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Uganda's Night-Time Economy: A Driver for Sustainable Economic Growth

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ABSTRACT

The night-time economy has been progressively acknowledged as a significant but insufficiently investigated catalyst for urban and national economic advancement, especially in developing nations. This research focused on Uganda's night-time economy as a catalyst for sustainable economic development. The primary aim of the study was to investigate the night-time economy as a facilitator of sustainable economic growth in Uganda. More specifically, the study aimed to comprehend the characteristics of Uganda's night-time economy, evaluate the factors influencing its performance, measure its impact on economic growth, and identify the obstacles hindering its progress.

The research employed a descriptive and analytical design, utilizing solely secondary data. Information was gathered from credible sources, such as government publications, reports from international organizations, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and statistical databases. The criteria for inclusion emphasized recent, pertinent, and trustworthy publications that discussed night-time economic activities, urban economies, informality, and economic growth, while excluding outdated, non-peer-reviewed, and irrelevant sources. The analysis of data was performed through thematic and content analysis, directed by the study's objectives to uncover patterns, relationships, and trends within the available literature and datasets.

The research indicated that Uganda's night-time economy is mainly informal and intricately connected to urban livelihoods, with primary activities focused on transport, hospitality, entertainment, food vending, and small-scale retail. The effectiveness of the night-time economy was determined to be heavily affected by the availability of infrastructure, regulatory and governance frameworks, security conditions, socioeconomic factors, and geographical location. Additionally, the study confirmed that the night-time economy plays a crucial role in job creation, income generation, livelihood diversification, urban efficiency, and tourism development, even though it is largely underrepresented in official economic statistics. Nevertheless, its expansion is hindered by infrastructural shortcomings, regulatory ambiguity, insecurity, limited access to financing, low purchasing power, and ongoing informality. The research determined that the night-time economy represents a significant yet underappreciated element of Uganda's economic framework, possessing considerable potential to foster inclusive and sustainable economic development. It suggested the enhancement of urban infrastructure, the improvement of regulatory consistency, the bolstering of security measures, the expansion of access to financial and digital services, and the incorporation of the night-time economy into urban planning and economic policy structures.

INTRODUCTION

The night-time economy (NTE) is defined as the set of economic, social, and cultural activities happening outside the typical working day, in the night-time period. According to recent academic understanding, the NTE is both an economic activity and an area of governance in relation to the impact of night-time on the socio-spatial dynamics of the city (Hollands, 2020; Shaw, 2023). It is highlighted within this area of research that the NTE is a function of leisure consumption, creative industry, and urban regeneration, and is subject to night-time economy governance frameworks and culture.

Within Low and Middle-Income Countries, including Uganda, research is increasingly showing the NTE can serve as a potential engine for urban productivity growth, small business expansion, and new job creation. It is apparent from local studies that late-night economic activity related to hospitality, road vending, transport, entertainment, and night markets makes a contribution to city budgets, domestic incomes, and tourism (ICPAU, 2024; KCCA, 2023). It is recommended by research that a functional NTE can reduce congestion in the daytime and enhance the use of city infrastructure with proper investment in lighting, transport, and safety infrastructure (UN-Habitat, 2022).

A night-time economy (NTE) measurement, especially in regions with a lack of information, must be carried out in a qualitative and spatially informed manner. This is evidenced by new evidence showing the effectiveness of night-time lighting derived from satellites in monitoring economic activity and night-time economy intensity in African cities (Ayala & Ma, 2023). Spatial night-time lighting analysis in Uganda reflects night-time economic activity concentration in Kampala and other towns, adding evidence with regard to the transformation and infrastructure-driven growth of cities worldwide (Mukwaya & Bamutaze, 2020; World Bank, 2024).

At the policy level, in the Ugandan context, three strategic areas have emerged for realizing the potential of the NTE: (a) investments in infrastructure related to lighting, mobility, and sanitation; (b) regulatory frameworks shaping licensing with a consideration of both order and economic potential; and (c) small businesses, which comprise the informal sector and drive the economy during night times (Gore and Muwonge, 2021; KCCA, 2023). Recent examples include Kampala's improved lighting projects and the revival of mobility services post-pandemic, showing the significant difference the infrastructure and regulatory frameworks can make to the performance and equity of the NTE's delivery (Ngoma and Kigozi, 2023).

However, despite its potential, the night-time economy in Uganda is faced with a wide range of serious challenges. Safety, lack of standardization in regulatory frameworks, lack of transport, and inadequacy in provision of services can be mentioned among these factors, according to Mallett et al., 2022. International authors warn, furthermore, that a night-time economy with uneven outcomes can pose significant challenges related to sound and health issues, alongside putting extra pressure on urban services if proper and coordinated planning is not carried out, according to Shaw, 2023.

Within this background, the purpose of the current research was to look into the night economy in Uganda with the objectives of: (a) explaining its characteristics; (b) explaining the determinants influencing its performance; (c) explaining its contribution to economic development; and (d) explaining the constraints inhibiting its growth. This research was able to produce valuable evidence-based insights aimed at helping policymakers and other actors seeking sustainable economic growth within Ugandan cities.

Background

The economy of cities is no longer confined within the typical boundaries of a day. There is a growing tendency towards dynamic night-time economy in hospitality, entertainment, retail, transport, and public services described jointly by the term night-time economy (NTE). The night-time economy is a significant concept in economic development in cities worldwide, being an important factor in employment, tourism, cultural entrepreneurship, and social activity described by Shaw (2023) and Hollands (2020). The night-time economy is an economic activity that affects the socio-spatial ordering of the city, influencing the mobility, safety, compliance, and use of infrastructure of cities.

In developing nations and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, the NTE has emerged increasingly as a strategy for promoting urbanization and poverty reduction. Smaller businesses and informal businesses, especially those that form the backbone of the NTE sector, rely heavily on late operating times in order to satisfy the needs of young city dwellers, tourism clients, and people who work non-traditional jobs (Gore & Muwonge, 2021). According to UN-Habitat, a dynamic night-time economy can increase the income of households, foster economic growth, and maximize the use of infrastructure in the city, given adequate investment in lighting, transport, and sustainable night-time economy infrastructure, among others (UN-Habitat, 2022).

A prime example of the night-time economy's potential is seen in the Ugandan experience. Kampala, Wakiso, Mbarara, and Gulu have high agglomeration sites of night-time economy businesses such as bars, food joints, night markets, entertainment, and motorbike taxi services. Such businesses form a big part of the city's economy, especially where job creation is a concern (Mukwaya and Bamutaze, 2020; World Bank, 2024). New evidence shows night-time economy businesses earn income and enhance movement within the city by relieving congestion during the day, which shows a better utilization of the city's space and resources (ICPAU, 2024; KCCA, 2023).

Despite the potential, however, the observation and management of the NTE in Uganda have faced numerous challenges related to data availability, which is a constraint in estimating its economic value. However, new techniques such as the use of night-time light intensity from satellites have improved the ability to estimate economic activity and regions with high night-time economic activity density and main night-time economic activity routes with high intensity levels (Ayala and Ma, 2023). This is because night-time economic activity is mostly concentrated in regions of high infrastructure density, marking the dependence of urban planning and economic activity for economic growth and development.

