

Complaint.

Some residents say the Kiregyere garbage collection site, which the municipal council provided as an alternative burial ground, is not suitable.

Kabale cemetery turned into parking yard amid protests

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KABALE. Kabale Municipal Council (KMC) authorities have turned the more than 60-year-old cemetery located in Mwanjari Ward Southern Division into a parking yard amid protests from some residents.

The parking yard is expected to fetch the council revenue and help decongest the town.

The mayor, Mr Sentaro Byamugisha, says the project has been endorsed by district councillors and the Ministry of Local Government.

The grading and levelling of the cemetery covering 10 acres kicked off on Monday.

All the bodies have been exhumed and reburied in a mass grave at one of the corners of the cemetery, according to Mr Byamugisha.

"We have started with grading and levelling the site and on finishing, we shall pour marrum, fence it off before making it ready for use," said Mr Byamugisha.

"We shall allow other development partners to put up restaurants, hotels and warehouses to make the place busier so that we can generate more money to fund different development projects for the Kabale Municipal Council," he added.

Kiregyere garbage collection site has been provided as alternative burial site for unclaimed bodies.

A total of Shs50 million has been budgeted for remodelling and upgrading the site for business.

Mr Sentaro says they expect to reap at least Shs10 million every month from the facility expected to be completed by end of this financial year, and Shs500 million in years to come.

Exhumation procedure

The mayor says the council followed all procedures, including getting an exhumation certificate from the Kabale High Court.

He adds that announcements were placed on radio stations and in newspapers informing and inviting people to exhume bodies of their loved ones

and rebury them where they want.

"We notified people that anyone who has someone buried in the cemetery should come, exhume the body and rebury it where he or she wants within 14 days after the exhumation certificate was issued. But no one responded and the council had to start its developments on the cemetery," says Mr Byamugisha.

Mr Pierri Mbabazi, a resident, in 2014 lodged a suit against the municipal council at Kabale Chief Magistrate's Court when the municipal council first announced plans to turn the cemetery land into a parking yard. He argued that the council had not availed alternative land for the cemetery.

Mr Mbabazi, however, withdrew the case later because of pressure from different stakeholders that wanted the project to kickoff.

He has, however, been hosted on different radio talk shows where he has continuously objected to any developments on the cemetery before

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Mass grave: All the bodies have been exhumed and reburied in a mass grave at one of the corners of the cemetery.

New use: The Kabale Municipal Council has budgeted Shs50 million to turn the cemetery into a parking yard.

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Voices

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"There is urgent need for establishment of another cemetery so as to avoid being stuck with unclaimed bodies now that this is being developed into something else that shall be generating revenue for the council,"

ANDREW BIJJA,
PRINCIPAL HEALTH
INSPECTOR FOR
KABALE MUNICIPALITY

bodies are properly exhumed and reburied somewhere else.

Former speaker for Kabale Municipal Council and the current LCIV councillor for Kirigime Ward, Mr Richard Muhanguzi, says the council resolution was clear that they must first get the alternative land on which the remains of the deceased can be reburied before any development can take place.

He claims the resolution has been ignored and bodies of the deceased people are still underground as the mayor and his team are busy levelling and grading the graves.

"Levelling and grading the graves without relocating the remains of the deceased person is illegal and against the law and I am sure some people shall challenge this in courts of law. It's a barbaric act. During our council meetings, we refused using Kirengyere garbage collecting centre as a cemetery because it is gazetted for recycling garbage. What they are doing now is wrong," says Mr Muhanguzi.

He adds that they resolved that before the relocation of bodies is done, religious leaders from all denominations must be invited to pray for the souls of the deceased, but that has not been done.

The principal health inspector for Kabale Municipality, Mr Andrew Bijja, says at least one unclaimed body was being buried in the cemetery every week.

He adds that digging graves at Mwanjari cemetery was easy unlike the proposed site at Kirengyere garbage recycling centre where the soils are hard because of it being on a hill.

"There is urgent need for establishment of another cemetery so as to avoid being stuck with unclaimed bodies now that this is being developed into something else that shall be generating revenue for the council," says Mr Bijja.

He adds that most of the unclaimed bodies in Kabale are mainly picked from Lake Bunyonyi where people commit suicide by drowning themselves, and areas near Uganda-Rwanda border.

The Kabale District chairman, Mr Patrick Besigye Keihwa, says the removal of the cemetery from the centre of Kabale Town is long overdue.