteries Association (SACA).

## ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

SALGA is a registered public entity, established in terms of Section 21 of the Companies Act, 1973 and is recognised by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in terms of the Organised Local Government Act. SALGA represents local government on numerous intergovernmental forums such as the PCC, Ministers and MECs Forum, Budget Forum, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), and the Financial and Fiscal Commission.

SALGA aims, among other things, to:

- transform local government to enable it to fulfil its developmental role
- enhance the role of provincial local government associations as provincial representatives and consultative bodies on local government
- raise the profile of local government
- ensure full participation of women
- act as the national employers' organisation for municipal and provincial member employers
- provide legal assistance to its members

SALGA is funded through a combination of sources, including a national government grant, membership fees from provincial and local government associations that are voluntary members, and donations from the donor community for specific projects.

In 2012, SALGA commissioned a report on the "State of Cemeteries Management in South African Cities" which included a focus on problems in cemeteries management.

### SALGA initiatives on cemetery management

SALGA, as the representative of municipalities, has provided support in this area and has undertaken a number of initiatives to address cemetery-management challenges faced by municipalities.

In October 2011 IERM convened a conference with a special focus on cemeteries in which SALGA participated and interacted with municipalities on the issue. SALGA held a national seminar in February 2012 and a Local Government Summit in September 2012, where municipalities, the CRL Rights Commission, IERM, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and funeral parlours deliberated and exchanged ideas on dealing with issues associated with cemeteries.

Subsequent to these engagements, SALGA governance structures recommended that a local government policy position and a strategy on cemeteries be developed. Research was conducted with eight metropolitan municipalities to enhance the development of the policy position and strategy. The research sought to:

- establish challenges facing the cemetery sector in urban municipalities
- determine strategies employed by municipalities in response to challenges established
- determine how municipal processes can be better designed, oriented and implemented to meet the burial needs, as well as socio-economic needs of communities.

In 2016 SALGA commissioned this report to present the findings of research to date, along with findings from interviews conducted with cemetery management in metro municipalities.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human death and burials are part of human life, while cemetery management is part of human settlement development. This publication is intended to provide municipalities with an update on good practices in cemetery management by sharing local and international best practices.

*Chapter 1 Introduction* provides a brief history of cemeteries and funerals in South Africa, shares the legacy of the custodianship and legislation that influence today's cemeteries, and explores cemeteries in modern South Africa.

*Chapter 2 Management in the cemeteries sector* is about land scarcity as a critical issue, and looks at day-to-day cemetery management and the memorialising of heroes.

*Chapter 3 Challenges in cemetery management* explores challenges for metropolitan and smaller municipalities, and reviews the issues of low uptake of alternative burial methods and how insufficient budgets for cemetery services are impacting cemetery management.

*Chapter 4 International and local good practices* reviews international examples of legislative, space and the environmental planning in the cemetery sector in Europe. It also reviews South African municipal responses to cemetery challenges and how some municipalities are seeking creative solutions.

*Chapter 5 Applying alternative burial options in the local context* focuses on sustainable burial options. Political leadership and community involvement are examined, and four local municipal case studies of good practices are explored: Ekurhuleni Municipality (costing and pricing), Maluti-a-phofung Local Municipality (informal cemeteries), eThekweni Metro Municipality (re-use of older cemeteries) and Mangaung Metro Municipality (vandalism and theft).

*Chapter 6 Key learnings and recommendations* focuses on the findings of six interviews with cemetery managers from metro municipalities. Based on these interviews key insights, lessons and good practices in cemetery management are presented and a holistic guiding principle on sustainability suggested.

*Appendices* with references and the list of interviewees are attached.



## Introduction

### 1.1 History of funerals and cemeteries in South Africa

Since South Africa was first inhabited, people have been burying their dead following traditional customs and practices. Over the past two centuries funerals and burial sites and their management have evolved. As city centres emerged, management, maintenance, record-keeping and environmental issues related to cemetery management became key issues of concern. People are increasingly migrating into urban areas and this development puts strain on the management of limited municipal resources. Municipalities need to both emulate and create good practices in cemetery management.

### 1.2 Custodianship and legislation

South Africa is a constitutional democracy with a three-tier system of government and an independent judiciary. The powers of the lawmakers (legislative authorities), cabinet (executive authorities) and courts (judicial authorities) are separate from one another.

Government consists of national, provincial and local spheres, all of which have legislative and executive authority in their own spheres. It is a stated intention in the Constitution that the country should be run on a system of cooperative governance. Cemeteries are legislated at different spheres of government, but remain primarily the responsibility of municipalities.

In terms of Chapter 7 of the Constitution of South Africa, the local sphere of government is made up of municipalities. A municipality has the right to govern, on its own initiative, the local government affairs of its community, subject to national and provincial legislation.

The objectives of local government are to:

- provide democratic and accountable government for local communities
- ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner
- promote social and economic development
- promote a safe and healthy environment
- encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government

There are three kinds of municipalities in South Africa: metropolitan, local and district municipalities. Metropolitan municipalities have been established to administer South Africa's most urbanised areas. Today there are 278 municipalities in South Africa, each with responsibilities for cemeteries. Each of them faces similar issues with regard to cemeteries.

The adoption of the South African Constitution on 8 May 1996 was one of the turning points in the history of the struggle for democracy in this country. South Africa's Constitution was drafted by an all-inclusive Constitutional Assembly, which had representatives from all the major political parties and liberation organisations. The new Constitution was the embodiment of the vision of generations of anti-apartheid freedom fighters and democrats who had fought for the principle that South Africa belonged to all, for non-racialism and for human rights.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Chapter 7, 151 states that municipal services are to be provided in an equitable and sustainable manner, regulated through by-laws which are drawn up and administered by municipalities. Under Schedule 5B of the Constitution, cemeteries, funeral parlours and crematoria fall under the jurisdiction of local government.



### 1.3 Cemeteries in modern South Africa

Cemeteries in South African urban areas have historically been planned as spacious, landscaped gardens to house human remains. However, older cemeteries have run, or are running out of space for new burials, especially in major urban municipalities. This is as a result of rapid urbanisation in towns and cities, which results in fierce competition for well-located land. Municipalities are also faced with the challenge of cemeteries developing informally or on land geographically unsuitable for in-ground burial.

Among most cultures in South Africa, the cemeteries are more than just a place of burial. They carry spiritual, religious and cultural significance.

The main challenge facing cemetery management today is striking an acceptable balance between spiritual, religious and cultural practices and the present and future availability of land for cemeteries.

To address this challenge, some municipalities have implemented innovative practices which could be inculcated into the norms, standards, by-laws and electronic software systems of cemetery management.



## Management in the Cemeteries Sector

### 2.1 Land scarcity is a critical issue

In the context of land scarcity and despite the availability of a range of alternatives, conventional burial is still the most common and preferred. A change of mindset regarding funeral and burial practices is required, and the solutions must involve communities. The funeral and burial services offered by municipalities cannot be decontextualised from the religious and cultural beliefs that people hold.

### 2.2 Day-to-day cemetery management

Cemetery management includes many skill sets. These range from the most hands-on tasks on the ground, from grave-digging to landscaping and horticulture, to the more high-level tasks undertaken by managers, including the scheduling and logistics associated with running a cemetery.

On a day-to-day and weekly basis the cemetery officer and horticulturalist have to plan for the funerals that have been booked in their cemetery, taking care of everything from the booking of the grave and burial method, to the digging of the grave and making sure each burial goes smoothly. They also have to manage the flow of visitors to the cemetery paying their respects at the graves of loved ones, and perhaps unveiling tombstones, and ensure their security and the maintenance and upkeep of the cemetery.

The cemetery manager oversees a team of horticulturalists, cemetery officers, and gardeners. Each cemetery has a cemetery officer who reports to the cemetery manager.

The cemetery officer informs the cemetery manager for the municipality of the logistics at the grave site itself; the number of funerals that have been booked through undertakers, and whether they are for first burials, or reburials and other categories. Based on this information the head gardener decides how many graves

should be dug and confirms this figure in consultation with the cemetery manager. Gardeners are responsible for maintenance and digging the holes for graves. In the past this used be done by hand, but it is now done using a tractor with a backhoe.

Cemetery maintenance covers a lot of different areas. The access road, internal roads and internal walkways either need to be tarred or, if dirt, then graded and kept smooth and passable in all weathers. Fences and gates, and building structures must be maintained, as well as signage and grave numbers. Horticultural issues include mowing of the lawns, weed control, watering, and pruning trees, shrubs and flowers. Finally, water, sewer and storm-water drains must be kept in good working order.

Cemetery management is a profession that is not often spoken of, but it is so essential in one of the most important rites of life, the final goodbye.

**Reggie Moloi, cemetery manager of the City of Johannesburg, on the joys of the job: "I personally regard this as my passion. The reason I came back to this job is that I am doing what I like doing. There are a lot of challenges, and overcoming those challenges is what I would regard as success. For instance, our records in the South are in a mess, government offices were burned down as far back as the 1976 uprisings and went down with the records. Tracing becomes a challenge, in some cases family members that are left behind were not even there when the person was buried. In the investigations, eliminations and helping people with such research, you find that they experience joy. As African people we regard that as important as knowing where your ancestors are buried. We get incidents like that every week and I am grateful that I can make people happy."**

The cemetery manager has to be a planner, someone who has to think ahead to anticipate the need for burials in the areas under their control. Reggie Moloï at the City of Joburg estimates future demand for burials by looking at burial trends in the municipality for the past three years. He also uses data from Stats SA to corroborate what he is seeing. Sadly, in the past this approach did not anticipate increased mortality rates as a result of the AIDS epidemic. With increased uptake of ARVs in the country the mortality rate has gone down from 18 000 – 20 000 burials per year to about 14 000 in the City of Joburg. The city's cemetery managers operate on the assumption they will need to provide burial space for 16 000 burials per year.

A good cemetery manager brings years of observation and experience to bear on the many logistical aspects of running a cemetery. For example, he knows that Easter Monday, Boxing Day, Christmas and New Year's Day are popular days for people to pay respects at graveyards. Additional graves are dug in Johannesburg in anticipation of any emergencies that may come up over a long holiday weekend, and plans made to cover the possibility that the funeral of a famous person might lead to large crowds.