A Night-Time Economy (NTE) in Uganda is impacted by a series of both structural and institutional constraints. Inadequate lighting, lack of access to transport, lack of consistent enforcement of regulations, lack of sanitation, and attitudes related to safety directly impact the accessibility, social equity, and viability of a night-time economy (UN-Habitat, 2022; Mallett et al., 2022). Global best practices show that without a committed framework of governance and planning, a series of potential risks associated with a night-time economy may negatively impact the benefits derived from such an economy, including risks associated with disorder, noise, and disease (Shaw, 2023).

It is therefore paramount for decision-makers and development agencies to grasp the dynamics of the NTE in Uganda in order to fully appreciate its potential. This might greatly aid in understanding the characteristics and factors influencing night economic activity, the level and pattern of employment and financial contribution, among other aspects, within the NTE as well as the challenges inhibiting sustainable growth within this sector.

Problem statement

Uganda's NTE is gradually emerging as a peculiar contributor to employment creation, urban vibrancy, tourism, and services sector growth; however, it has remained marginal in research and policy discourse. According to the national accounts, the services sector, within which night-time hospitality, entertainment, and transport activities fall, contributed 42.4% of Uganda's GDP in 2022/23 (Sqoop, 2025). Similarly, the tourism industry, whose expenditure patterns heavily include night-time activities like hospitality, entertainment, and cultural events, generated UGX 6,061 billion in 2023, contributing 3.2% to national GDP (UBOS, 2025). These figures underscore the economic significance of service-driven activities, but they do not disaggregate night-time contributions, leaving an important evidence gap.

Emerging empirical observations in Uganda illustrate the potential magnitude of its NTE. For example, comments by the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Uganda highlight the fact that businesses operating between 6 pm and 6 am, such as bars, night restaurants, events, transport, and security services, are significant sources of income for micro and small enterprises and absorb a high proportion of informal-sector labour (ICPAU, 2024). Large cultural events, such as the Nyege Nyege Festival, reveal the economic multiplier effect of night-time leisure, where, for example, government reports show that hotel occupancy rises, room rates increase, and local business revenues expand during festival periods (Africa Business, 2025). Such examples indicate that Uganda's NTE has strong potential to enhance urban competitiveness, stimulate tourism, and create livelihoods for youth and informal workers.

Despite this promise, the NTE remains poorly understood, largely informal, and weakly integrated into urban and national economic planning. Existing datasets by UBOS and sector agencies do not isolate night-time activities. This makes it difficult to quantify employment, revenue, productivity, or sectoral linkages that are particular to night-time enterprises. In addition, regulatory pressures, such as the stepped-up enforcement of noise pollution regulations by NEMA, have placed many nightlife businesses under strain, affecting operations, compliance costs, and ultimately business survival.

These are unresolved gaps that create a very strong justification for undertaking systematic, empirical research on the structure, determinants, contribution, and constraints of Uganda's nighttime economy. With such evidence absent, policymakers, urban planners, and local governments cannot have the analytical basis on which to design and establish supportive regulatory systems, create inclusive urban strategies, and tap the NTE as a viable driver of sustainable economic growth. This study sought to generate the data and insights required to position the NTE as a strategic and productive component within Uganda's socio-economic development agenda.

General Objective

To explore the night-time economy as a driver for sustainable economic growth in Uganda

Specific Objectives of the study

1. To understand the nature of Uganda's night-time economy
2. To examine the determinants of the performance of the night-time economy in Uganda
3. To assess the contribution of the night-time economy to Uganda's economic growth
4. To analyze the bottlenecks to the growth of Uganda's night-time economy

Research Questions

1. What is the nature and structure of Uganda's night-time economy?
2. What determinants influence the performance of the night-time economy in Uganda?
3. How does the night-time economy contribute to Uganda's economic growth?
4. What bottlenecks hinder the growth and sustainability of Uganda's night-time economy?

Scope of the Study

This research was confined regarding its content, geographical scope, and temporal parameters to facilitate a concentrated and coherent examination of Uganda's night-time economy. The defined scope outlines the thematic limits of the study, the geographical regions from which data is collected, and the timeframe during which the phenomena under investigation take place. These boundaries inform the methodological decisions and provide context for the interpretation of the results.

Content Scope

The study's content was confined to themes that are directly related to both the general and specific objectives. It examines the nature and attributes of Uganda's night-time economy, the elements that affect its performance, its role in promoting sustainable economic growth, and the barriers that hinder its advancement. In tackling these thematic areas, the study emphasizes critical sectors including hospitality, entertainment, transport, retail trade, and informal commerce. Additionally, it considers governance, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructural conditions that influence the operation and results of night-time economic activities.

Geographical Scope

The study's geographical focus was limited to specific urban centers in Uganda, namely Kampala, Wakiso, Mbarara, and Gulu. These areas have been selected due to their relatively vibrant and diverse night-time economies, which makes them ideal for analyzing differences in nocturnal economic activities across various urban settings. This selection facilitates a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of night-time economies within the urban landscape of Uganda.

Time Scope

The temporal scope of the research encompassed the years 2020 to 2025. This period reflects the changes in night-time economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following recovery phase, and the introduction of recent policy and regulatory measures impacting the sector. By concentrating on this timeframe, the study was able to examine current developments and evaluate recent trends in the progression of Uganda's night-time economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This research was grounded in Urban Governance Theory, a framework most notably proposed by Gerry Stoker in his influential publication The Governance of Urban Areas (1998). Stoker defined urban governance as the collaborative process through which public, private, and civic stakeholders collectively influence the management, regulation, and development of urban environments. The theory is based on the premise that urban results are no longer generated solely through hierarchical state authority, but rather through networks of participants whose interactions, negotiations, and power dynamics dictate the functioning of cities (Stoker, 1998). This viewpoint was subsequently elaborated upon by Pierre (2000, 2011), who highlighted that governance entails the strategic coordination of institutions, policy tools, and urban coalitions to attain desired economic and social results.

One of the fundamental premises of Urban Governance Theory is that urban economies-whether they operate during the day or at night are influenced by institutional capacity, regulatory frameworks, infrastructural investments, and political relationships. This theory posits that economic activities within urban areas are integrated into governance structures that affect access to urban space, the degree of regulation, enforcement patterns, and the allocation of opportunities among both formal and informal participants.

Harvey's (1989) explanation of entrepreneurial urban governance further indicates that modern cities strategically utilize cultural, entertainment, and leisure economies, including nighttime activities, to foster growth and enhance competitiveness. These premises suggest that the vitality and effectiveness of the nighttime economy rely not solely on market demand but also on the manner in which city authorities oversee licensing, infrastructure, policing, spatial planning, and engagement with the informal sector.

Urban Governance Theory has been extensively utilized to investigate nighttime economies in both developed and developing settings. In the United Kingdom, Shaw (2010) employed the theory to analyze how regulatory frameworks and policing methods influenced the social dynamics of nightlife areas. Roberts and Eldridge (2009) utilized it to elucidate how municipal planning structures impacted nighttime entertainment and transportation systems. In African cities, Watson (2014) and Meagher (2018) applied governance perspectives to examine how local authorities regulated, constrained, or facilitated informal economic activities. More recently, UN-Habitat (2022) embraced an urban governance perspective to evaluate how infrastructural shortcomings, ineffective enforcement mechanisms, and disjointed planning institutions affected urban informal economies in East Africa. These instances illustrate the theory's effectiveness in comprehending how institutional arrangements shape nighttime economic activities, especially in contexts where informal enterprises are prevalent.

