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Professionalizing Facilities Management in Catholic Major Seminaries: Strategic Approaches for Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, and St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot-Ekpene.

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Abstract

Catholic major seminaries in Nigeria are pivotal institutions for clerical formation, often possessing extensive physical assets. However, the operational efficacy of these facilities is frequently compromised, impacting both their formative mission and financial sustainability. This study investigates the state of Facilities Management (FM) at two of Nigeria's premier seminaries. The research aimed to critically evaluate the existing FM practices, identify the root causes of facility underutilization and deterioration, and propose a structured model for integrating professional FM to enhance institutional resilience and mission effectiveness. A qualitative case study approach was employed, incorporating semi-structured interviews with 15 administrative staff and focus group discussions with 40 seminarians across both institutions. This was supplemented by direct observational audits of key facilities, including water production plants, bakeries, residential halls, and academic blocks. Findings reveal a significant gap between the scale of infrastructure and the sophistication of its management. Both seminaries exhibit a reactive, maintenance-driven approach characterized by inadequate funding, absence of preventive maintenance schedules, and a critical lack of professional FM expertise. This has led to the chronic underutilization of revenue-generating assets and accelerated depreciation of the physical plant. The study concludes that the integration of professional facilities management is not merely an operational upgrade but a strategic imperative. It recommends the adoption of a tripartite model involving the immediate engagement of FM professionals, the development of a strategic asset management plan, and the embedding of a "stewardship culture" within the formational curriculum. This approach aligns the management of the physical environment with the spiritual and educational mission of the seminaries.

Keywords: Catholic, Facilities Management, Nigeria, Professionalization, Seminaries, Strategic Approaches

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, facilities management has emerged as a critical component of efficient operational practices in educational institutions worldwide. Well-implemented FM can enhance organizational performance, ensuring optimal use of resources and fostering conducive learning environments. However, in Nigeria, challenges persist, particularly in Major Seminaries. Issues such as underutilization of assets and insufficient professional expertise highlight the need for intervention. Seminary-specific challenges exacerbate these problems, necessitating a focused approach towards professionalizing FM.

The physical environment of an educational institution is a silent curriculum, profoundly shaping the culture, effectiveness, and overall experience of its inhabitants (Ullah & Sepasgozar, 2020). This is especially true in Catholic major seminaries, where the integration of human, spiritual, academic, and pastoral formation requires a holistic and supportive built environment. In Nigeria, seminaries like Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, and St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene, stand as monuments to the Church's investment in priestly training, boasting extensive campuses with diverse facilities—from water production factories and bakeries to sophisticated libraries and recreational complexes (Bigard Memorial Seminary, n.d.; St. Joseph Major Seminary, n.d.).

However, a paradox exists. Despite these substantial investments, there is a persistent narrative of operational challenge. Facilities that could serve as hubs for community life, practical training, and even auxiliary income generation often operate below capacity or fall into disrepair. The problem, this paper argues, is not primarily one of infrastructure but of management. The prevailing approach to Facilities Management (FM) in these institutions remains largely reactive and custodial, lacking the strategic, professional character necessary to steward these assets effectively in the 21st century.

This study moves beyond merely diagnosing the problem to proposing a viable pathway forward. It critically examines the current FM practices at Bigard and St. Joseph Seminaries, framing the chronic underutilization of assets as a direct consequence of a professional FM deficit. By drawing on both international FM principles and the specific contextual challenges of Nigerian institutions, this paper makes a case for the professionalization of FM as a non-negotiable component of seminary administration. It culminates in a practical, phased model for integrating professional FM, arguing that such a transformation is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability, financial health, and formational efficacy of these vital ecclesial institutions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Catholic Major Seminaries in Nigeria face significant challenges due to the underutilization of assets, lack of professional FM, a reactive maintenance culture, economic losses, and deteriorating facilities. Currently, the seminary facility in the study areas is handled internally by the priests' formators,

seminarians, and domestic staff with very little or no knowledge on what facilities management actually entails. The resultant effect is now that the priest formators who are normally and primarily preoccupied with the duty of training the future priests are being distracted with the role of facilities management which they barely have the technical knowhow; and as well the seminarians who ordinarily should take their studies very serious are often distracted with the roles of facilities management functions. The Catholic major seminaries in the study area are currently battling with inadequate funding, poor maintenance culture and underutilization of its facilities which threatens their existence.

1.3.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to evaluate existing FM practices and propose a professionalized FM framework tailored for Catholic Major Seminaries.

1.3.2 Objectives

For successful completion of this research, the following objectives were pursuit, to:

1. assess existing FM practices within the Seminaries,
2. identify causes of facility deterioration,
3. examine operational inefficiencies in current practices and
4. propose a strategic FM model that addresses identified deficiencies.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions include:

1. What FM practices currently exist in the Seminaries?
2. What factors contribute to facility deterioration?
3. What are the operational inefficiencies in current practices?
4. How can the identified deficiencies be addressed?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of Facilities Management From Maintenance to Strategy

Globally, FM has evolved from a narrow focus on building upkeep to a multidisciplinary profession integral to organizational strategy. The International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) defines FM as "a profession that encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality, comfort, safety, and efficiency of the built environment by integrating people, place, process, and technology" (IFMA, 2013). This strategic view positions FM as critical to optimizing life-cycle costs, enhancing user productivity, and supporting the core objectives of the organization (Atkin & Brooks, 2015). In educational contexts, this translates to creating environments that actively support learning, community, and institutional mission.