Observing problems and coming up with solutions is an indicator of good cemetery management practice. Adaptation and innovation occurs in many areas. For example, in the City of Joburg, because funerals are booked, the cemetery manager can anticipate the demand. But they have no way of knowing how many unveilings of headstones and tombstones will take place. These do not require booking and yet may result in many visitors to a cemetery. This unanticipated congestion in the cemetery might affect funerals that have been scheduled, which is undesirable. Similarly, two causes of congestion at funerals are the number of mourners, and the amount of time taken for a funeral; the first the cemetery cannot control, but the intention is to communicate to undertakers the need to be mindful of time when conducting funerals.

## 2.3 Memorialising heroes

Preserving the memories of struggle heroes is a way in which cemeteries management can fulfil the spirit of the Constitution that is the product of South Africa's long journey to freedom. Graves, burial sites, war memorials and monuments are tangible and symbolic reminders of our turbulent history. Military activity, the conduct of war and armed conflict, including the liberation struggle, have long played a significant role in South African history.

Prior to democracy, heroes' burials were confined to state presidents and prime ministers, who received state funerals. The first recognition of "ordinary" heroes was in 1995, when the former Soweto Council approved a Heroes Acre at Avalon Cemetery. A Heroes Acre, according to Johannesburg City Parks, is "an expression of the collective will of the people to write their own history. This space arouses national consciousness, forges national unity and engenders a spirit of patriotism."

After the colonisation of South Africa, those who died defending the country or in the line of duty were recognised and interred in a military, police or fireman's grave, but this recognition applied to only one part of the country's population. Since the advent of democracy, the South African Heritage Resources Agency in the Department of Arts and Culture has been the custodian of these graves. The Burial Grounds and Graves Unit preserves and maintains graves and memorials of soldiers, combatants/freedom fighters and civilians who died as a result of wars and armed struggle in South Africa and beyond. It is mandated to identify and record graves and collect the names of all the victims of conflict, irrespective of their political affiliation.



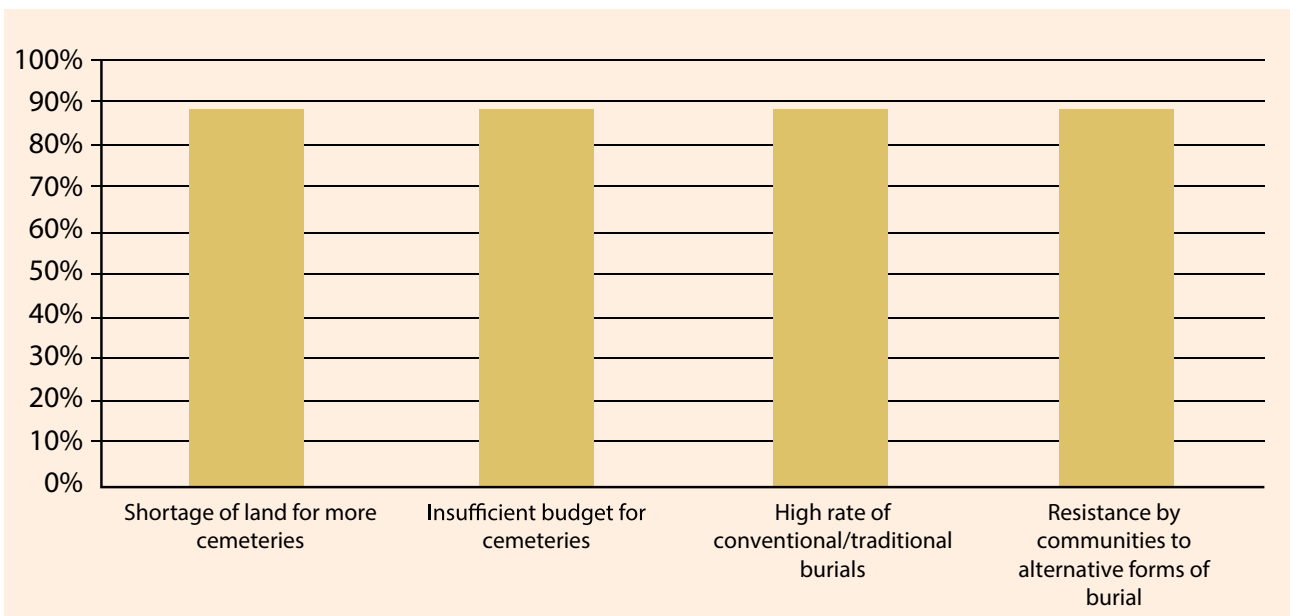
## Challenges in Cemetery Management

The burdens of day-to-day management, long-term planning and sustainability remain with municipalities. Each municipality is affected differently, due to differing land sizes, budgets, population sizes, religions, cultures and other elements.

### 3.1 Challenges for metropolitan municipalities

Figure 1 below shows the major challenges facing the cemetery sector. They include shortage of land for cemeteries, insufficient budget for cemeteries, high rates of traditional burials, and community resistance to alternative forms of burial.

Figure 1:



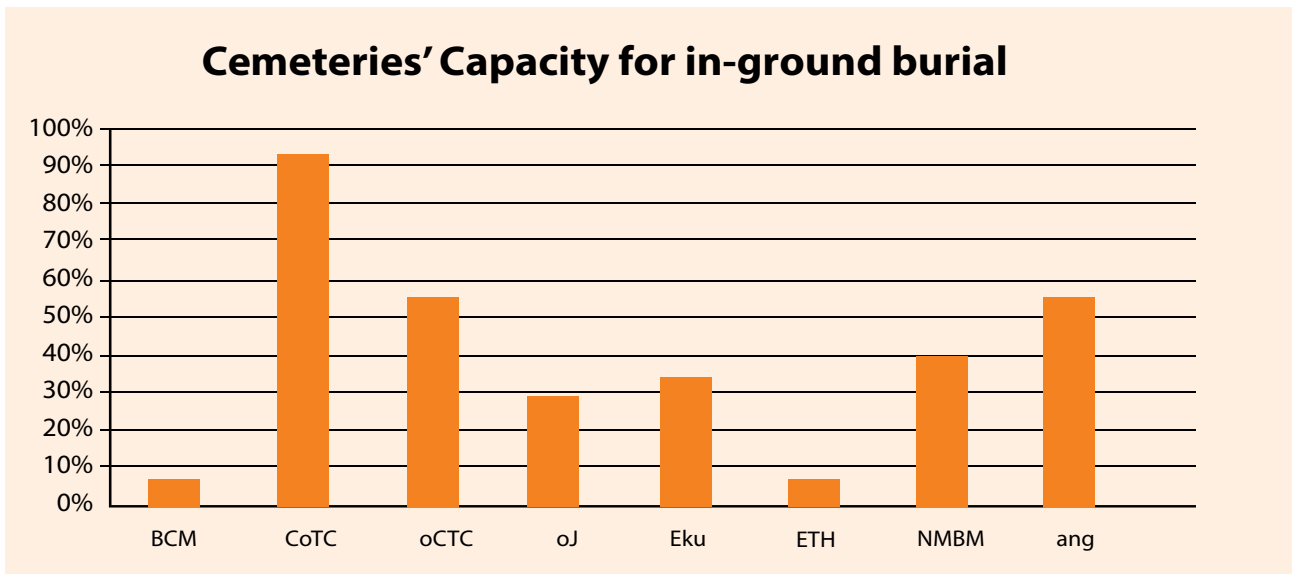
Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (p. 7)

Availability of land is the biggest challenge facing the cemetery sector in South Africa. The second biggest is insufficient budgetary resources. The two remaining challenges – a high rate of conventional/traditional in-ground burials and community resistance to alternative forms of burial – contribute to the first.

Apart from the high demand for in-ground burial causing the shortage of space, cemeteries have also been

located on unsuitable land, as shown in Figure 3 below. This is because environmental legislation relating to the suitability of the soil and the gradient of the land is either insufficient or not enforced. In some municipalities cemeteries are located near water sources, and the challenge is compounded by non-adherence to burial standards regarding grave depths. Figure 2 below shows the remaining capacity for in-ground burial in various municipalities.

**Figure 2:** Capacity of cemeteries in various municipalities for in-ground burial



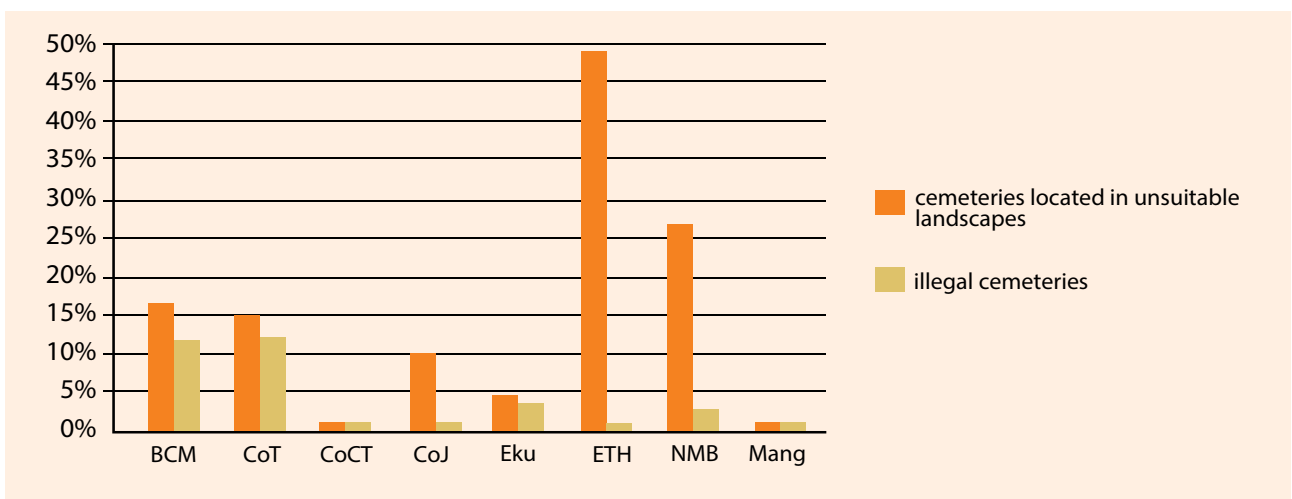
Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (p. 6)

At times the issues go far beyond space. Sometimes grounds are available, but for geographic or other reasons, they are not suitable. It can take many years to expose dolomitic faults or other issues that can make a site unsuitable for a cemetery. Furthermore, some cultural practices dictate that families must be buried on

communal land. This can also lead to unapproved burials and other issues.

Figure 3 below illustrates where cemeteries are located on unsuitable landscapes, which can have environmental and socio-political impacts on neighbouring communities.