Despite its extensive use, the theory has faced numerous criticisms. Some academics have claimed that the notion of urban governance is excessively normative and lacks sufficient grounding in local political economies, particularly in African settings where informal systems compete with formal institutions (Beall & Goodfellow, 2014). Others argue that the theory occasionally places too much emphasis on collaboration among stakeholders, neglecting the power imbalances, patronage networks, and coercive regulations that influence urban economic activities (Pieterse, 2011). Furthermore, critics have pointed out that governance frameworks fail to adequately reflect the lived experiences of informal workers who navigate urban challenges without formal acknowledgment (Resnick, 2020). Nonetheless, these criticisms have reinforced the theory by advocating for contextualized and hybrid interpretations that incorporate both formal and informal governance practices.

Urban Governance Theory played a crucial role in guiding the current study in several significant ways. Firstly, it established a conceptual framework for examining the structure and operation of Uganda's night-time economy, which is influenced by licensing systems, security management, infrastructural investments, and informal regulations enacted by local associations and community stakeholders. Moreover, the theory provided a perspective for understanding the factors affecting performance, especially regarding how institutional capacity, political coordination, and regulatory enforcement impacted nocturnal business activities.

Additionally, it offered a structure for identifying the obstacles that hindered the night-time economy, such as inconsistent enforcement of bylaws, insufficient street lighting, security deficiencies, and limited public transport options. Lastly, the theory was well-suited to the Ugandan context as it recognizes the coexistence of formal and informal governance systems, which is a defining feature of urban economic life in cities like Kampala, Wakiso, Gulu, and other secondary urban areas.

In conclusion, Urban Governance Theory provided a solid and contextually pertinent foundation for analyzing the night-time economy in Uganda by connecting economic activities to municipal governance frameworks, regulatory practices, and urban infrastructure conditions. Its focus on institutional arrangements and actor networks was closely aligned with the study's objectives and the realities of Uganda's urban environment.

Nature of the Night-Time Economy

Seijas and Gelders (2021) presented one of the most comprehensive contemporary analyses of how cities have established governance roles and bodies to manage night-time activities. Their comparative study of night mayors and associated governance structures illustrated that numerous cities have started to view the night not merely as a time to be controlled but as a unique policy area that necessitates focused institutional oversight. Seijas and Gelders contended that the institutional recognition afforded to the night both mirrored and bolstered the economic importance of activities occurring after dark: nightlife, hospitality, late retail, arts and culture, and late-shift services were not marginal but integral to urban economic strategies. Consequently, their research redefined the night-time economy as a multifunctional urban subsystem characterized by economic, cultural, and regulatory dimensions, demonstrating how the structure and governance of night-time economies differed across cities based on local political alliances, regulatory capabilities, and cultural standards (Seijas & Gelders, 2021).

Building upon the governance shift, Acuto, Seijas, Edwards, and Bassett (2024) investigated the emergence and operational functions of night commissions and advisory groups across a variety of cities. They recorded that these entities frequently served as convening platforms where municipal officials, cultural entrepreneurs, law enforcement, transport providers, and community representatives engaged in discussions regarding the usage and regulation of night-time spaces. Their empirical study revealed that night-time economies consisted of a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from regulated hospitality and creative sectors to informal night markets and transport services, with the relative significance of each activity being influenced by the types of inter-actor coordination facilitated (or hindered) by these commissions. Crucially, for a comprehensive understanding of the nature of these economies, Acuto et al. illustrated that night-time economies were assemblages: they arose from interactions among infrastructure (such as lighting and transport), institutions (including licensing and policing), market participants (like bars, markets, and ride services), and social practices (such as informal vending and nightlife culture) (Acuto et al., 2024).

The 2022 report from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, titled “The State of African Cities 2022”, provided context for night-time economic activities within the larger framework of urbanization and informality trends across the continent. UN-Habitat noted that in numerous African cities, a significant portion of activities occurring after dark were focused on livelihoods rather than solely for leisure: street food vending, night markets, informal transportation, small retail operations, and late-shift jobs often served as essential survival strategies for urban households. The report highlighted that the night-time economy (NTE) in African settings thus intertwined cultural consumption with subsistence livelihoods, with its spatial manifestation frequently spread across informal settlements, transport corridors, and designated entertainment areas. UN-Habitat’s analysis clarified that the characteristics of the NTE in Africa could not be adequately represented by models based solely on high-income cities; rather, it demonstrated high degrees of informality, multifunctionality, and adaptive utilization of urban spaces (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Gibson, Olivia, Boe-Gibson, and Li (2021) explored a methodological aspect crucial to examining the night-time economy (NTE) in data-scarce environments: utilizing satellite night-time lights as an indicator of economic activity after dark. They conducted a comparison between the older DMSP night lights and the more recent VIIRS products, demonstrating that the selection of sensor significantly influenced conclusions regarding the locations and intensity of night-time economic activities. Consequently, their research shaped how scholars understood and quantified the night-time economy in areas that lack administrative statistics on time-of-day economic activities, illustrating that remote sensing can uncover spatial distributions of nocturnal activities while also warning against excessive dependence on a single type of sensor. In regions like Uganda, where official breakdowns of economic activities by hour are infrequent, the methodological insights provided by Gibson et al. were vital in supporting the use of night-light proxies, while also emphasizing the necessity for thorough validation and cross-referencing with qualitative data collected on-site (Gibson et al., 2021).

Zheng et al., (2023) synthesized advancements in night-time lights remote sensing for urban applications and emphasized the complex significance of nocturnal illumination. Their review contended that night lights captured a variety of phenomena, ranging from formal commercial centers and transport hubs to residential electrification and informal night markets. They argued that to analytically separate these signals, it was necessary to combine night-light indices with land-use, mobility, and demographic data. Zheng et al. (2023) also underscored the ability of high-resolution NTL products to map smaller nocturnal clusters, such as entertainment corridors or market streets, which were previously obscured in coarser products. This capability refines the empirical understanding of what constitutes a Night-Time Economy (NTE). Consequently, the review proposed that the 'nature' of the NTE could be effectively explored as a spatial pattern of nocturnal intensity and diversity, which can be detected using modern remote sensing techniques when complemented with socio-economic datasets (Zheng et al., 2023).

Regionally focused research on urban informality and nighttime activities has further elucidated the characteristics of the NTE. The WIEGO statistical brief (Workers in Informal Employment in Uganda: A Statistical Profile, 2018–2021) revealed that urban employment in Uganda was predominantly informal, with numerous informal livelihoods operating during extended hours. WIEGO’s data synthesis highlighted that in Kampala and other urban areas, informal retail, food vending, and transport services constituted essential elements of urban economic life, often occurring in the evenings and at night. Consequently, the WIEGO analysis reinforced the perspective that the NTE in Uganda was primarily characterized by informal, labor-intensive activities that offered flexible income opportunities, yet frequently lacked regulatory recognition, social protection, or stable earnings (WIEGO, 2025).

City-level studies have also revealed the local dynamics of night-time activities, the 2023 economic profile of Kampala Capital City Authority highlighted clusters of nocturnal commercial activities concentrated in specific neighborhoods such as Kabalagala, Bugolobi, and certain areas of the central business district. The KCCA report detailed the combination of registered hospitality establishments, informal night markets, and transport-related services (particularly boda-boda stands and taxi parks) that collectively produced economic activity during late hours. Additionally, KCCA observed that the nature of the night-time economy was influenced by municipal regulations, local infrastructure (including street lighting and sanitation), and policing patterns, demonstrating institutionally mediated differences within Uganda's capital (KCCA, 2023).

