



Policy Brief

CEMETERY MANAGEMENT AND FUNERAL SERVICES: CHALLENGES FOR CITY GOVERNMENT AND WAY FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Cemeteries in Pakistan form an integral part of the social and religious landscape, yet their management remains one of the most overlooked components of urban governance. In cities like Rawalpindi, rapid population growth, urban sprawl, and institutional neglect have collectively strained the capacity of existing burial spaces. Most public cemeteries in the city are operating at almost full occupancy, with limited land allocation for new graveyards over the past decade, despite a substantial increase in urban settlements. Along with space shortages, the cemetery management is riddled with issues of unregulated prices, incidents of grave robbing and desecration, visitors' security risk, and lack of maintenance.

Rationale

This study seeks to address the problem through a dual lens:

1. Physical and structural solutions: exploring the viability of new graveyard models (such as planned cemeteries and alternative burial modes).
2. Digital governance solutions: evaluating the plausibility of e-management models for cemetery and funeral services and attitude towards technology adoption from both demand and supply side perspectives.

Objectives

1. To assess the logistical and financial challenges faced by bereaved families in terms of locating and arranging burial space and funeral services in Rawalpindi.
2. To analyse the current challenges and inefficiencies in cemetery management and funeral service faced by end users and the local government in Rawalpindi.



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3. To evaluate the perspectives of different stakeholders, including bereaved families, charity organizations, religious scholars, and institutions (formal and informal), towards technology adoption for the management of cemeteries and funeral services.
4. To assess the plausibility of different e-government models from the perspectives of stakeholders.
5. To evaluate the feasibility of different graveyard models from multiple stakeholders' perspectives.
6. To integrate insights using benchmarking, geospatial analysis, and triangulation to develop evidence-based policy interventions for transparent and sustainable cemetery and funeral service management.

METHODOLOGY

Stakeholder Mapping

The stakeholder mapping in Figure 2 highlights the multifaceted nature of cemetery and funeral service management in Rawalpindi, where diverse actors shape both challenges and opportunities for reforms. Bereaved families remain the primary stakeholders (demand side), directly experiencing logistical and financial constraints as well as influencing acceptance of digital interventions and different graveyard models. Service providers (supply side) act as operational intermediaries, managing day-to-day processes and adapting to potential reforms related to burial shortages and digitization. Local government institutions, the informal graveyard management committee, and the RDA hold regulatory and planning authority, thereby determining the feasibility of digital transition. Religious scholars and clergy provide cultural and spiritual legitimacy, ensuring reforms align with community norms. At the same time, technology providers introduce the tools, such as GIS mapping and e-management platforms, necessary to modernize services.

The cross-sectional study was carried out from June to December 2025 in Rawalpindi city. According to the Population Census 2023, Rawalpindi city is the 4th largest city of Pakistan. Rawalpindi city is divided into 46 union councils (UCs) for administrative purposes by the Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation. Each union council has a distinct administrative boundary defined as an area of population of > 20,000 people. The table presents stakeholder typology and sample size.

Table 1: Stakeholder Typology

Stakeholder Classification	Data Collected
Bereaved Families (End Users)	470 Questionnaires
Union Councils (Formal Institutions)	46 Questionnaires