2.2 The Nigerian Context and The "Maintenance Culture" Deficit

The Nigerian environment presents a well-documented challenge for facility stewardship. Scholars consistently identify a pervasive "poor maintenance culture" as a systemic issue affecting public and private sectors alike (Adewunmi et al., 2016). Research specific to Nigerian institutions highlights factors such as inadequate funding, reactive maintenance policies, use of non-specialist personnel, and a

lack of long-term planning (Omoregie & Radford, 2016). This context is crucial for understanding the operational realities of seminaries, which are not immune to these national trends. The situation is often exacerbated in religious institutions, where spiritual mission can inadvertently overshadow operational excellence, and budgetary priorities may favor immediate programmatic needs over long-term asset preservation.

2.3 FM in Religious and Educational Institutions

The management of religious institutional facilities carries a unique dimension: the theology of stewardship. The Catholic tradition emphasizes responsible care for creation and resources as a sacred trust (LS, 2015). Applying this to infrastructure implies that professional FM is not just good practice but a moral obligation. Meanwhile, studies on higher education management affirm that the quality of facilities directly impacts student satisfaction, recruitment, and institutional reputation (Cheng & Roberts, 2019). For seminaries, which are both religious and educational, the stakes are doubly high. Poorly managed facilities can undermine the holistic formational environment, sending a tacit message that contradicts the values of order, beauty, and stewardship being taught in the classroom.

3.0 Materials and Methods

This research adopted a qualitative, multiple-case study design to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the FM phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). A purposive sampling approach was adopted to collect data from key stakeholders, including facility managers and seminary staff. The validation of the instruments included expert review and pilot testing. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Data collection utilized triangulation methods, including interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observational studies. The two seminaries Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, and St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene; were selected as critical cases due to their prominence, comparable infrastructure, and shared ecclesiastical province.

Data collection was conducted in two phases between January and June 2025:

1. Semi-structured interviews: 15 interviews were held with key informants, including Rectors, Bursars, Estate Managers, and heads of departments responsible for specific facilities (e.g., bakery, water factory). Interviews focused on understanding management structures, decision-making processes, funding mechanisms, and perceived challenges.

2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Four FGDs were conducted with a total of 40 seminarians (20 from each institution) to gather user-perspective data on facility adequacy, reliability, and impact on their formational experience.

Direct Observation: A structured observational walkthrough was used to audit the physical condition and operational status of predetermined facilities.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, involving transcription, coding, and categorization of responses to identify

emergent themes related to FM practices, challenges, and opportunities.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Data Presentation and Analysis

S/N	Codes	Categories	Theme
1.	Reactive FM	Facility Management Challenges	Ineffective Operations
2.	Underutilization	Asset Management	Resource Waste
3.	Professional FM	Operational Efficiency	Strategic Alignment

4.1 Results

1. **Reactive FM Model:** Predominantly utilized, leading to inefficiencies and accumulating backlogs.
2. **Underutilization of Assets:** Facilities are often not used to their full potential, for instance, the bakery only produces the quantity that would serve the seminarians, and during seminary vacations , which sometimes spans for about three months, this machine is not usually put into use. .
3. **Lack of Professional FM**: Absence of trained professionals contributes to deterioration. This is true since there is no planned maintenance culture on ground at the moment.
4. **Effects on Pedagogy and Economy:** Poor FM practices hinder pedagogical outcomes and create financial burdens on the institutions.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Each finding will be elaborated upon with empirical support, drawing contrasts with prior studies. For instance, the reactive FM model's inefficiencies have been evidenced in similar studies globally, indicating a consistent trend of deterioration where professional management is deficient.

4.2.1 The State of Play: A Reactive and Custodial Model

The investigation found that FM at both seminaries is predominantly reactive. The primary trigger for action is equipment failure or a visible breakdown, rather than scheduled, preventive care. As one Bursar noted, "We operate a fire-brigade approach. When the water factory machine breaks down, we look for a technician to fix it. We don't have a schedule for servicing it." This approach aligns with the broader Nigerian maintenance deficit identified by Omoregie and Radford (2016).

The organizational structure further reinforces this model. Responsibility for facilities is typically fragmented among bursars (finance), nominated priests (supervision), and semi-skilled or unskilled manual staff. There is a conspicuous absence of a dedicated, trained FM professional who can develop and implement a strategic asset management plan. This leads to decisions based on short-term financial constraints rather than long-term value preservation.