Ultimately, analyses and commentaries from the World Bank regarding Uganda's urban economy (World Bank, 2024) positioned the Night-Time Economy (NTE) within the larger context of urban agglomeration and structural transformation. The World Bank's findings emphasized that Kampala accounted for an outsized portion of the national economic output, with urban service sectors, many of which exhibit considerable activity after dark, such as hospitality, retail, and transport playing a crucial role in this economic performance. Furthermore, World Bank research highlighted that the composition of the NTE illustrated the diversification of the urban economy: formal hospitality and tourism establishments coexisted alongside informal night markets and transport services, with each sector contributing uniquely to employment, household income, and urban vibrancy. This perspective reinforced the notion that Uganda's night-time economy is multisectoral and integrated within both formal and informal urban frameworks (World Bank, 2024).

Determinants of the Performance of the Night-Time Economy

Recent research has consistently shown that the effectiveness of the night-time economy is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of governance, infrastructure, security, socioeconomic factors, and technological systems. Seijas and Gelders (2021) highlighted governance capacity as a crucial determinant, contending that cities with well-coordinated night-time governance frameworks experienced more stable and productive nighttime economic activities. Their comparative analysis revealed that in areas where local governments effectively coordinated licensing, transportation, policing, and cultural initiatives, nighttime enterprises were more likely to prosper. In contrast, disjointed institutional frameworks resulted in regulatory ambiguity, inconsistent enforcement, and hindered investment. This conclusion emphasized that performance is not solely driven by demand but is significantly shaped by institutional coherence.

The quality of infrastructure has been extensively recognized as a vital factor influencing economic performance during nighttime. UN-Habitat (2022) highlighted that, elements such as street lighting, dependable electricity, road conditions, sanitation, and the availability of public transport play a crucial role in determining both business activities and consumer engagement after dark. The report illustrated that insufficient infrastructure particularly hindered informal workers and small enterprises, restricting their operating hours and heightening their vulnerability to crime and accidents. In African cities, where infrastructure deficiencies are notably significant, nighttime economic performance has been found to be particularly responsive to public investment choices, especially in transport corridors and commercial areas.

Security conditions represent another significant factor emphasized throughout the literature. Roberts, Eldridge, and Schofield (2022) investigated night-time economies in various global cities and discovered that perceptions of safety were as impactful as actual crime rates in influencing nighttime participation. Their research indicated that effective policing strategies, a visible security presence, and gender-sensitive safety measures greatly improved consumer confidence and the viability of businesses. Conversely, environments marked by harassment, theft, or violence deterred both employees and customers, resulting in early business closures and diminished economic activity. These results resonate profoundly within African urban settings, where nighttime insecurity continues to be a pressing issue.

The socioeconomic structure and demographic makeup have been demonstrated to affect nighttime economic performance. The World Bank (2024) emphasized that youthful urban populations create a significant demand for nighttime services, including entertainment, transportation, and food vending. In Uganda, where more than three-quarters of the population is below 35 years of age, this demographic profile establishes a substantial potential market for nighttime activities. Nevertheless, the World Bank further indicated that elevated unemployment rates and income instability restrict purchasing power, implying that nighttime economies in such environments frequently depend on low-cost, informal consumption rather than upscale leisure services. Consequently, performance is influenced by both the size of demand and the distribution of income.

The regulatory landscape is a significant factor often highlighted in contemporary research. Goodfellow and Ssamula (2021), through their comparative study of Kampala and Kigali, illustrated that licensing policies, restrictions on operating hours, and methods of enforcement had substantial impacts on nighttime economic activities. In Kampala, erratic enforcement and subjective regulations generated uncertainty for enterprises, whereas in Kigali, more consistent regulatory frameworks enabled extended operating hours and increased private investment. The research concluded that clarity and equity in regulations were crucial for enhancing nighttime economic performance, especially in urban areas with extensive informal sectors.

Technological systems, particularly in the realms of digital finance and mobility platforms, have been increasingly recognized as key factors that enhance performance. Both the World Bank (2024) and UN-Habitat (2022) observed that mobile money, cashless payment systems, and ride-hailing applications have mitigated transaction risks, improved safety, and broadened market access for businesses operating at night. These technologies have allowed consumers to conduct transactions without the need for cash and have promoted safer mobility during nighttime hours. In cities across East Africa, digital platforms have proven to be particularly vital for informal nighttime workers, boosting efficiency and decreasing their vulnerability.

The availability and cost of transportation have been thoroughly examined in existing literature. Acuto et al. (2024) contended that the success of night-time economies is significantly reliant on mobility systems that operate during extended hours, which encompass public transport, informal taxis, and motorcycle services. Their research indicated that in areas where transport services ended early, there was a marked decline in nighttime economic activities, irrespective of demand. In cities like Kampala, boda-bodas are essential for maintaining nighttime commerce, as they allow both workers and consumers to navigate the city safely and with flexibility. Consequently, transport limitations were demonstrated to directly restrict spatial reach and operational hours.

Cultural norms and societal perceptions significantly impact the economic performance during nighttime hours. Shaw (2022) noted that moral narratives linking nightlife to deviance, noise, or disorder frequently provided justification for restrictive policies that hindered economic activity. In more conservative environments, nighttime enterprises encountered social opposition and increased regulation, which diminished profitability and deterred formalization. This observation is especially pertinent in Uganda, where cultural and religious norms occasionally clash with nightlife activities, influencing both consumer behavior and regulatory actions.

Contribution of the Night-Time Economy to Economic Growth

Recent studies have increasingly acknowledged the night-time economy as a vital factor in driving urban and national economic growth through job creation, income generation, productivity improvement, and the encouragement of related sectors. Seijas and Gelders (2021) contended that nighttime economic activities expand the productive capacity of cities beyond traditional working hours, thus optimizing the use of urban infrastructure and space. Their research illustrated that cities that actively promoted night-time economic activities saw greater business density, job creation, and cultural output. The authors stressed that nighttime economies ought to be viewed as systems that enhance growth rather than as marginal leisure sectors, as they produce multiplier effects across hospitality, transport, retail, and creative industries.

Empirical evidence from the United Kingdom and other developed economies has demonstrated that nighttime economies play a significant role in contributing to gross domestic product and employment. While recognizing the contextual variations, Roberts, Eldridge, and Schofield (2022) observed that these contributions stem from analogous mechanisms across various cities, which include extended operating hours, heightened consumer expenditure, and the aggregation of complementary services. Their research emphasized that nighttime economies yield both direct economic advantages, such as wages and business income, as well as indirect benefits through supply chains, security services, logistics, and maintenance. These dynamics offer a conceptual framework for comprehending how similar processes might function, albeit on different scales, in developing urban environments.

In developing nations, the role of the night-time economy is intricately connected to the informal sector. Meagher (2020) illustrated that informal nighttime activities are essential for maintaining urban livelihoods by accommodating surplus labor and offering income opportunities for individuals marginalized from formal employment. The research highlighted that nighttime work allows households to diversify their income streams and stabilize consumption, especially in economies marked by underemployment and fluctuating income. Although this contribution is frequently overlooked in national accounts, it constitutes a significant portion of urban economic activity and bolsters economic resilience at the household level.

The World Bank (2024) presented evidence specific to Uganda regarding the impact of urban service sectors on economic growth. The report emphasized that Kampala accounted for more than one-third of Uganda's gross domestic product, with service industries, many of which function significantly during nighttime playing a crucial role in this contribution. Key drivers of urban employment and consumption included hospitality, entertainment, transport, and retail services. While the report did not break down output by time of day, it clearly stated that longer operating hours enhanced turnover and job opportunities, thereby indicating the indirect contribution of nighttime economic activities to growth.