**Figure 3:** Illegal cemeteries and cemeteries located on unsuitable landscapes



Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (p. 6)

### 3.2 Challenges for smaller municipalities

In smaller municipalities, keeping up with these basic requirements is often difficult. The situation facing them can be traced to a small revenue base and minimal institutionalisation of policies and practices related to cemetery management. Many small municipalities do not even have by-laws for cemeteries. Rural cemeteries are not fenced, leading to vandalism and trespass by stray animals.

In Aganang Local Municipality in Limpopo Province, municipal control over cemeteries is contested and communities do not want to cede control of them. In Thulamela Local Municipality large numbers of pauper burials place a strain on available resources – the same was reported in Bela Bela Local Municipality.

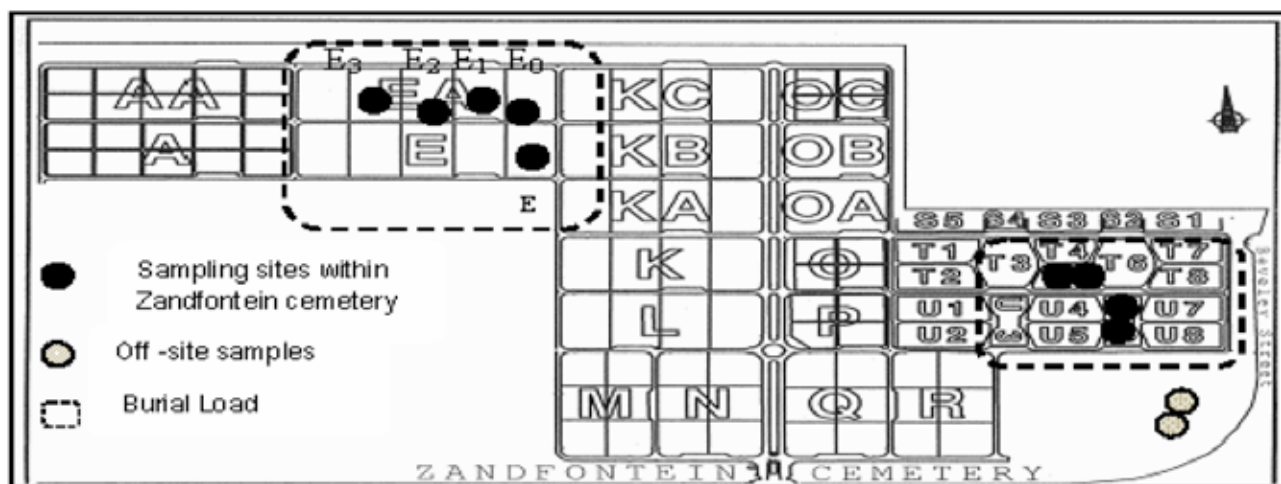
In Emnambithi/Ladysmith Local Municipality in Kwazulu-Natal it was noted that in rural areas graves are not registered. The problems identified in Abaqulusi Local

Municipality are typical of the challenges faced by small municipalities: a lack of funds to maintain adequate staffing levels, fence cemeteries and build ablution facilities.

Richtersveld Municipality in the Northern Cape Province indicated that it has no access control and no running water in its cemeteries. As a result they use bucket toilets and have no hand-washing facilities. Nama-Khoi municipality, like other small municipalities, reported that they do not have proper equipment for digging graves. Namakwa District Municipality anticipated a need for assistance in planning new cemeteries and completing environmental impact assessments.

Delays in environmental impact assessments, which are the prerogative of the provincial government, are also a challenge in Swartland Municipality, in the Western Cape Province, meaning that land set aside for cemeteries is not available for use when needed.

Figure 4:



Issues with unsuitable land in Zandfontein Cemetery

Source: [www.mdpi.com](http://www.mdpi.com)

The larger municipalities with a longer history and established systems do not face the same difficulties as smaller municipalities encounter. However, they do share one important challenge: cemeteries in South Africa are running out of space.

### 3.3 Low uptake of alternative burial methods

A key solution to the diminishing availability of land is the introduction of burial alternatives. Many of these have existed for many years around the world, but are not actively practised in South Africa. There is limited knowledge of and exposure among communities to alternative ways of internment which would reduce these pressures.

One example is cremation. Cremation reduces mortal remains as the body is burnt to ash, and it is a sustainable alternative to traditional burial. Cremation is permissible in the Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Parsi and Buddhist faiths. It is however, forbidden, by Islam and Orthodox Judaism.

It is not looked upon favourably by most Africans holding traditional beliefs.

Zweli Dlamini, Ekurhuleni Municipality Spokesperson, warns: “We’re running out of burial space, and that might be a huge problem in years to come. We want people to look at alternative burial methods, and it will take a community engagement on the matter. But this remains the people’s decision, because we don’t run a dictatorship. And while we look for alternatives, we should remember our customs and traditions. We shouldn’t go against what we know and believe.” [Drum 18 June 2015, p. 93]

Figures 5, 6 and 7 below show that traditional burial remains prevalent in the South African context while cremation is practised on a very small scale, despite this alternative internment method being well known. The notable exceptions to this are the City of Cape Town and Buffalo City Municipality.

Figure 5: Conventional burial vs cremation - 2009/10

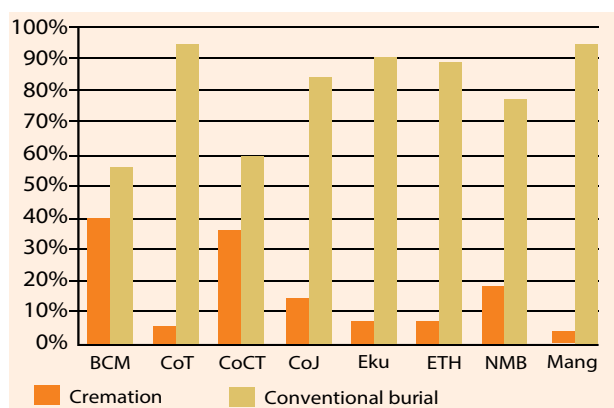


Figure 6: Conventional vs cremation 2010/11

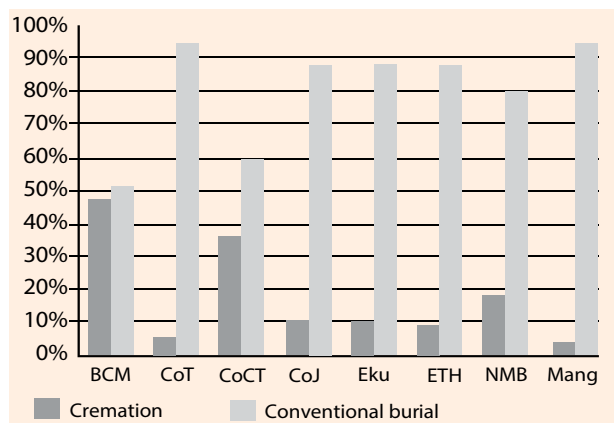
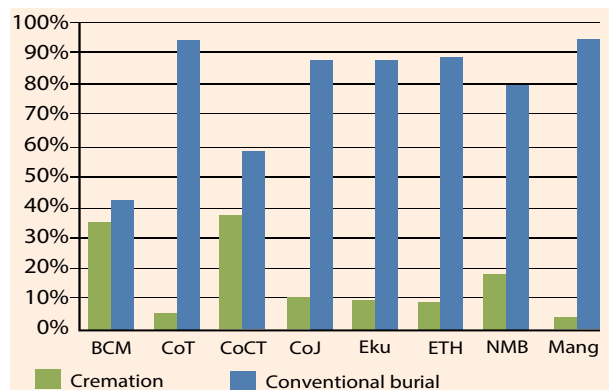


Figure 7: Conventional burial vs cremation 2011/12



Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (pp. 7-8)

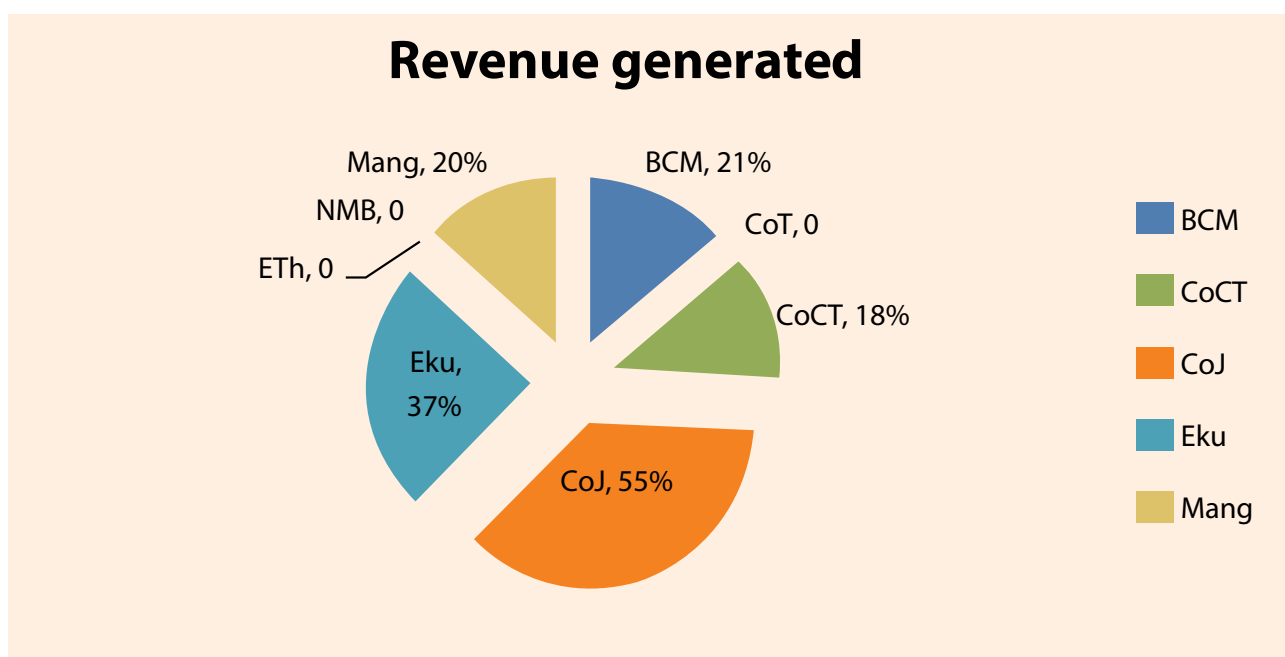
### 3.4 Insufficient budget for cemetery services

Budget for the cemetery sector is quite constrained. In non-metro municipalities the situation has worsened as the public infrastructure component of the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (a conditional grant allocated annually by National Treasury through the Division of Revenue Act), which was previously allocated for cemeteries and other community facilities, is now ring-fenced for sport and recreation facilities only.