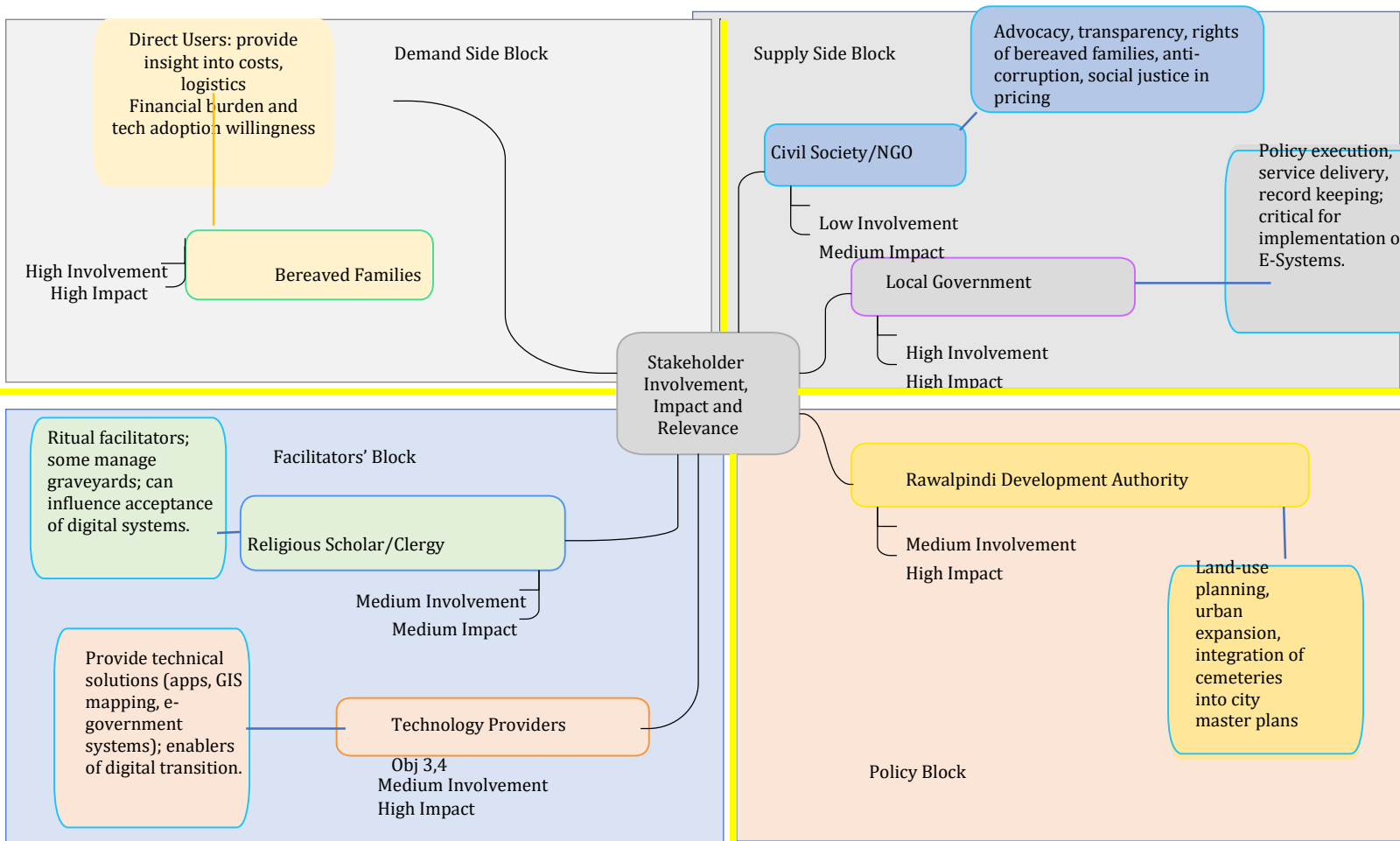


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Gravediggers (Frontline Workers)	26 Structured Interviews
Graveyard Committees (Informal Institutions) +Charity Organization	26 + 4 Structured Interviews
Islamic Scholar (Moral Advocates)	7 Structural Interviews
Tech Experts (Facilitators)	7 Structured Interviews
City Government	DG RDA

Source: Authors' compilations.

Figure 1: : Stakeholder Mapping



Source: Author's Construction.



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- The sampling unit is a bereaved family with the incidence of death in the last 3 years. The respondent is the individual who managed burial and funeral arrangements in the event of death. Considering the Muslim and Christian population and the mortality rates, with 99 % confidence interval and 5 % margin of error, the minimum required sample size for Muslims is 100 (300 for the last three years) and 15 (45 for the last three years) for Christian population. Given these calculations, the study sample comprises 400 Muslims and 70 Christian bereaved families, respectively.
- The second stakeholder is the union council. As mentioned, Rawalpindi city is administratively divided into 46 UCs. The study covers all UCs.
- Third stakeholders are frontline workers. 63 graveyards (26 public and 37 private/community) were approached for data collection from gravediggers. Only 23 public and 2 private gravediggers responded.
- Fourth stakeholders are the graveyard informal committees. About 50 individuals belonging to different informal committees were approached for data collection, out of which 32 responded.
- Fifth stakeholder, moral advocates (Muslim scholars) belonging to both Dars-Nazami and conventional academic streams were approached. The research team contacted 25 Muslim scholars, out of which 7 responded with 3 different schools of thought.
- The sixth stakeholder was technology experts. About 15 technology experts were approached, out of which 10 interviews were obtained.
- Finally, to incorporate the perspective of the city government, a detailed interview was conducted with DG-RDA, Ms. Kinza Murtaza.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