UN-Habitat (2022) further reported that the night-time economies in African cities played a crucial role in generating employment, especially for young people and women. The report highlighted that, areas such as street food vending, night markets, informal transportation, and entertainment offered accessible pathways into the urban economy. These activities were demonstrated to foster local economic circulation by keeping income within communities and aiding micro-enterprises. UN-Habitat contended that acknowledging and promoting nighttime economic activities could bolster inclusive growth by incorporating marginalized groups into urban economic frameworks.

Technological advancements have significantly enhanced the growth impact of nighttime economies. As reported by the World Bank (2024), the rise of mobile money and digital platforms in East Africa has made nighttime transactions safer and more efficient, leading to increased business volumes and lower operational risks. Digital payment systems have empowered small businesses to expand their operations, monitor sales, and obtain credit, which in turn boosts productivity and income generation. These technological connections reinforce the role of nighttime economies in contributing to overall economic growth by enhancing efficiency and market accessibility.

Cultural and creative industries have surfaced as an additional avenue through which nighttime economies foster growth. Acuto et al. (2024) noted that nighttime cultural engagements, including music, performances, and nightlife events, are becoming increasingly significant in city branding, attracting tourism, and providing creative employment opportunities. Their research illustrated that, cities utilizing nighttime culture as an economic resource drew both domestic and international visitors, consequently generating revenue and invigorating associated sectors such as accommodation, transportation, and food services. This approach is especially pertinent for Uganda, where music and entertainment constitute key urban economic activities.

Ultimately, research utilizing nighttime illumination as indicators of economic activity has yielded macro-level insights into the connection between nocturnal engagement and economic growth. Gibson et al. (2021) demonstrated that rises in nighttime light intensity were significantly associated with economic development, particularly in data-limited settings. While recognizing methodological constraints, the authors illustrated that nighttime economic activity has a measurable impact on overall economic performance. This methodology has been extensively employed in developing nations, providing indirect validation of the growth-promoting function of economic activities conducted after dark.

Therefore, the existing literature suggests that the nighttime economy plays a role in economic growth by generating employment, diversifying income sources, enhancing urban productivity, supporting informal livelihoods, and fostering the growth of service and creative industries. Although its complete impact is frequently underrepresented in official statistics, findings from recent research indicate that nighttime economic activity constitutes a vital yet underestimated element of urban economic development in Uganda and similar environments.

Bottlenecks to the Growth of Night-Time Economy

Recent studies have highlighted various structural, institutional, and social barriers that hinder the development and sustainability of night-time economies, especially in cities located in the Global South. Seijas and Gelders (2021) contended that inadequate governance coordination is one of the primary obstacles. Their comparative analysis revealed that in cities where the responsibilities for licensing, security, transportation, and cultural programming were dispersed among several agencies, nighttime economic activities experienced regulatory ambiguity and inconsistent enforcement. Businesses encountered unclear operating conditions, which deterred investment and restricted growth. The authors underscored that the lack of cohesive night-time governance frameworks limited the sector's potential for growth.

Infrastructure deficiencies have been extensively recorded as a significant obstacle to economic development during nighttime hours. According to UN-Habitat (2022), insufficient street lighting, inconsistent electricity supply, substandard road conditions, and inadequate sanitation facilities severely limited nighttime activities in African urban areas. These infrastructural inadequacies raised operational expenses for businesses and increased safety hazards for both workers and consumers. The report also highlighted that informal nighttime businesses were especially at risk, as they did not possess the means to mitigate the impacts of public infrastructure shortcomings, resulting in decreased operating hours and diminished productivity.

Security challenges represent a significant obstacle identified in the literature. Roberts, Eldridge, and Schofield (2022) noted that the fear of crime, along with real occurrences of theft, assault, and harassment, deterred participation during nighttime hours and diminished economic activity after dark. Their research highlighted that, women and informal workers were particularly vulnerable to nighttime insecurity, which restricted labor supply and consumer demand. In numerous developing cities, insufficient night patrols and inadequate lighting intensified these dangers, leading to earlier business closures and hindering sectoral growth.

Regulatory limitations and inconsistent enforcement practices have been found to hinder nighttime economic activities. Goodfellow and Ssamula (2021), in their examination of Kampala and Kigali, illustrated that discretionary enforcement of bylaws, erratic licensing systems, and intermittent crackdowns on informal traders weakened business stability in Kampala. The research emphasized that although regulations were frequently defended on the basis of public order, their uneven implementation raised compliance costs and dissuaded formalization. Such regulatory conditions restricted the scalability and sustainability of nighttime businesses.

Socio-cultural resistance to nightlife constitutes an additional obstacle. Shaw (2022) posited that moral and cultural narratives frequently depicted nighttime activities as deviant or socially unacceptable, which led to restrictive policies and public dissent. These narratives were demonstrated to affect political decision-making, culminating in curfews, noise regulations, and restrictions on operating hours. In more conservative environments, such views hindered the diversification of nighttime economic activities and diminished opportunities for cultural and creative expression.

Limited access to financing has further impeded the expansion of nighttime enterprises, especially small and informal businesses. The World Bank (2024) indicated that numerous urban micro-entrepreneurs faced challenges in obtaining credit due to their informal status, inconsistent income sources, and insufficient collateral. These limitations curtailed investments in equipment, security, and infrastructure enhancements that could improve nighttime productivity. The report highlighted that financial exclusion restricted the ability of nighttime businesses to grow beyond mere subsistence levels.

Transport limitations have been recognized as major obstacles. Acuto et al. (2024) illustrated that insufficient late-night transportation services constrained the geographical extent and operational hours of nighttime economies. In instances where public transport ended prematurely and informal transport was inadequately regulated, both employees and consumers encountered mobility issues. In urban areas like Kampala, dependence on boda-bodas alleviated certain constraints but simultaneously presented safety and cost-related challenges, hindering the expansion of nighttime activities.

Ultimately, data and policy blind spots were recognized as systemic obstacles. Gibson et al. (2021) observed that the lack of time-disaggregated economic data resulted in the underrepresentation of nighttime activities in official statistics and policy frameworks. This lack of visibility hindered evidence-based policymaking and targeted investments. In the absence of dependable data, governments found it challenging to justify infrastructure expenditures and regulatory reforms intended to bolster nighttime economies, thereby perpetuating a cycle of neglect.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature that has been reviewed has reached a consensus on the notion that the night-time economy represents a complex urban phenomenon that includes both formal and informal activities such as hospitality, entertainment, transport, retail, cultural production, and street-based commerce. Across various contexts, researchers have consistently concurred that night-time economic activities enhance urban productivity beyond conventional working hours and significantly contribute to job creation, income generation, and urban vibrancy. Additionally, there is a strong agreement that the effectiveness and sustainability of the night-time economy are influenced by governance structures, the quality of infrastructure, security conditions, and the availability of transport. Further studies have also acknowledged that nighttime economic activities are especially vital for youth and informal workers, particularly in the rapidly urbanizing cities of the Global South.