As a result, cemetery services are heavily subsidised by municipalities. Only the City of Johannesburg generated revenue above 50% of the total budget, as shown in Figure 8.

Budgetary constraints limit the ability of municipalities to maintain existing cemeteries and purchase land for new ones.

**Figure 8:** Revenue generated from cemetery services, 2011/12 financial year



Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (p. 9)



## CHAPTER 4



### International and Local Good Practices

There are many stories of new practices and good practice both in South Africa and around the world. As part of the commitment to knowledge management, it is important to capture good practices, develop new centres of excellence, and experiment with new technologies and methods of the future.

#### 4.1 International examples of contestations for space

Cemeteries are just one form of land use in competition with others. Governments have had to play a role in mediating this contestation. There are different perspectives on how conflicts over the meanings ascribed and the spaces devoted to cemeteries can be reconciled. The conflicts result from traditional and religious associations with burials and land coming up against more utilitarian views.

In Hong Kong, where Chinese cemeteries are still symbolic places for individuals who desire the religious and cultural considerations of ancestral worship to be fully incorporated in burial, the state, guided by secular concerns of planning and efficient land use guidelines, has tried to get people to adopt cremation. This is similar to the approach in Singapore, whose government adopted a utilitarian view of burial space from the 1960s, highlighting the unsanitary nature of burial grounds and suggesting that the space they occupied could be better deployed for developmental purposes.

In Namibia conflicts between modern and traditional value systems came to the fore when the government planned a hydroelectric dam that would submerge Himba gravesites. The Himba community emphasised the symbolic and religious meanings of the graves as focal points of identity, expressions of relationships with the land, and features central to the practice of religious beliefs and rituals.

The following chart shows some of the functions multiple-use cemeteries have been put to in Australia, Egypt and the United States.

Cemetery	Functioning
Pinnaroo Cemetery Perth, Australia	After-funeral catering: Pinnaroo Cafe- A 70-seat cafe is open seven days a week to all members of the public ; Facilities built from local materials including limestone and WA jarrah hardwood.
Cairene cemetery: City of the Dead, Cairo Egypt Dates as far back as the 10th century Over 1 mil people live there	Residential areas: - Overnight stays by families who visit the deceased; - Apartments for permanent stays by cemetery residents whose livelihoods are derived from burial activities; shows signs of rich architectural and urban history; The curing of a certain disease or the fulfilment of a particular type of wish.
Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum, Ohio U.S. National Historic Landmark	Includes fine arts, architecture, education programs; Attracts photographers, bird watchers, students always visit cemetery because of its arboretum; Involvement in studies and projects mainly on horticulture; Hosts weddings, fun walks and runs.
Green Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, USA A National Historic Landmark in 2006	A tourist destination, Visitors' centre and museum/ exhibition space, birdwatchers, ticketed tours to picnic, bike, hike and just sit in the peaceful quietness; Whiskey-tasting nights, theatre performances

Source: Slide 9 in Tsepang Leuta presentation "Effective Management of Cemeteries" to National Cemeteries Management Workshop, 29 October 2014.

The multi-use approach to cemetery design ameliorates these conflicts in presenting a wider range of options for the community. An example of this occurred in New Orleans. Funding constraints and the pressing need to tackle social problems such as poor public schools and crumbling infrastructure have meant that reduced attention was given to its historical burial grounds. A non-profit group took up the task of preserving the historical cemeteries by creating multiple uses for the sites, turning them into spaces for recreation and tourism.

#### **4.2 Environmental and legislative aspects of cemetery planning in Europe**

The eco-cemetery represents the idea of rapid return of the corpses to nature and non-polluting burial methods and cemetery planning. It envisages environmental sustainability and recycling in natural ways. It proposes new methods that decrease the amount of wood, steel or other metals used in making coffins, and that prevent pollution of the environment with chemical treatments of the corpse during burial. It also encourages protection of the natural landscape, as well as the fauna and the flora at the time of planning the cemetery and choosing its location. The method often uses grave markers that do not intrude on the landscape. Graves are marked with markers native to the landscape, such as trees, shrubs or flat stones. In some cases, graves are unmarked and the plots are identified by surveying techniques such as using GIS.

The main purpose of eco-cemeteries is to decrease the negative impacts of the cemeteries on the underground water, natural vegetation and fauna existing in the burial area, using materials that biodegrade more rapidly and minimise the ecological footprint of the individual. Bodies in eco-cemeteries are usually buried in a casket made of cardboard or wicker, or simply in a shroud.

Italy has been forced to adopt the eco-cemetery concept in response to space and environmental challenges in cemetery planning.

The country faces severe limitations in finding new suitable areas for cemeteries. Finding a solution to this challenge is hampered by the absence of relevant,

comprehensive legislation applying to the systems of disposal of human remains. There were no standards governing the best conditions for different interment methods.

Cemetery planning in Italy has had to take into account the decomposition process which occurs in a burial site, and situate cemeteries so as to realise the best micro-environment conditions to increase the rate of decomposition prior to the expiry of the burial rights. The Italian legislation addresses the topography of the area and the chemical and physical characteristics of the soil. The law establishes the expiry of burial rights granted on the basis of realised micro-environment characteristics, in order to reuse the sites. This has come about as a result of environmental concerns about in-ground burial.

#### **4.3 South African municipal responses to cemetery challenges**

Probably the single biggest challenge facing cemetery managers is the constraint of trying to find adequate land for burials. Traditional burial requires suitable land. It must be suitable for deep digging, and safe for the interment of bodies. In Europe, historically the deceased were buried in the grounds of the churches where they worshipped. With the growth of urban areas during the industrial era, the custom began of burying people in discrete pieces of land designated as cemeteries. After South Africa was colonised and towns established, the same was done here.

Over the years these cemeteries have filled up in all the major urban areas. The City of Johannesburg has only seven active cemeteries out of 35, and these are on the northern and southern peripheries of the city; all the centrally located cemeteries are full. Ekurhuleni has 63 cemeteries, of which 42 are inactive; the 21 active cemeteries are nearing full capacity.

Land must meet certain requirements in order to be suitable for burial. After burial, bodies decompose over time. This decomposition results in toxic biological waste. For this reason cemeteries are ideally situated where the water table is low, and at a distance from water sources such as dams and rivers, to avoid contamination.

Over time and as cemeteries within them have filled up, towns themselves have also grown and expanded, meaning that municipal planners have to find land for new cemeteries. The challenge they face is that the most suitable land for cemeteries is also geologically the best for building houses on, which is the most immediate need in urban areas.

Municipalities have come up with a number of ways to deal with land scarcity. Many have by-laws that allow for the burial of more than one family member in a grave. A period of time, usually up to two years, is given before the grave is re-opened and a new body can be placed on top of the previous remains, before being covered up again. Up to three bodies from the same family can be placed in the same grave. This allows for cemeteries that are theoretically full – i.e. with a body in each grave – to continue being used. Avalon Cemetery in the south of Johannesburg, the biggest in the city, is full. When it was active, Avalon Cemetery used to handle 100–150 burials a week. Now that reburials are allowed there, up to 300 such burials take place every week.

#### 4.4 Finding creative solutions

Finding more available land for cemeteries has required creative action by cemetery management in the City of Johannesburg. In Eldorado Park Cemetery, the City applied to the provincial government to expand the cemetery into adjacent land owned by the provincial government. In Ennerdale, at a small cemetery of one hectare, an application was made to the City to extend the cemetery into the vacant land adjacent to it. In Doornkop Cemetery, a leaking reservoir meant that land allocated for burial was no longer usable. Once the reservoir was fixed, that land was once again available for burial.

In the City of Ekurhuleni, grave reservation was identified as one of the causes of existing cemeteries filling up. This is the practice whereby, once a person was buried, the living spouse was allowed to reserve the grave next to them in anticipation of one day being buried next to their partner. What the municipality has found is that often that grave was not taken up, perhaps because the living spouse remarried or moved to another place. Yet the graves remained reserved on the books and so were not usable by anyone else.

This created a situation where cemeteries were technically full and yet had unused spaces. As a result Ekurhuleni decided to end the practice of grave reservation. Unlike Ekurhuleni, the City of Johannesburg still allows and encourages the practice of grave reservation. The municipality encourages families of the deceased to plan for multiple use of one grave by family members. It has also pioneered the use of reduction burial, by which a body once buried is later exhumed and reinterred in a smaller casket, allowing for the burial of more family members in the same grave.

**Reggie Moloi, City of Johannesburg: “So far reserved burials and second burials are the ones carrying us. Cemeteries do not die out; we get people coming back after many years with evidence that their family was buried there, and then use that for second burials. That is how we deal with space issues.”**

In many cemeteries in South Africa areas have been reserved for Muslim and Jewish people. Cemetery management in Ekurhuleni has found that this led to spaces in cemeteries not being used while the cemetery technically was full. As a result it was decided to end the reservation of specific areas for people of a particular faith community.



## Applying Alternative Burial options in the Local Context

The amount of land devoted to traditional burial has been determined by the area devoted to a standard grave measurement. Reducing this footprint is one way in which more bodies can be interred in the same area. Burial options that take up less space than a traditional grave and tombstone include headstones and stone plaques that lie flat on the ground. This shift from the familiar tombstone gives cemetery planners the flexibility to design different landscape options which increase the sustainability of cemeteries. The unobtrusiveness of plaques allows for a cemetery to include a park, as people are not conscious that they are in a cemetery, but rather experience it as a well-landscaped public garden.

### 5.1 Focus on sustainable burial options

The City of Johannesburg is taking steps to ensure that current and new cemeteries will offer more sustainable burial options. In Waterval Cemetery only headstones are allowed. Diepsloot Cemetery has a section called Diepsloot Memorial Park, which is a landscaped park laid out with benches, water points and trees. West Park and New Clare Cemeteries have both berm and memorial park sections.

The new cemetery planned for Oliphantsvlei will represent best practice in this regard. The memorial section will offer the traditional option of both a headstone and tombstone, but the cemetery will also have a garden section and a berm section. Burial spaces in the garden section will be marked by memorial plaques in the ground. In the berm section only headstones will be allowed.