4.2.2 The Consequences: Underutilization and Value Erosion

The lack of professional FM has direct, tangible consequences:

Economic Loss: The water production plants and bakeries, which have the potential to be significant revenue streams, were operating at 30-40% capacity. Frequent breakdowns, inconsistent raw material supply due to poor inventory management and a lack of marketing strategy render them financially suboptimal.

Accelerated Depreciation: The absence of preventive maintenance schedules for critical assets like electrical generators, water treatment systems, and library climate control systems leads to more frequent and severe breakdowns, shortening their useful life and increasing the total cost of ownership.

Pedagogical and Formational Impact: Seminarians reported frustrations with inconsistent water supply, malfunctioning laundry equipment, and poorly maintained recreational facilities. These "minor" inconveniences cumulatively create an environment of frustration that detracts from the intended peaceful and ordered atmosphere conducive to spiritual and intellectual formation.

4.2.3 The Root Cause: The Professional FM Gap

The central theme emerging from the data is a critical gap in professional FM expertise. While the staff are often dedicated, they lack the formal training in areas such as: Life-cycle costing analysis; Preventive and predictive maintenance methodologies; Strategic space management and utilization tracking; Contract management for specialized services; and Sustainability and energy efficiency practices. This gap means that institutional leadership lacks the expert advice needed to make informed decisions about their single largest physical and financial asset—the campus itself.

5.0 A Model for Enhancing FM: The Pathway to Professionalization

Addressing these challenges requires a systemic shift from a custodial to a strategic FM model. We propose a tripartite framework for action:

5.1 Phase 1: Strategic Foundation (Short-Term: 0-12 months)

Appoint a Facilities Manager: The most critical step. This should be a dedicated role filled by a qualified FM professional, not an additional duty for a priest or bursar. This person should report directly to the Rector or a designated member of the senior management team, giving FM a voice at the strategic level.

Conduct a Comprehensive Facility Condition Audit (FCA): A professional assessment of all assets to establish a baseline of their condition, quantify deferred maintenance, and provide data for future planning.

Develop a Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP): This living document should outline a 5-10 year vision for the physical plant, linking facility goals to the seminary's mission. It must include a prioritized list of projects, a life-cycle cost analysis, and a clear funding strategy.

5.2 Phase 2: Operational Transformation (Medium-Term: 1-3 years)

Implement a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS): This software will digitize work orders, schedule preventive maintenance, manage inventory, and provide data for performance measurement, moving the institution from a paper-based, reactive system to a data-driven, proactive one.

Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Move beyond measuring success by the absence of complaints. Implement KPIs such as Facility Availability Rate, Maintenance Backlog, and Energy Consumption per Square Meter.

Develop In-House Capacity: The professional FM should train existing maintenance staff, upgrading their skills and fostering a culture of professionalism and continuous improvement.

5.3 Phase 3: Cultural and Financial Integration (Long-Term: 3-5 years)

Embed Stewardship in Formation: Integrate the principles of responsible creation care and asset management into the seminary curriculum. Seminarians should understand that stewardship of parish facilities in their future ministry is a theological, not just a practical, duty.

Create a Sinking Fund for Capital Renewal: Allocate a small percentage (e.g., 2-3%) of the annual operating budget to a dedicated fund for major repairs and equipment replacement. This prevents the cycle of crisis funding and makes the SAMP financially viable.

Leverage Assets for Revenue: With professional management, underutilized assets like bakeries and water factories can be optimized to generate reliable auxiliary income, creating a virtuous cycle where facilities fund their own improvement.

6.0 Conclusion

The challenges of facilities management at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, and St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene, are significant but not insurmountable. They reflect a broader need for Nigerian institutions to embrace professional management practices across all operational domains. This study has demonstrated that the underutilization and deterioration of valuable seminary infrastructure is fundamentally a management issue, rooted in the absence of professional FM expertise and strategic foresight.

The proposed pathway to professionalization is more than a set of technical recommendations; it is a call for a change in mindset. It urges seminary administrators to view their physical plants not as a burden to be maintained, but as a strategic resource to be stewarded. By investing in professional FM, these seminaries can transform their campuses into more efficient, sustainable, and effective environments for forming the priests of tomorrow. In doing so, they will not only preserve financial resources but also bear witness to the very values of order, responsibility, and stewardship that lie at the heart of the Catholic faith. The future resilience and mission-effectiveness of these vital institutions may well depend on it.

Summary:

This study highlights the pressing need for professional FM practices in Catholic Major Seminaries. The findings indicate significant challenges, primarily due to inadequate asset management and a reactive maintenance culture.

The consequences of these deficiencies extend beyond mere facility management; they affect the educational missions of the institutions. Elevating FM practices can enhance overall operational efficiency.

A paradigm shift towards professionalizing FM in these seminaries is not only feasible but essential for their future sustainability and effectiveness in training leaders.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the findings of this study:

1. Short-term approach should be applied in conducting training sessions for FM staff to enhance their capacity.
2. There should be a mid-term implementation of regular audits of FM practices to identify inefficiencies.
3. It is therefore recommended to develop a strategic framework for continuous improvement in FM aligned with educational objectives.

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