Despite these areas of consensus, the literature has uncovered significant differences in the conceptualization and assessment of the night-time economy across various contexts. A considerable portion of the literature originating from high-income nations has underscored leisure, nightlife, and cultural consumption as key characteristics of the night-time economy, frequently portraying it as a mechanism for city branding and tourism enhancement. Conversely, research centered on African and other developing urban areas has pointed to livelihood-focused and informal activities as essential elements of nighttime economies. Differences were also apparent in policy viewpoints, with some researchers advocating for more stringent regulations to mitigate social risks, while others highlighted the importance of flexible governance strategies to foster inclusion and economic resilience. These disparities mirrored contextual differences in urban structure, institutional capabilities, and socioeconomic circumstances.

The literature revealed several significant gaps. Firstly, there was a scarcity of empirical research specifically targeting Uganda's night-time economy, with most insights being drawn from broader studies conducted in Africa or globally. Secondly, only a few studies have systematically analyzed the night-time economy using secondary data over prolonged periods, leading to a limited comprehension of temporal trends and post-pandemic dynamics. Thirdly, the role of nighttime economic activities in contributing to macroeconomic growth has remained insufficiently explored, especially in contexts where informal activities prevail and official statistics do not provide time-based disaggregation. Lastly, there was a conspicuous absence of integrative studies that concurrently investigated the nature, determinants, contributions, and obstacles of the night-time economy within a unified analytical framework. These deficiencies highlighted the necessity for the current study and validated its emphasis on Uganda's night-time economy as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research utilized a descriptive and analytical research framework. This framework was deemed suitable as it enabled the researcher to depict current phenomena and assess relationships between variables utilizing pre-existing data. Descriptive frameworks have often been employed in investigations of urban economies and informal sector dynamics, as they facilitate the systematic analysis of recorded evidence (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). The analytical aspect aided in interpreting patterns and trends within Uganda's night-time economy, aligning with methodologies used in comparable studies on urban economic systems (Ayala & Ma, 2023).

Data Sources

The research was entirely based on secondary data sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, institutional publications, and documents generated by international organizations. Key sources comprised reports from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the Kampala Capital City Authority, the World Bank, and UN-Habitat. Additionally, secondary academic literature from journals such as Urban Studies, Journal of Urban Affairs, and Environment and Urbanization contributed to the analysis. The dependence on secondary data adhered to academic recommendations indicating that secondary sources are appropriate for studies that aim to synthesize existing knowledge and assess trends over time (Vartanian, 2010). Only publications released between 2020 and 2025 were emphasized to guarantee that the findings represented current post-pandemic developments in Uganda.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study applied predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the secondary evidence was relevant, credible and sufficiently transparent for analysis. Sources were included when they met one or more of the following conditions: (i) they provided direct evidence concerning Uganda's night-time economic activities; (ii) they examined urban economic activities, informality, governance, infrastructure, mobility or employment relevant to the operation of the NTE; (iii) they provided official statistics that could serve as contextual indicators for sectors connected to night-time activity; or (iv) they provided comparable evidence from African urban settings that could assist interpretation of Uganda-specific findings.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, official government publications, institutional reports and publications from reputable international organizations. The principal publication period was 2020–2025.

Earlier sources were retained only where they were necessary to establish theoretical or conceptual foundations.

Sources were excluded where they were unverifiable, methodologically weak, unrelated to the study objectives, duplicative, or lacked sufficient information to support interpretation. General sectoral statistics were not excluded merely because they did not measure the NTE directly; instead, they were classified as contextual evidence and were not used as direct estimates of night-time economic output.

This distinction was maintained throughout the analysis so that evidence relating specifically to Uganda's NTE could be separated from broader indicators relating to tourism, services, informal employment, urban GDP and other related sectors.

Data Analysis

The selected secondary evidence was analysed using qualitative content analysis and descriptive interpretation of available numerical indicators. Qualitative content analysis involved systematic reading of the selected documents, identification of recurring concepts and themes, comparison of evidence across sources, and organization of findings according to the four study objectives: the nature of the NTE, determinants of its performance, its contribution to economic growth, and bottlenecks to its development.

During analysis, evidence was classified as either direct NTE evidence or contextual evidence. Direct NTE evidence referred to information explicitly describing economic activities occurring during night-time hours in Uganda, including evidence on night-time businesses, workers, transport, hospitality, entertainment, markets and other nocturnal activities. Contextual evidence referred to broader statistics or indicators relating to sectors that overlap with the NTE, including total services-sector output, tourism receipts, Kampala's overall economic contribution, informal employment and the size of the informal economy.

Numerical indicators were descriptively interpreted only within the scope supported by their original sources. For example, national services-sector GDP and tourism statistics were used to demonstrate the importance of the wider economic sectors in which many night-time activities operate, but were not treated as measurements of the NTE itself. Where sources provided Uganda-specific evidence directly related to night-time activities, such evidence was given greater weight in assessing the nature and functioning of the NTE.

The analysis therefore relied on triangulation across direct NTE evidence and contextual indicators while maintaining a clear distinction between the two. This approach enabled the study to synthesize available evidence without implying that broader sectoral statistics represented disaggregated night-time economic output.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was improved by consistently implementing established procedures for searching, selecting, and assessing sources. The research depended solely on credible databases and official publications, thereby reducing the likelihood of encountering inaccurate or unreliable information. Validity was further enhanced through triangulation, which involved comparing data from various sources, including government reports, academic studies, and international datasets. Methodological literature emphasizes triangulation as a crucial approach for enhancing the credibility of secondary research findings (Fusch et al., 2018). Additionally, the study employed temporal validity by concentrating on recent data to ensure that the conclusions accurately represented contemporary realities.

Ethical Considerations

Although the research was solely based on secondary data and did not entail direct engagement with human subjects, maintaining adherence to ethical research standards was crucial throughout the entire research process. The ethical obligations in secondary research encompass not only the protection of participants but also the preservation of intellectual integrity, transparency, and the faithful representation of existing knowledge. Consequently, all data sources utilized in the study were duly acknowledged through in-text citations and a thorough reference list compiled in accordance with APA 7th edition standards, thereby reducing the likelihood of plagiarism and promoting scholarly integrity.

The research exclusively utilized publicly accessible and legally obtainable documents, which included peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and publications from esteemed international organizations. No confidential, proprietary, or restricted information was utilized. The selection and interpretation of data were carried out impartially, with careful attention to avoid selective reporting, distortion of results, or misrepresentation of the original authors' conclusions. This methodology was aligned with ethical principles that prioritize accuracy, accountability, and respect for original scholarship in the analysis of secondary data.

Moreover, the analysis was conducted with a focus on transparency and methodological rigor, ensuring that interpretations were firmly based on the evidence presented in the reviewed literature rather than influenced by personal biases or preconceived notions. The study complied with established ethical guidelines for secondary research, which stress the importance of proper attribution, responsible data management, and truthful reporting as essential components of ethical scholarship (Resnik, 2020). In summary, ethical considerations were diligently observed at every phase of the research to maintain the integrity, credibility, and academic significance of the study.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Nature of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The characteristics of Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) mirror the broader traits of its urban informal economy, which remains a primary source of livelihood for many individuals. The labour market in Uganda is predominantly informal, with estimates consistently showing that over 85–90% of all workers are engaged in informal employment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020; WIEGO, 2021). In urban settings, the extent of informality is even more evident, especially in Kampala, where informal employment constitutes the foundation of economic activity. The World Bank (2021) notes that Kampala accounts for approximately one-third of Uganda's GDP, yet it continues to depend significantly on a workforce where more than 57% is informal, engaged in low-wage, low-productivity jobs.