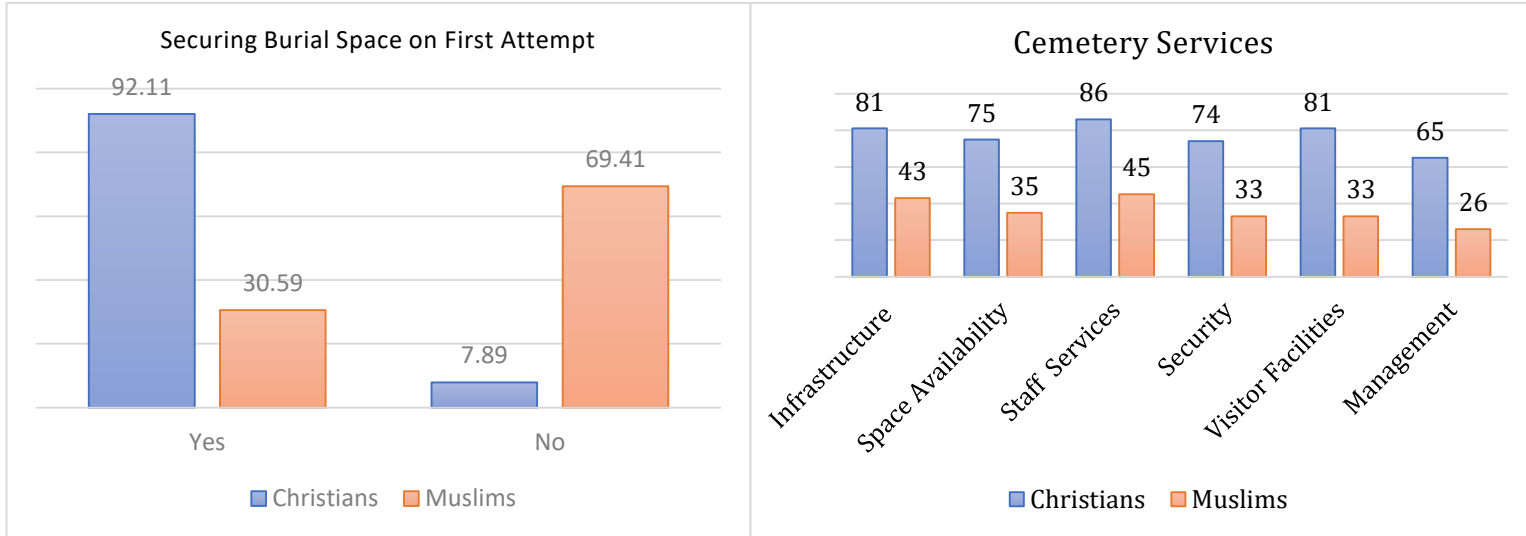
Distress Assessment of Bereaved Families and Issues in Cemetery Management

The search process for burial space demonstrates that Muslim families are compelled to visit multiple graveyards, reflecting the structural shortage of land. However, a substantial percentage of respondents reported relying on informal strategies such as personal influence and extra payments to secure a plot, indicative of the artificial shortage of land created by the service provider.



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Figure 3. Search Process and Cemetery Services