The City of Johannesburg is also encouraging above-ground burials, in mausoleums. The City of Cape Town has begun a pilot project offering mausoleums and modular crypts as burial options, while the City of Ekurhuleni is currently investigating the possibility of introducing

modular crypts as an alternative burial option.

The unsustainability of in-ground burial is a problem being faced around the world. Simply put, there is just not enough land to bury everyone in the world using this traditional method of burial. In the Hindu faith cremation is the preferred method of burial. In this process, the deceased body is burnt to ash. This greatly reduces the mortal remains of the deceased, and in these cultures an urn containing these ashes is how the dead are memorialised.

Cremation has emerged over many years as an alternative among Christian communities in western countries, and it has now become fairly common. There are crematoria in all the major municipalities in South Africa catering to the Hindu community and those of other faiths who would like to be cremated. These municipalities offer cremation as a burial option along with traditional burial. There are no religious prohibitions on cremation in Christianity. Cremation is, however, forbidden in the Muslim and Orthodox Jewish faiths. In African cultures, while there is no formal prohibition on cremation, traditionally it has been seen as undesirable by many people. As indigenous Africans form the largest population group in South Africa, this represents a considerable opportunity to reduce the number of traditional burials, and so reduce the pressure on municipalities to find land for them.

Larger municipalities have worked with the South African Cemeteries Association to consider ways to change attitudes and to get people to consider alternative burial methods. Cemetery management in the City of Ekurhuleni has made considerable efforts to address this issue. They have asked the MEC for Community Development to talk about alternative burial methods. There are plans in place to have a walk-in interpretive centre where the public can see for themselves what alternative burial methods look like. Cemetery management is also collaborating with the media, communications and marketing departments who are planning media coverage and other initiatives to prompt conversation about alternative burial methods.

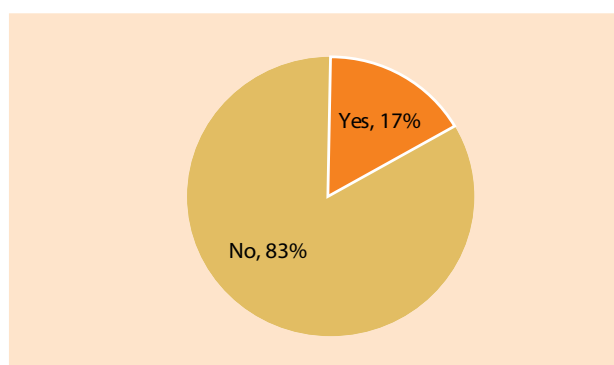
Dennis Ings, City of why we, as practitioners, with institutions such as the Cemeteries Association, adopted a process of creating awareness about educating the people and offering alternative methods of burials. The main thing is to influence the public to make informed decisions about the issue of what to do regarding disposal of the body.”

## 5.2 Political leadership and community involvement are important

In the absence of an overarching body to pronounce on traditional cultural practices; people take their cues from political leaders. Municipalities should encourage political leaders to vouch for cremation and other alternative methods of burial; if they come out and say they choose to be buried in an alternative way, then people will follow their example, as was the case with reducing the stigma around HIV and AIDS. Also, there is always the potential for change in the younger generation, which is not as bound by tradition and is easily influenced by advertising, to adopt the latest ways of doing things.

A few municipalities (and only the City of Tshwane and City of Johannesburg of the eight metro municipalities) have conducted surveys to establish community views on burial methods. Municipalities that conducted surveys reported that their communities were accustomed to cultural traditions of in-ground burial and showed no

**Figure 9:** Survey results on communities’ views about whether they are open to using methods other than traditional in-ground burial



Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (p. 10)

willingness to change their mindset on burial methods.

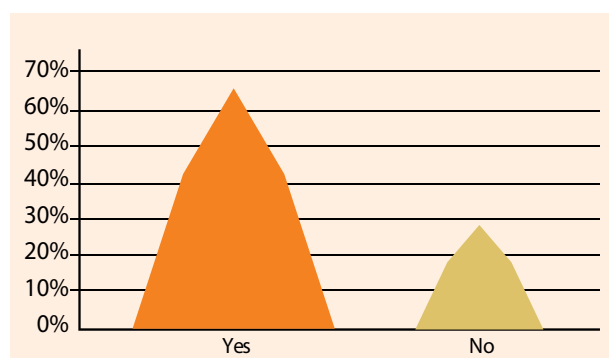
eThekweni Metro and Ekurhuleni have allocated specific budgets for awareness of and education on different methods of internment in a bid to encourage communities to opt for methods other than in-ground, traditional burial. The success of this approach has not been measured yet. The City of Johannesburg encourages funeral parlours to suggest their customers consider alternative methods of burial.

## 5.3 Local municipal case studies

More than 60% of the eight metro municipalities reported that they consider themselves as having good practice in the management of cemeteries, as shown in Figure 10. Good practices included the maintenance of norms and standards, having a good set of by-laws, and having electronic software to assist in cemetery management. One municipality attributed its good practice to cemetery layouts that are properly planned and densified to allow for more graves per hectare, a more space-intensive burial method.

Municipalities that reported that they did not have good practices mentioned the non-existence of burial records, poor cemetery-related infrastructure, corruption, and departmental structures that failed to provide adequate attention to issues of cemeteries.

**Figure 10:** Municipalities reporting good practice in cemetery management



Source: SA Local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014 (p. 10)

On the following pages are four case studies of local municipalities employing good practices.

### **5.3.1 Case Study 1: Ekurhuleni Municipality (costing and pricing)**

Ekurhuleni Municipality is on the East Rand. There are 62 cemeteries. Currently 19 are active, down from 29 in 2005. Some active cemeteries will become inactive very soon.

There are a lot of unauthorised burials, illegal burials and illegal multiple-body graves. There are some illegal cemeteries which have not yet been registered. The municipality experiences vandalism in cemeteries and also lacks sufficient space for cemeteries. There have been some internal challenges, particularly insufficient staff and insufficient capacity at crematoria.

An alternative burial strategy has been pursued since 2007 in Ekurhuleni to deal with the looming scarcity of burial land. People are no longer allowed to reserve graves, and cremations are on the increase. Grave re-use is under way, and the municipality is looking at restructuring tariffs and increasing the use of mausoleums and cremation.

The cost implications of different burial options were changed. Cremations are now 27% cheaper than a single-body burial and about half the cost of multiple-body burial in the same grave. The charges are structured to encourage the community to make use of alternative methods of burial. The challenge is changing people's attitudes.

### **5.3.2 Case Study 2: Maluti-a-phofung Local Municipality (informal cemeteries)**

Maluti-a-phofung municipality is situated in the Eastern Free State. There are nine formal cemeteries whose registers have been amalgamated. The five cemeteries in the farm areas, which are administrated by the Chief, have no registers. It is very difficult to monitor these burials. The practice is to approach the Chief, who will demarcate a site without municipal intervention. There are also backyard burials, where families bury their loved ones at their homes. This presents a health hazard.

The municipality is in the process of formalising the informal cemeteries, including farms. A consultant has been employed to identify the various sites to give a clear

picture of the number of informal burial grounds. Once these records are available, an integrated register can be introduced. It is assumed there are about 50 informal cemeteries. Four of these have already been formalised in a pilot process.

Informal cemeteries often belong to traditional families – however, municipalities are trying to open these up to others, by building roads, for example. However, people are being encouraged to make use of formal cemeteries so funerals can be properly registered.

### **5.3.3 Case Study 3: eThekweni Metro Municipality (re-use of older cemeteries)**

eThekweni has 65 cemeteries, some of which date back 150 years. There is a dire need to deal with the lack of burial space. Therefore, the re-use of old cemeteries is being looked at.


The municipality also needs to address the issues of cemetery policy, regulations, standard operating procedures and consistent management of the service. A database of legal and illegal undertakers is being investigated and the actual number of graves audited.

### **5.3.4 Case Study 4: Mangaung Metro Municipality (vandalism and theft)**

Mangaung is a municipality in the Free State. There are 18 cemeteries and 45 rural cemeteries which fall under the jurisdiction of tribal authorities. There is a challenge of integrating rural with formal cemeteries.

Only three of Bloemfontein's 12 cemeteries are still active. There are two new cemeteries that are not yet operational. There is one crematorium which caters for the whole region. There is a resistance in the community to alternative burial methods.

Vagrancy and theft of tombstones, fences and water taps is a problem in formal cemeteries. The wall of remembrance has also been vandalised. One of the cemeteries is next to a dumping site and the refuse sometimes is blown into the cemetery by the wind.



There is lack of security and access control. Insufficient budget leads to poor maintenance, landscaping and access. There is a high rate of indigents and tighter screening is needed. The municipality also suffers from a shortage of land due to competing needs from other sectors.

These case studies illustrate that many local municipalities are finding creative solutions, sometimes simple solutions, to handle the issues facing cemetery management.



### Key learnings and recommendations

In February 2016, SALGA commissioned research to identify, source and document good practices in cemetery management from municipalities and partner organisations in South Africa. As part of this research, a series of interviews was conducted with key respondents chosen because of their involvement in cemetery management in metro municipalities. Metro municipalities consist of the largest urban areas in South Africa and the challenges they face are representative of those facing all municipalities. Their size and their growing populations mean that the particular challenges of sustainability they face are more pressing.

#### 6.1 Interviews with cemetery managers from metro municipalities

The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality is located in Gauteng province. Johannesburg is the largest municipality in South Africa and is the engine room of the South African economy. The population of 4 434 827 is made up of 1 434 856 households.

The City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality accounts for almost a quarter of economic activity in Gauteng. It is second only to the City of Johannesburg in population size, with 3 178 470 residents and 1 015 465 households.

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality is situated on the east coast of the Eastern Cape province. It has a population of 755 000 in 223 568 households.

Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality is in the Free State province in the central interior of South Africa. Its population of 747 431 is distributed across 231 921 households.

All the interviewees are top-level managers of cemeteries in their municipalities. Antoinette Richardson at SALGA was interviewed because of her involvement in SALGA's previous initiative in cemetery management in municipalities. The interviewees are listed below:

1. Reggie Moloi, City of Johannesburg
2. Jan Burger, Dennis Ings, Sanelisiwe Mongoai, City of Ekurhuleni
3. Kevin Kalazani, Buffalo City
4. Ncedisa Ntulini, Mangaung
5. Antonette Richardson, SALGA

The interviews with Reggie Moloi and Jan Burger, Dennis Ings and Sanelisiwe Mongoai in the City of Johannesburg and City of Ekurhuleni, respectively, were conducted face-to-face. The interviews with Kevin Kalazani in Buffalo City and Ncedisa Ntulini in Mangaung were done over the telephone.