In this broader context, the night-time economy stands out as a crucial yet often overlooked sector. Secondary evidence indicates that a considerable portion of informal enterprises operates outside conventional working hours-between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.-due to the flexibility provided by informality and the nature of urban demand in rapidly expanding cities (WIEGO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). These activities encompass late-night food vending, street retail, boda-boda transport, taxi services, bar and restaurant operations, nightclubs, events, informal gambling stalls, and market activities in areas such as Kikuubo, Bwaise, Kisenyi, and Nakulabye.

The composition of Uganda's Night-Time Economy (NTE) is diverse, comprising registered formal businesses, semi-formal entities, and completely informal participants. Formal businesses encompass registered entertainment establishments, hotels, restaurants, casinos, and licensed bars. Semi-formal participants consist of partially registered enterprises that operate under temporary or location-specific permits, such as night markets or kiosk operators. Informal participants who often represent the majority include unregistered street vendors, mobile traders, motorcycle taxi operators, and home-based businesses (ICPAU, 2024). This coexistence of various types of enterprises reflects trends observed in other African cities, including Accra, Lagos, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam, where night-time commerce tends to cluster around transportation hubs, informal settlements, and wholesale districts (UN-Habitat, 2020).

Additionally, Uganda's NTE is influenced by rapid urbanization. The National Planning Authority (2023) indicates that urban growth rates are at 5.2% per year, one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the rising consumer demand particularly from workers involved in non-traditional or shift-based jobs has driven the growth of night-time retail, transportation, food services, and leisure sectors. The concentration of informal enterprises in low-income, high-density areas further promotes night-time trading as residents look for affordable, flexible services after their daytime employment (World Bank, 2021).

A significant aspect of Uganda's night-time economy is its contribution to livelihood diversification, particularly for the youth. Uganda boasts one of the youngest demographics globally, with over 75% of its population under the age of 30, coupled with persistently high rates of youth unemployment (MoGLSD, 2022). Employment during the night offers alternative income avenues for young individuals who struggle to find formal employment. For instance, numerous boda-boda riders primarily operate during the late evening and night hours, attracted by increased demand and reduced competition. Likewise, night markets and street-vending areas have emerged as vital income sources for low-skilled workers, women, and migrants.

Culturally, Uganda's Night-Time Economy (NTE) is intricately linked to social interactions, urban mobility, and entertainment trends. Kampala is frequently referred to as a "24-hour city," especially in neighborhoods like Kololo, Kabalagala, Ntinda, and Kamwokya, where nightlife establishments remain open until the early hours of the morning. The extensive appeal of music, entertainment events, festivals, and social gatherings plays a crucial role in fostering a lively night-time leisure economy. Events such as the Nyege Nyege Festival-known to significantly enhance hotel occupancy, restaurant revenues, and domestic tourism illustrate the increasing importance of night-time leisure for the national economy (Africa Business, 2025).

Overall, Uganda's NTE represents a complex and multi-faceted ecosystem that is deeply rooted in informal urban dynamics, influenced by socio-economic factors, youth employment trends, cultural practices, and the structural makeup of African urban economies. Consequently, its importance is not peripheral but rather essential for comprehending Uganda's changing urban economic landscape.

Determinants of the Performance of the Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The performance of Uganda's night-time economy is shaped by a variety of structural, infrastructural, regulatory, demographic, and socioeconomic factors. Infrastructural Factors: Infrastructure serves as the essential determinant of night-time economy performance. Sufficient lighting, transportation, electricity, and road networks affect business hours, consumer mobility, and safety. According to the National Planning Authority (2023), merely 58% of urban households have dependable access to electricity, while numerous informal settlements are devoid of streetlights and paved roads. These deficiencies diminish consumer willingness to engage in night-time activities and heighten operational risks for vendors and transport operators. Additionally, inadequate drainage systems worsen flooding during rainy seasons, restricting night-time mobility.

The availability of public transport is another vital facilitator. Late-night commuter services are scarce in Ugandan cities, leading to a dependence on boda-bodas as the main mode of night-time transportation. While flexible, boda-bodas come with safety concerns, which affect the demand for night-time consumption (MoWT, 2021). Research on night-time economies worldwide such as those in London, Sydney, Accra, and Johannesburg-highlights that reliable and safe public transport is crucial for a thriving nighttime commerce (Roberts & Eldridge, 2019).

Regulatory and Governance Determinants: The operational environment of night-time enterprises (NTE) is significantly influenced by regulatory frameworks. The enforcement of noise pollution regulations, venue licensing, curfews (notably during the COVID-19 pandemic), and the eviction of informal vendors all play a role in the stability of these enterprises. For example, heightened enforcement actions by NEMA and KCCA have adversely affected bar operations, street vending, and late-night events (Business Times, 2025).

Moreover, informal enterprises encounter regulatory uncertainty as many do not possess licenses, business permits, or designated trading areas. Studies on informal economies in African cities reveal that erratic enforcement diminishes investment, hinders business growth, and heightens susceptibility to harassment (ILO, 2018).

Socioeconomic and Demographic Determinants: The youthful demographic of Uganda plays a crucial role in stimulating night-time economic activities. The high rate of youth unemployment-reported to be over 13% nationally, with even higher figures in urban regions (MoGLSD, 2022) forces many young individuals to seek informal and night-time employment as a means of survival. Additionally, rural-urban migration contributes to an increased labor supply that is willing to work during flexible hours.

Another significant factor is consumer purchasing power. Urban poverty in Uganda is recorded at 12%, resulting in many households having limited disposable income available for leisure activities and night-time spending (UBOS, 2023). This limitation affects the demand for entertainment, retail, and hospitality services during the night; however, affordable informal services continue to prosper due to the price sensitivity of low-income urban dwellers.

Spatial and Settlement Determinants: Night-time activities tend to concentrate around areas of high population density, transportation routes, marketplaces, and commercial hubs. According to the World Bank (2021), informal businesses in Kampala are often located near significant transport centers such as Old Taxi Park, New Taxi Park, Wandegeya, and Nakulabye. The urban layout of Kampala, marked by densely populated informal settlements, fosters markets for affordable night-time services, thereby making spatial closeness a crucial factor for viability.

Labour-Market Structure and Informality: Informality serves a dual purpose: it provides flexibility and low barriers to entry, yet it also leads to instability, reduced productivity, and fragile business resilience. Workers engaged in informal night-time jobs generally do not enjoy job security, social safety nets, or access to financial resources (WIEGO, 2021). This inherent precariousness restricts long-term business success and the potential for technological advancement. Collectively, these factors influence not only the sustainability of night-time businesses but also their ability to be resilient, productive, and to contribute to urban economic development.

Contribution of the Night-Time Economy to Uganda's Economic Growth

Despite the absence of official national accounts in Uganda that specifically quantify night-time economic output, existing evidence indicates that the night-time economy plays a crucial role in employment, consumption, entrepreneurship, and urban GDP. Contribution to GDP and Urban Productivity: The informal sector in Uganda accounts for roughly 51% of GDP (Economic Policy Research Centre, 2019). Given that a significant portion of informal-sector activities takes place at night, the night-time economy likely contributes a substantial yet unrecorded segment of economic output. Kampala, in particular, is responsible for approximately 33% of Uganda's GDP (World Bank, 2021), with much of the city's commercial, transport, and entertainment activities occurring outside of regular daytime hours.