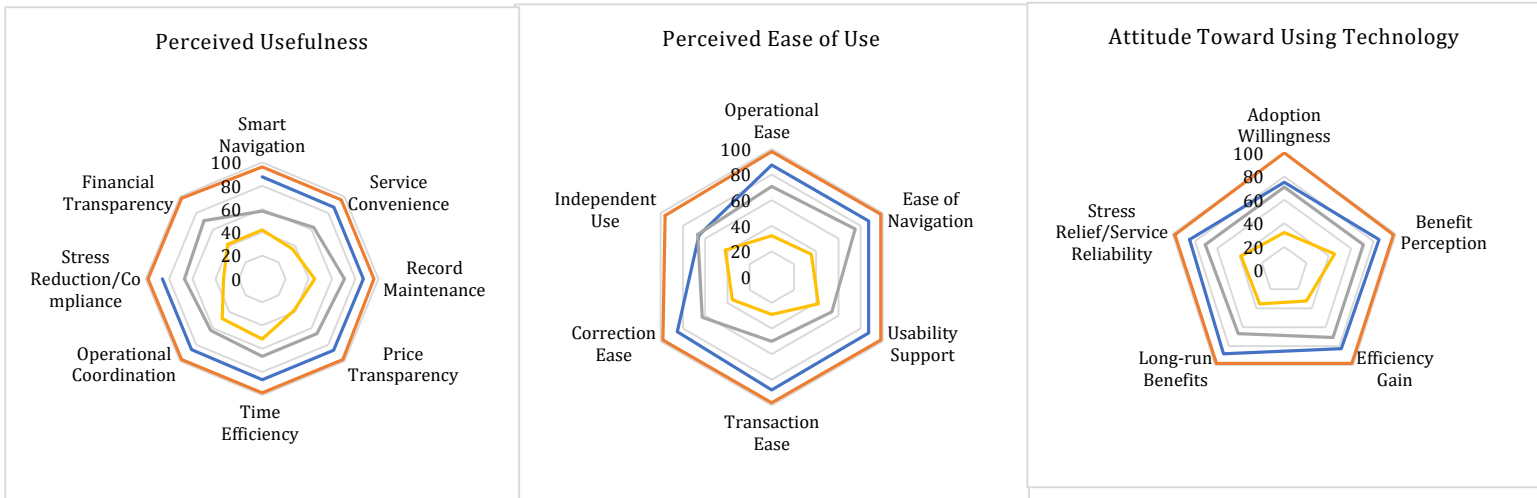
Source: Authors' construction.

Attitude Toward Technology

UCs are fully supportive of digital adoption. HHs are also moderately positive but constrained by trust, emotional context, and access issues. GD occupy a transitional position, showing partial readiness but institutional limitations. GC face structural, financial, and technical constraints rather than attitudinal resistance. This pattern suggests that proximity to formal governance structures and routine exposure to administrative technologies strongly shape positive attitudes, whereas emotional context, limited digital familiarity, and cultural considerations temper acceptance at the informal level.

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Figure 3: Technology Acceptance Model

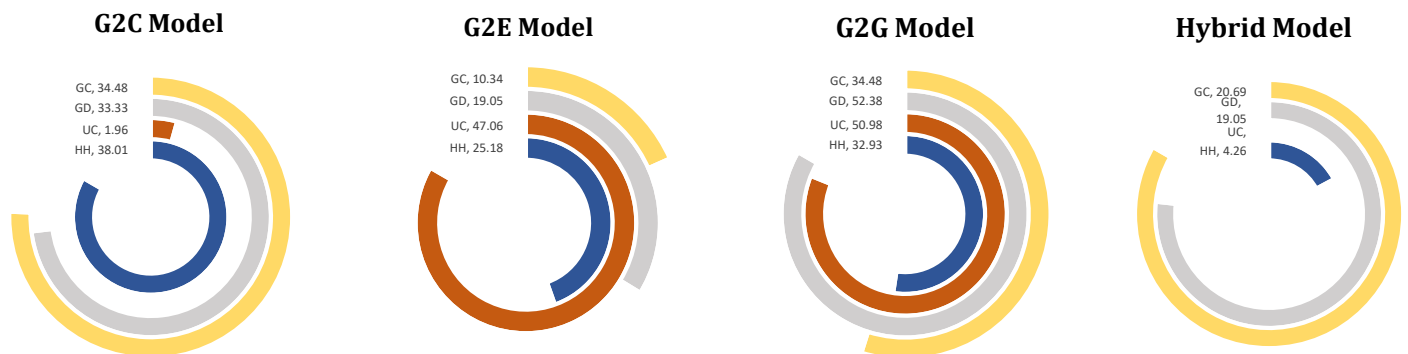


Source: Authors' construction.

Transition towards E-Governance

The results demonstrate that the transition to e-governance in cemetery management is not merely a technological upgrade but a complex governance transformation. The integrated interpretation of stakeholder participation and challenge dimensions reveals that no single e-governance model independently addresses technical, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers. Citizen-centered G2C models enhance acceptance but lack institutional robustness, while G2E and G2G models strengthen administrative control at the expense of user experience.