Since the challenges faced by municipalities had been established by previous SALGA surveys of municipalities and the Local Government Summit on Cemeteries, the aim of the interviews was to get managerial insight into these issues.

Their responses when asked to identify issues they encounter in managing cemeteries in municipalities are shown in the table below. An "X" indicates that the interviewee said that issue was something they had noted in their municipal cemeteries.

Illegal cemeteries are those that are situated on land in municipalities that has not been set aside for burials because the land is unsuitable. It may be close to water sources, or situated too close to the water table. Unregistered cemeteries consist of land that is being used for burials without official sanction.



Figure 11: Interview results

	Sanelisiwe Mongoai	Reggie Moloji	Antonette Richardson	Ncedisa Ntulini	Kevin Kalazani	Dennis Ings Jan Burger
Illegal cemeteries	X		X			
Unregistered cemeteries	X				X	
Vandalism	X	X			X	
Full cemeteries	X	X		X		X
Record-keeping		X	X		X	
Safety & Security		X		X	X	
Funding			X			
Sustainability						X

### 6.1.1 Safety and security

Safety and security are a problem with cemeteries in many municipalities. In Johannesburg vandalism of tombstones and graves has become commonplace, a phenomenon that cemeteries manager Reggie Moloji attributes to the declining respect that young people in society have for traditions. In general, difficulties with safety and security in cemeteries arise from a decline in social cohesion over the years. Many municipalities have overlooked this issue and are now having to address it as a matter of urgent concern.

**Ncedisa Ntulini in Mangaung:** “Another problem that we experience is the one of vandalism and theft in our cemeteries. There are many reasons for this and we are trying to solve this, as all of our cemeteries are fenced, but unfortunately they don’t have lights...and then we also try to get security guards at the gate...and at least that is helping for the meantime, but people come and see that they are not there during the night so the solution would be locking gates at night at our cemeteries so we can fight crime and vandalism.”

### 6.1.2 Record-keeping

The poor record-keeping in previously disadvantaged communities reflects the cruel irony of the “separate but equal” apartheid philosophy. Also, in many of these communities, records were destroyed at various times in protests against the regime. Ekurhuleni municipality faces the challenge of record-keeping in former township areas. In Katlehong, as in other areas, the bodies of protesters shot by the police were buried in unmarked mass graves.

**Sanelisiwe Mongoai in Ekurhuleni:** “The other issue is old graves’ numbers, which were established in the old municipalities, so in 2000 when cemeteries were incorporated into Ekurhuleni, there was no uniformity when it comes to record-keeping. Especially when it comes to the previously disadvantaged communities, there are a lot of missing grave numbers... It becomes a problem because families come to find the grave of their grandparents or great grandparents and find that we do not have documentation to trace that.”

### 6.1.3 Revenue and funding

Cemeteries in the large municipalities are run on a shoestring budget. Municipalities do not collect enough revenue through charging for services to cover even the cost of those services.

**Antonette Richardson, SALGA:** “The funding mechanism needs to be looked into. In fact it is not so expensive to bury a person. We may think it is a lot of money, but the municipality has taken a lot of the responsibility in the long term, because for years and years to come they are going to maintain that cemetery – look after the lawns, plant trees, fix up the fences, etc.; hire someone for security because there is a lot of vandalism now. I don’t think someone sat down and tallied up how much it costs for the municipalities to efficiently maintain a cemetery, in terms of safety, infrastructure, and skills in cemetery management.”

Historically, cemetery planners did not take into account the total costs of in-ground burial. The costs covered are for digging a grave and perhaps the administration associated with conducting the funeral, from paperwork to arranging for the plot and so on. The major cost, the maintenance of that gravesite in perpetuity, and providing security and amenities in the cemetery where the grave is located, is not factored into this price: once it has been developed a cemetery must be maintained. Kevin Kalazani says that in Buffalo City Municipality “the roads are well constructed, but we need staff to maintain the cemeteries. This entails cutting of the grass and managing the bushes. Most of our cemeteries are overgrown.” The difference that such funding makes in providing the resources required to run cemeteries is considerable. In Buffalo City Municipality funding shortfalls have been addressed and have improved the situation. Kalazani adds, “In the past we had challenges with funding for the development and maintenance of cemeteries, but in the recent five years or so there has been budget allocated and it helps a great deal.”

#### 6.1.4 Funeral practices

The importance of sensitivity to cultural practices emerged from the interviews with Reggie Moloi in the City of Johannesburg and Ncedisa Ntulini in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Families are very emotional at the time of a bereavement and need to be hand-held through the process. They often make emotional decisions. Cemetery managers should also be able to accommodate religious beliefs and sensibilities. For example, in African culture twins must be buried before sunrise. In Islam burial must take place within 24 hours.

Cemetery management in Ekurhuleni Municipality conducted an internal survey of staff to find out their attitudes to burial and burial methods. It was communicated during the interviews with Danny Ings and Jan Burger that the findings of this survey suggest that many people are still, in their words, in an 18th- and 19th-century mindset in terms of burials, born out of habitual practice. They are encouraged by the fact that the choice of cremation – currently 5% of burials in Ekurhuleni – is increasing.

The municipality has realised that the presentation of alternative burial methods in line with the cultural expectations around death and burial is a good way to enable people to adopt different methods. They have come up with the idea of burial cells as an alternative to traditional burial and cremation. Burial cells are like mausoleums, but are modular and moveable, allowing for a flexibility in placement and ease of construction that mausoleums do not. Ekurhuleni cemetery management thinks that a burial cells provide a very good option from a sustainability point of view for the municipality, and are pushing for them to be part of their offering.

**Dennis Ings, Ekurhuleni: “We give various options, whereby at least one option is close or in line with the outcomes they want or believe in. For example, if you have a community that believes in the resurrection of the body, they would not want the body destroyed by fire. Little do they realise that over time the body disappears...but a burial cell will preserve a body relatively intact. The skeleton will still be there. If you practise rituals you could still go to the burial cell, which will still be there, separate from everyone else, and that will satisfy the need of a group which requires a physical tangible body...which is what they don’t get in cremation, because with that the body has taken a different form in an hour.”**

The way that cemetery management in Ekurhuleni sees it, they are not doing away with in-ground burials, but merely saying that for those who want it, it is going to be expensive. The alternatives that are offered will take up less space and be more sustainable. Dennis Ings says: “We need to deal with the perception of the luxury of customs and practices from centuries ago by not taking them into the future...it is about how best to use space instead of sticking to the paradigm of dedicated places for cemeteries.”

The cultural, religious and linguistics team at SALGA believes that, through education, long-held beliefs can be changed:

**Antonette Richardson, SALGA: “Ultimately you want to be respectful. Also, what the cultural, religious and linguistics team has emphasised strongly is that fundamentals of religion or belief systems will not change. But gradually, with education through schools, churches, priests etc. that it is okay to be cremated and so on, with reasons, the change will slowly take place. Once you have reasons linked to a religious belief then the change will take place. For example, people [who] believe in connection with ancestors [may object to cremation] because there are no physical remains. Then you can say that if you burn them, package the ashes and you can put the whole family in there.”**

### 6.1.5 Space

There are three main reasons for a lack of space in cemeteries. First, the prevalence of in-ground burials. Second, the reluctance of the majority of the population to adopt alternative methods. Third, the increase in burial rates due to changing population movements with the end of apartheid and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, developments which were unanticipated by spatial planners in the 1960s and 1970s when the majority of cemeteries in the metropolitan municipalities were conceived.

In-ground burials by necessity occupy a certain amount of space, determined by the dimensions of the coffin in which the body is interred. The options are detailed in municipal by-laws.

**Jan Burger, Ekurhuleni: “[Among] other things we need to consider is that our burial practices are unsustainable. For us to move into a sustainable burial practice, we need to start the re-use or recycling of graves, filling up graves with as many bodies as possible, above-ground burials, limiting the time that the body can stay in the ground, cremation and all the other ways of disposing of the body so that we don’t continually use too much earth for burials.”**

In the interviews with cemetery managers, it became apparent that the higher mortality rate associated

with HIV/AIDS has had an impact on the land that was allocated by municipalities for cemeteries. These plans were based on mortality rates that were prevalent decades ago, when no-one anticipated a major spike in deaths as has occurred in South Africa since the 1990s. Because of a public-health policy disaster cause by AIDS denialism, interventions to deal with the epidemic have lagged those in other sub-Saharan countries that have also been badly affected by the epidemic. South Africa currently has the world’s highest number of people living with HIV and the world’s highest new HIV infection rate.

In addition, apartheid municipal planners treated black lives as an afterthought. Influx controls severely limited the numbers of black Africans allowed to live and die in urban areas. With the end of apartheid, population growth in urban areas through natural migration far exceeded the cursory arrangements made for the burial of the majority of the population by racist planners. Since 1994 the number of Africans buried in township cemeteries has increased, and also in urban cemeteries that had previously been segregated.

The end of apartheid also saw South Africa entering into normal relationships with countries in the African continent. With its advanced middle-income economy, South Africa represents a land of opportunity for economic migrants from the rest of the continent. In the same way that South Africans from rural areas have flocked to the cities in search of work, so too have Africans from other countries come to South African cities. In Johannesburg in particular, this influx has been very great and cemetery management has taken account of the city’s increasing population in its plans.

To summarise the interview findings, the high rate of traditional burial, a reluctance by the majority of the African population to adopt alternative burial methods, and unanticipated increases in burial rates due to heightened mortality and population growth have resulted in the situation that cemetery planners in South Africa now face. Some key learnings emerged from the interviews, and are presented next.

## 6.2 Key lessons from interviews with cemetery managers

The key lessons from the interviews confirmed the findings of previous SALGA research that is outlined separately in this publication.

They are as follows:

- **Space is the most important issue in cemetery management.** The most common form of funeral conducted in municipal cemeteries is in-ground burial, and this uses up a lot of space. As a result, older cemeteries in many larger municipalities are full and can only accept second burials, while newer cemeteries are reaching full capacity for first burials.
- **Funeral services, as currently practised, are unsustainable.** In-ground burial takes up land that has competing uses for the important human needs of housing and agriculture.
- **Safety and security are an ongoing concern.** Assaults and robberies are common in cemeteries as criminals take advantage of the vulnerability of visitors. Vandalism is also increasingly becoming a problem.
- **Record-keeping requires attention.** Record-keeping is a very important function in managing cemeteries. Electronic record-keeping is ideal, yet not widely used outside the major municipalities.
- **Insufficient funding.** The revenues collected for funeral services do not cover the operational costs of cemeteries. Budgets in all municipalities are not sufficient for cemetery management to meet the requirements of managing and maintaining cemeteries.