Figure 4: Preferences for E-Government Models



Source: Authors' construction.

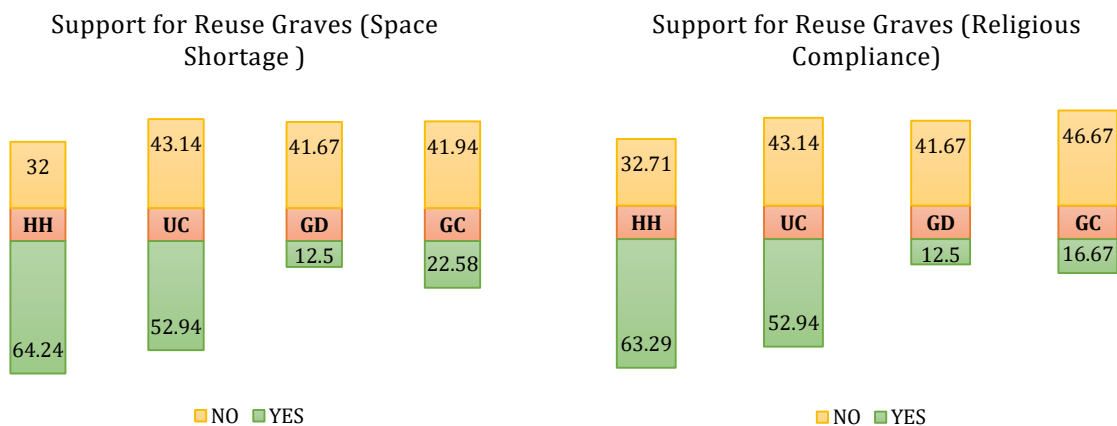


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Alternative Graveyard Models

The acceptability analysis reveals a strong preference for traditional and community-based graveyard models across all stakeholder groups, particularly among HHs. Traditional cemeteries are perceived as religiously familiar, emotionally secure, and symbolically permanent. Community-managed graveyards similarly retain high acceptability due to autonomous management and financial sustainability (donation-based financial modes). For addressing space scarcity. A key finding of is the remarkable acceptance of reuse graves by HHs and UCs as alternative graveyard model given religious compliance and land scarcity arguments. This high level of acceptance may be largely attributed to the ongoing burial practices involving reuse of existing graves among families and communities, albeit, informally.

Figure 5: Preference for Grave Reuse



Source: Authors' construction.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proposed policy framework and its implementation strategy are presented in Figure 5.1 and comprise multiple stages. The foundational triangle for implementation heavily involves three key stakeholders, namely, the city government, religious scholars, and technology experts. The focus at this stage will be on ensuring immediate relief for the bereaved families through the formation of a dedicated logistical and financial support cell. The first step involves technology adoption for improved recordkeeping and providing access to technical aid. The Islamic scholars will simultaneously provide counsel for and legitimacy to innovative governance initiatives. In this regard, dedicated funds for the maintenance and upkeep of existing cemeteries, as well as the reservation of land for future cemeteries, need to be ensured by the RDA. The concerns regarding grave robbing require the arrangement of security measures, such as installing security cameras and



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assigning security personnel. The latter can be done in collaboration with the law enforcement departments.

The subsequent stage entails the expansion of the institutional ecosystem through the development of a comprehensive integrated cemetery database covering grave occupancy and space availability. This will initiate an effective G2G model for intra-governmental coordination and data sharing. While an interface for interacting with end users (G2C) can be embedded in the existing e-government platforms like city government websites or Citizen portals, with active feedback through helplines and other communication platforms. Meanwhile, the government personnel can be trained in operational use of digital tools (G2E) along with explicit allocation of responsibilities to the UCs regarding security and maintenance of graveyards in their jurisdiction.