## 6.3 Good practices in cemetery management

In the discussions with SALGA prior to conducting the interviews, it was agreed that finding best practices, across the range of municipalities across the country with so many different characteristics, would not be feasible.

Jan Burger, Ekurhuleni: “I think what SALGA needs to recognise is that we have best practice and also good practice. Best practice is ideal, and with ideal comes budget, time, expertise and other resources. We can share with you the best practices that we have learnt from overseas in terms of research – all the things that we are trying to implement, but which may be too high-level for our situation. And also, remember that making a comparison with overseas cemeteries is not ideal.”

All the same, it was possible to glean from the interviews a range of insights into how cemeteries are run and practices that are replicable and improve cemetery management, particularly in municipalities facing the challenges of land scarcity, safety and security, record-keeping, and funding.

- **Improving safety and security in cemeteries.** In order to deter assaults on visitors to cemeteries and prevent the theft and vandalism of tombstones, security should be increased at cemeteries. This is particularly the case in passive cemeteries where burial activity has ceased and traffic is reduced on weekends. The number of security officers and patrols should be increased. In Mangaung, security officers have been given patrol dogs to further increase the deterrent. Ekurhuleni has installed CCTV cameras at active cemeteries to monitor crime and, through increasing the speed of the response to incidents, hopefully reduce the incentive for crime in the cemeteries.
- **When budget permits, outsource functions in cemeteries.** Ekurhuleni has service-level agreements with grave diggers, which means that graves can be dug when required, 24 hours a day, thus providing a better service to citizens.
- **Create jobs through collaborating with the Expanded Public Works Programme.** Low-skilled labour in cemeteries can be provided by communities adjacent to cemeteries, as the City of Ekurhuleni has done.

- **Electronic funds transfer (EFT) should replace cash payments to cemetery officers for funeral services.** In most municipalities cemetery officers who take bookings for funerals from bereaved families and undertakers receive the cash payments. In Ekurhuleni it was found that this afforded the opportunity for corruption, when unscrupulous cemetery officers would pocket the money paid by families themselves and not send it to the municipal revenue department. The City of Johannesburg has instituted an EFT system where funeral services are paid directly to the municipal revenue department and no cash payments are handled at cemeteries.

- **Funeral records should be managed properly.** Particularly in township cemeteries, historical records are missing and have not been properly kept. A system should be put in place to ensure that accurate records of all burials are kept. In Mangaung the keeping of accurate funeral records is a key performance indicator.

- **Use computerised management software.** Ideally records should be captured electronically using customised computer software. The Cities of Ekurhuleni and Johannesburg and Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality have electronic software that has automated the funeral-booking process. Persons making a funeral booking at the cemetery are able to select on the system from all the options provided by the cemeteries in the municipality. The dominant player in this market is also the first one, Synapsis, but there are now better systems available. The City of Johannesburg has recently tendered for an upgraded system that will allow for the GPS location of graves. At present no municipal electronic cemetery-management systems are linked with undertakers, which would be desirable since most funerals are handled by undertakers.

- **Funeral procedures should be streamlined and made more efficient.** Municipalities should commit to providing an efficient burial service to citizens in keeping with the Batho Pele “People First” principles.

### The Batho Pele Principles

**1. Consultation.** Citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice about the services that are offered.

**2. Service standards.** Citizens should be told what level and quality of public service they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.

**3. Access.** All citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.

**4. Courtesy.** Citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration.

**5. Information.** Citizens should be given full accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive.

**6. Openness and transparency.** Citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost and who is in charge.

**7. Redress.** If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy; and when complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response.

**8. Value for money.** Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best possible value for money.

The Batho Pele principles are aligned to the Constitution and encourage citizens to know the service they are entitled to. Government officials must follow the Batho Pele principles, which require public servants to be polite, open and transparent and to deliver good service to the public.

**Antonette Richardson, SALGA:** “[Providing burial services] is a business, whereby you need to know that it is clean, safe, sustainable long term...it’s like with municipal managers right now...because you want to dignify your previous tax payer by looking after their interests even when they are gone.”

- **Funeral procedures should be standardised.** Having a comprehensive set of municipal by-laws that addresses all aspects of a funeral, from the booking of the grave to the type of burial chosen and the management of a cemetery, increases efficiency.

## Funeral Procedures Best Practice – The City of Ekurhuleni 48 Hour Commitment

The City of Ekurhuleni is able to provide a burial within 48 hours of a funeral booking being made and paid for. This is possible because the municipality has expedited the payment system in collaboration with the rates office and uses electronic cemetery-management software to handle funeral bookings. When either the family or the undertaker makes a booking, payment is made at the municipal rates hall. Once payment is recorded on the electronic cemetery management system, SmartMune, the grave is assigned, allowing the family to go and see it during the week. In the meantime the service provider is notified and the hole dug in preparation for burial. In the case of a second burial, the grave is reopened. All actual burial ceremonies take place on weekends.

- **Cemetery officers should be carefully recruited and vetted.** The official in charge of a cemetery is the cemetery officer. In the vast majority of municipalities, cash payments for funeral services are made directly to cemetery officers, which provides the temptation for corruption, since there is no means to ensure accountability through a paper trail.

**Dennis Ings, Ekurhuleni: “The challenge in local government is that everybody applies for a position like that and there is very little control over the quality of candidate that gets appointed to that position. It is an underpaid position, undervalued and highly responsible. When it comes to recruitment, that aspect has to be looked into.”**

- **All new cemeteries should offer environmentally sustainable burial methods.** Wherever possible, space should be allocated in cemeteries that are designed and landscaped to include alternatives to the traditional headstone or tombstone burial, such as a berm section, a garden section and a memorial wall. 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.

The City of Johannesburg has pioneered this practice. Waterval Cemetery has only headstones. Diepsloot cemetery has a memorial section called Diepsloot Memorial Park. West Park and Newclare cemeteries have garden sections. The City of Johannesburg’s newest cemetery, Oliphantsvlei, will be largely devoted to these new burial offerings.

- **Frequently engage all stakeholders in cemeteries to identify problems in providing funeral services and find solutions.** Undertakers, religious bodies, and the police service all play some part in the burial process. Their input on problems can be useful to cemetery management. Mangaung municipality has quarterly cemetery forums where topics such as health issues and compliance for undertakers are discussed.

- **Encourage the development of private cemeteries.** Most cemeteries in Europe nowadays are private cemeteries. Private cemeteries in South Africa are financially sustainable and offer an appealing alternative to municipal cemeteries. Ekurhuleni actively encourages the development of private cemeteries, as it reduces the burden on the municipality of providing burial services.

### 6.4 A holistic guiding principle: sustainability

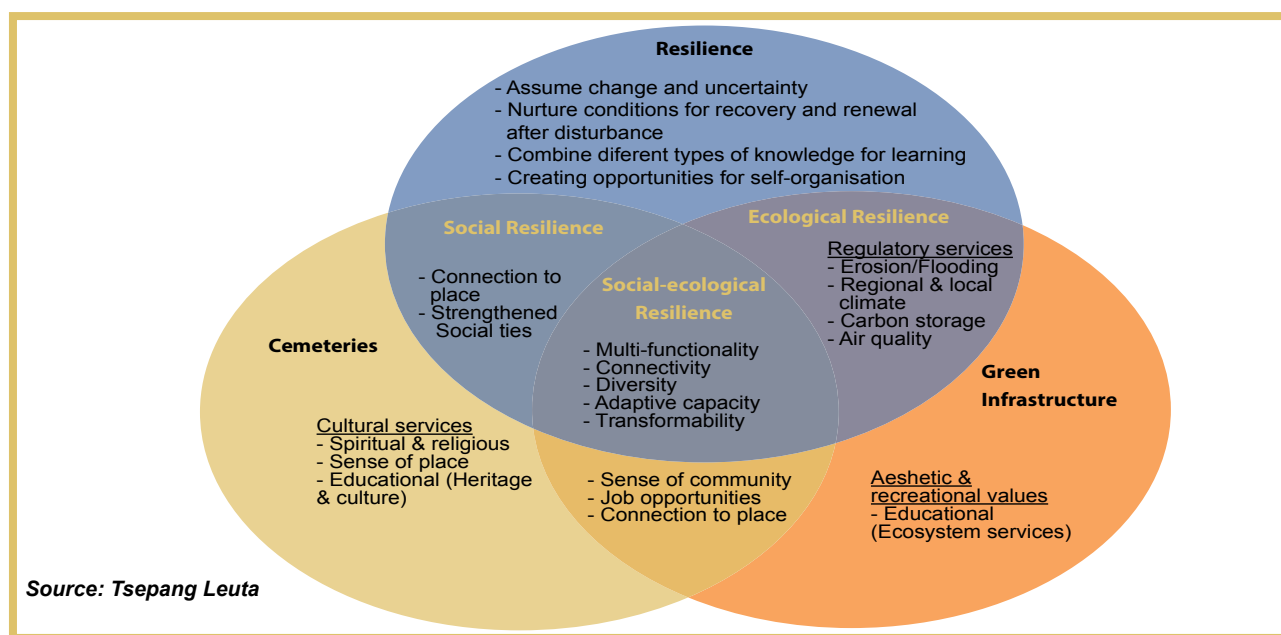
The key take-away from the research is the importance of the sustainability of burial practices. Sustainability is a holistic and comprehensive approach to the use of land that encompasses the issues of space, land scarcity, and environmentally sound burial practices.

The lack of space in many cemeteries and the difficulty of increasing uptake of alternative burial methods are symptomatic of the wider challenge of sustainability faced by cemeteries in South Africa and globally. As South African municipalities have found, conventional, in-ground burial is unsustainable given that existing cemeteries are filling up, and new cemeteries face competing demands for land use in growing urban areas.

Cemetery management and planning need to reflect these realities on three axes: cemeteries as a form of land use that is inextricably linked to religion and cultural practices; the need to take these ritualistic practices into account when seeking alternatives; and the ecological considerations that sustainability mandates. Environmental sustainability should be top of mind for cemetery managers.

Tsepang Leuta has done extensive research on cemetery practices and management in South Africa. The following diagram from her research presentation illustrates how, conceptually, the idea of cemeteries as a site for cultural practice intersects with the ecology of cemeteries (their physicality), and the idea of resilience, which underpins sustainable practice.

Figure 12:



Source: Slide 11 from Tsepang Leuta's presentation titled "Effective Management of Cemeteries" at the National Cemeteries Management Workshop 29 October, 2014.

The intersection of all three elements results in burial solutions that are culturally sensitive, spatially integrated into the municipality, and environmentally sustainable..

## Applying Alternative Burial options in the Local Context

The City of Ekurhuleni was formed in 2000 from the amalgamation of 11 different councils in the East Rand and is a microcosm of these challenges faced by metro municipalities and in many ways, demonstrates best practice in the way they have been dealt with.

The first challenge that was dealt with was regulatory, in coming up with a common set of cemetery by-laws for the new metro municipality, which included historically white urban areas and townships.

A useful lever to changing behaviour is to create a financial incentive to reward change. Over time cemetery managers realised that the low rate charged for burials in Ekurhuleni compared to neighbouring municipalities meant that people who were not resident in Ekurhuleni were even willing to pay the higher rate that was charged to them, as it was still lower than the rate they would pay for burial in their own municipality. As a result burial tariffs in Ekurhuleni were substantially increased to be on par with neighbouring municipalities, thus removing the existing incentive for people from outside Ekurhuleni to be buried in the municipality and so place pressure on cemetery space.

The practice of grave reservation was ended in the merged municipality when it was realised that often the reserved graves were never used. They were being held

in reserve for owners who perhaps had moved away, or had remarried and so no longer wanted to be buried next to their former spouse.

At the same time the tariff structure was examined in greater detail to see if it could be changed to incentivise a different approach to selecting burial methods. The municipal by-laws had been changed to allow for up to three members of the same family to be buried in the same grave, but the original tariff structure did not incentivise this practice. It has therefore been adjusted so that the price of each burial in a particular plot is less than the burial before, so that the first burial is more expensive than the second and third. This encourages people to choose multiple burials in the same plot as those after the first are subsidised to a greater extent.

The cost of cremations has been kept, in the words of Jan Burger, “incredibly cheap”, as this is the one burial method that is not subsidised. Once a body is cremated the municipality does not need to maintain in perpetuity a burial plot and headstone or tombstone as is the case in conventional in-ground burial. Cremation rates have been kept the same for the past five years.

The single biggest problem that remains with traditional burials is that the cost of the plot is the lowest cost of the funeral, so it is not the main consideration. As Jan Burger and Dennis Ings say, “Undertakers are not our friends” in this respect. They have no incentive to offer cremations, for example, when traditional burials are such a great source of income, from the purchase of the casket to the ever more elaborate burial ceremonies that have become popular in the African community as a sign of status and wealth.

Ekurhuleni has found that even with the preponderance of traditional burials, however, offering a range of burial options had made the community aware of and more likely to adopt alternative, more sustainable burial methods, including multiple burial and cremation.

## 6.5 Recommendations from interviews and SALGA summit

SALGA hosted a Local Government Summit on Cemeteries in September 2012, which sought to develop policy proposals and strategies for municipalities in

cemeteries management. During the summit attendees broke into three commissions to look at issues in more detail and come up with recommendations. The first commission focused on land availability, cost-effective and environmentally friendly burials, and the issue of informal and illegal burials. The second considered mechanisms for community buy-in to alternative burial methods. The third discussed incorporating new burial alternatives to the services offered by cemeteries.

For this report, the recommendations from the SALGA summit were combined with the insights, key lessons and best practices elicited from the interviews that were conducted with cemetery managers. They are detailed below.

- **National and provincial government should be made aware of the very real challenges facing municipalities in terms of finding space for burials.** Cemetery planning should be treated by all spheres of government as a matter of urgency. Cemetery planning and plans for future cemeteries should be included in municipal development plans.
- **There needs to be a holistic and comprehensive approach to the availability of land** for cemeteries. Firstly, there should be sensitisation at national level of the issue of looming land scarcity. There is little evidence of political will to tackle this issue, which needs to be tackled with the urgency that it requires in some areas.
- **Funding must be provided for municipalities to conduct land audits** to find out the availability and suitability of land for cemeteries compatible with the town planning and development plans for the municipalities that are already in place.
- **National, high-level engagement can address issues such as land owned by provincial and national government that might be suitable for burial** and could be transferred to municipalities. Cemeteries that border on available land in neighbouring jurisdictions and unused land that is in private hands can be handled by the national government. At the same time all farms should be required to register cemeteries, and sites of illegal cemeteries identified.



- **Solutions to increase the sustainability of cemeteries should be prioritised.** Municipalities should establish an agreed-upon set of steps to ensure that representative community input to cemetery planning and the choice of internment methods are canvassed. These stakeholders should include members of the general public, elected representatives at the local level on ward committees, traditional leaders, and staff in the relevant line function departments.

- **Community consultation processes must be robust and credible,** ensuring that everyone in the community is represented and heard. The aim of the consultations is to help municipalities understand the position of the community on alternative burial methods, and their feelings on the matter. This is a first step towards finding ways to address issues raised and think of ways to make alternative burial methods more appealing.

- **Communities should be empowered to make informed choices about burial methods.** Municipalities should use all communication means at their disposal – electronic (television and radio) and print media, as well as community meetings and outreach through music and drama in schools – to educate the community about alternative burial methods.

The case should be made that alternative methods are a choice that has to be made in order to protect the interests of the living. The issue of land shortage should be stressed and that alternative methods are cheaper in terms of freeing up land for other uses, e.g. housing, and have less impact on the environment.

Stakeholders include traditional leaders, funeral parlours, farmers, and the Departments of Cooperative Governance and Community Development and Home Affairs.

- **National and provincial government need to address the budgetary constraints faced by municipalities in managing cemeteries.** At present revenue collection does not cover the operational costs of cemeteries. The cost structure is based on burials, but does not take into account the costs associated with the long-term upkeep and maintenance of cemeteries. Subventions from national and provincial government should make up the shortfall.

This will enable municipalities to invest in the infrastructure and facilities that improve the management of cemeteries and the services provided to the community, from rolling out electronic record-keeping and capturing old paper records to providing proper security and the maintenance and upkeep of the grounds and facilities.

- **These institutional arrangements should be formalised through legislation at national and provincial levels.**

- **Standardisation of practices.** Municipalities regulate cemeteries through by-laws, yet there is no standard set of cemetery by-laws and many municipalities do not have by-laws at all. Municipalities should be encouraged to adopt best-practice legislation as published in the SALGA Strategic Framework for Cemeteries Management 2014.

## CONCLUSION

The picture that has emerged in the process of compiling this publication and conducting the key respondent interviews is that there is much that is good in local practices and there are solid examples of good practice. Municipalities face a number of challenges in cemeteries management at the macro level, with issues such as funding and long-term sustainability, and the micro level, in terms of administration and operations.

On a day-to-day basis cemetery managers are required to meet the burial needs of the communities they serve, which they do under trying circumstances. Sustainability for the future is a key issue. However, it seems that those responsible for managing cemeteries in municipalities are left to their own devices in finding solutions to these problems.

Thus far SALGA has acted as a repository of knowledge on cemeteries management, in commissioning research into the challenges facing cemeteries. SALGA has also driven forward the process agreed upon the Local Government Summit on Cemeteries Management in 2012, in producing a Local Government Strategic Framework for Cemeteries, Crematoria and Undertakers in 2014.

There is room for SALGA to take a more proactive leadership role in driving solutions to the challenges facing cemeteries management. The institutional knowledge of years of experience in managing cemeteries is reflected in the findings of the SALGA research.

The Cemeteries Association of South Africa (CASA) is an industry body that was set up to bring together all stakeholders in the industry. CASA emerged from a grouping within the IERM that realised that cemeteries management was a national problem that was not being addressed. Its members have come together for the express purpose of promoting improvement in the delivery of cemetery services throughout South Africa.

Leadership to bring together all the stakeholders – cemeteries management professionals, funeral parlours and undertakers, CASA, political leadership in municipalities (municipal councils), and provincial and national government – will be a critical component of good practices in cemeteries management for the future.

# APPENDICES

## I. References

Cemeteries benchmarking visit: Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality to City of Joburg, 26 February 2015.

Johannesburg City Parks, Cemeteries and Zoo, 2015

City of Joburg Cemetery brochure. Cemeteries and Crematoria, 2008

Constitution of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996. Government Republic of South Africa, 1996

Effective management of cemeteries: the national cemeteries management workshop 29 October 2014. Leuta, Tsepang. University of the Witwatersrand, 2014

Ekurhuleni Cemetery Management: SALGA presentation. Burger, Jan. Parks and Cemeteries: Corporate Office, City of Ekurhuleni

Exploring sustainable burial practices in South Africa: potential challenges and opportunities. Leuta, Tsepang; Green, Che'ri. CSIR.

Local government summit on cemeteries: municipalities faced with an imminent shortage of cemeteries: a summit report. 12–13 September 2012. Dambudzo, Josephine. SALGA Summit on Cemeteries, 2012

No space to bury the dead: urban areas are running out of land. Lebeloane, Nkamogeleng; Mamogale, Regomoditswe. Drum Magazine, p 93, 18 June 2015

SA local government strategic framework for cemeteries, crematoria and undertakers. SALGA, 27 March 2014

State of cemeteries in provinces [includes correspondence with various municipalities]. SALGA, 2015

State of cemeteries report: the state of cemeteries in SA cities. Dambudzo, Josephine. SALGA, 2012

## II. Interviews

Antonette Richardson, SALGA 9 February 2016

Dennis Ings and Jan Burger, Ekurhuleni 10 February 2016

Kevin Kalazani, Buffalo City 10 February 2016

Ncedisa Ntulini, Mangaung 9 February 2016

Reggie Molo, City of Joburg 8 February 2016

Sanelisiwe Mongoai, Ekurhuleni 8 February 2016

## ENQUIRES

South African Local Government Association  
Knowledge Management and Municipal Innovations Unit  
Menlyn SALGA Corporate Park  
175 Corobay Avenue  
(c/o Garsfontein Road and Corobay Ave)  
Waterkloof Glen ext 11, Pretoria, South Africa  
Tel: +27 (0) 12 369 8000, Fax: +27 (0) 12 369 8001

### SALGA details:

website: [www.salga.org.za](http://www.salga.org.za)

Facebook: South African Local  
Government Association (SALGA)



Twitter: @SALGA\_Gov



YouTube: SALGA TV