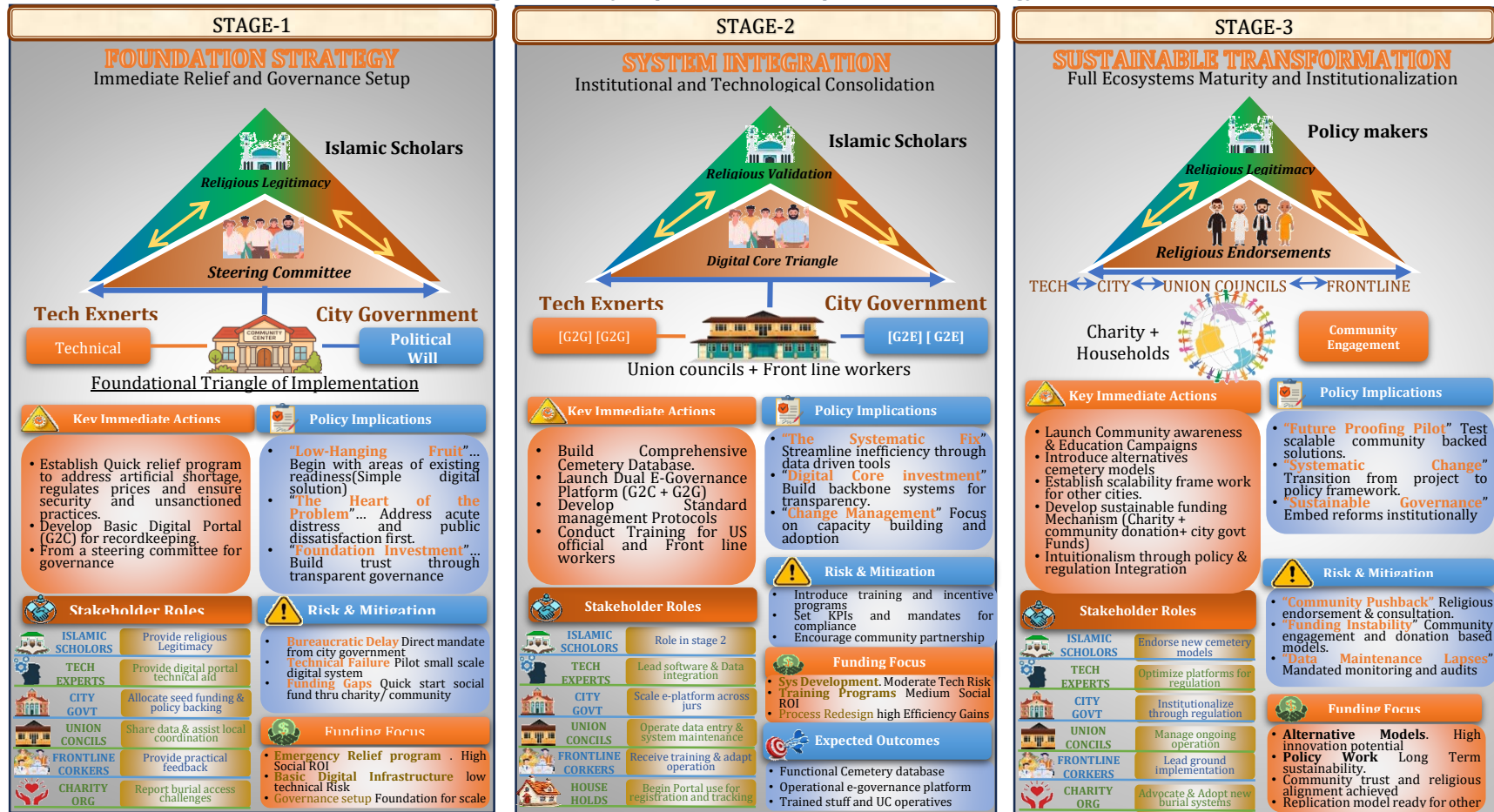
The final stage is that of ongoing transformation and evolution of the established institutional ecosystem. In this stage, the religious scholars can be engaged in creating awareness campaigns and providing religious acceptability to the interventions and creating consensus for institutionalization of new cemetery models, starting with more accepted models of grave re-use and community-managed graveyards. Technology experts will be overseeing the backend software for the digital platforms and ensuring data integrity, while frontline workers will be engaged for on-ground activities in both funeral services and graveyard maintenance. Finally, an on-ground operational assessment can be initiated for scalability and replication of the strategy beyond the city of Rawalpindi.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY



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Figure 6: Policy Implications and Implementation Strategy



Source: Authors' construction.