Employment and Livelihood Contribution: Activities within the night-time economy create vital employment opportunities for youth, migrants, and low-skilled workers. The challenge of youth unemployment in Uganda highlights the importance of night-time jobs, particularly in informal vending, transport, hospitality, and entertainment, as essential sources of livelihood. According to WIEGO (2021), more than 90% of urban informal workers have irregular schedules, with many working during the night. Furthermore, the night-time economy aids in providing secondary incomes for households with multiple earners. Street-food vendors, late-night market traders, and boda-boda riders frequently utilize night hours to enhance their daytime earnings, thereby bolstering household resilience in low-income communities.

Enhancing Urban Efficiency and Market Dynamism: By extending commercial hours, the Night-Time Economy (NTE) alleviates daytime congestion, improves consumer convenience, and enables businesses to make better use of their resources. Late-night retail and transportation help to balance demand, minimize queues, and ease peak periods; a trend that is commonly seen in vibrant cities around the globe (Roberts & Eldridge, 2019).

Entrepreneurship and Micro-Enterprise Development: The NTE offers a low-barrier pathway into entrepreneurship. Small-scale activities such as vending, catering, transport, and entertainment require little capital, empowering disadvantaged groups particularly women and youth to establish micro-businesses. While these enterprises may have low productivity, they play a vital role in enhancing household incomes, urban vibrancy, and business diversification (ICPAU, 2024).

Tourism and Cultural Economy Contribution: Uganda's entertainment and cultural sectors are crucial for domestic tourism. Events like Nyege Nyege significantly increase hotel occupancy, local transport earnings, and restaurant revenues (Africa Business, 2025). Music, nightlife, and cultural festivals draw both domestic and international tourists, thereby expanding the service economy. Together, these contributions illustrate that Uganda's night-time economy constitutes a vital economic subsystem, bolstering urban livelihoods, enhancing economic diversity, and contributing to GDP, despite the limited availability of official data.

Bottlenecks to the Growth of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

Infrastructural Constraints: The urban infrastructure in Uganda is still insufficient to support a flourishing night-time economy (NTE). Numerous neighborhoods are devoid of street lighting, which poses risks for businesses operating at night and diminishes consumer mobility. The reliability of electricity is another significant issue frequent power outages disrupt business activities and elevate operational costs. Urban transportation systems are inadequate, with few options for late-night public transit, leading to an increased dependence on boda-bodas (MoWT, 2021).

Poor waste management, drainage, and sanitation in informal settlements further impact the environment in which night-time business's function (UN-Habitat, 2020). These infrastructural shortcomings restrict both the scale and safety of night-time commerce.

Regulatory and Governance Constraints: Regulatory uncertainty presents a substantial challenge. The enforcement of noise pollution regulations, licensing requirements, crackdowns on informal vending, and disjointed municipal policies generate unpredictability for night-time workers (Business Times, 2025). Many operators are without licenses due to exorbitant fees, bureaucratic hurdles, or the absence of designated night markets. Inconsistent enforcement sometimes stringent, at other times lenient diminishes business confidence and deters long-term investment.

Economic Constraints: The limited purchasing power of consumers restricts the demand for leisure and entertainment services during the night. Urban poverty and fluctuating incomes diminish expenditures on non-essential goods and services. Furthermore, informal enterprises operating at night frequently encounter challenges in accessing credit, capital, or digital payment systems, which hinders their growth and productivity (MoFPED, 2023).

Social and Security Constraints: Issues such as crime, insecurity, and harassment especially in inadequately lit areas deter both consumers and employees. Women, in particular, are at a greater risk of gender-based harassment and violence, which restricts their involvement in night-time commerce (UN Women, 2022). Insufficient policing and weak community security measures further intensify these risks.

Structural Constraints of Informality: The nature of informality creates inherent limitations: workers are deprived of social protections, health insurance, pension savings, and job security (ILO, 2020). Typically, enterprises are small-scale and lack the benefits of economies of scale, digital resources, or pathways for growth. Consequently, the Night-Time Economy (NTE) is predominantly characterized by low-income, low-productivity activities that find it difficult to expand or contribute to long-term structural change.

Urban Planning and Land-Use Constraints: The cities of Uganda are devoid of intentional frameworks for night-time urban planning. Land-use regulations fail to incorporate night-time economic zones, designated night markets, 24-hour transportation systems, or safety infrastructures for night-time activities. In contrast, cities such as Melbourne, Amsterdam, and London have established Night-Time Economy Strategies, Night Mayors, and urban night planning frameworks (Roberts & Eldridge, 2019)-a framework that Uganda currently lacks. These cumulative challenges diminish the productivity, safety, and long-term sustainability of night-time economic activities, thereby limiting their potential to contribute to sustainable economic growth.

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary of findings

Nature of Uganda’s Night-Time Economy

The research findings reveal that Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) is primarily informal and closely resembles the structure of the broader urban informal economy, which employs a significant portion of the workforce. In Kampala and other urban areas, night-time economic activities are predominantly found in low-wage, low-productivity sectors such as street vending, boda-boda transport, food services, entertainment, and small-scale retail, mainly operating between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. The NTE consists of a combination of formal, semi-formal, and informal participants, with informal actors making up the largest proportion. Geographically, night-time activities tend to cluster around transport hubs, informal settlements, and wholesale and commercial districts. The rapid pace of urbanization, increasing consumer demand from shift-based and non-traditional workers, and high population density in low-income regions have further propelled the expansion of night-time trading. This sector plays a crucial role in diversifying livelihoods, especially for youth, women, and migrants, providing alternative income sources in the face of high unemployment and limited access to formal employment opportunities. Culturally, the NTE is intricately woven into urban social life, entertainment, and mobility, with nightlife and significant events making substantial contributions to tourism and the vibrancy of urban areas.

Determinants of the Performance of the Uganda’s Night-Time Economy

The results indicate that the performance of Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of infrastructural, regulatory, socioeconomic, spatial, and labor market elements. Infrastructural challenges especially insufficient street lighting, unreliable electricity, inadequate road systems, and poor drainage significantly hinder night-time business activities, consumer movement, and safety. The limited availability of late-night public transportation further limits engagement in night-time events, increasing dependence on boda-bodas, which, while offering flexibility, raise safety issues that dampen demand. Regulatory and governance structures also have a substantial impact on NTE performance, as inconsistent application of licensing, noise control, and vendor regulations creates uncertainty for both formal and informal businesses, deterring investment and growth. Socioeconomic and demographic factors, particularly high youth unemployment and swift rural-to-urban migration, increase the labor supply willing to participate in night-time employment, while low urban purchasing power restricts demand for higher-end leisure and hospitality services, perpetuating the prevalence of low-cost informal options. Spatial considerations, such as closeness to transport hubs, markets, and densely populated informal areas, further influence the feasibility and concentration of night-time activities. Ultimately, the dominance of informality offers operational adaptability but compromises productivity, job security, and long-term business sustainability.

Contribution of the Night-Time Economy to Uganda’s Economic Growth

The research indicates that Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) plays a significant, albeit largely unquantified, role in both national and urban economic development. Evidence points out that the informal sector constitutes approximately half of Uganda's GDP, with a considerable portion of informal activities taking place during the night. Consequently, the NTE is a vital yet underrepresented element of economic output especially in Kampala, which accounts for nearly one-third of the nation's GDP. Moreover, the NTE serves as a crucial source of employment and livelihood assistance, particularly for youth, migrants, women, and low-skilled laborers. Night-time activities create both primary and supplementary income avenues through informal vending, transportation, hospitality, and entertainment, thereby enhancing household income stability and resilience. Furthermore, extending business hours into the night improves urban efficiency by alleviating daytime congestion, enhancing consumer convenience, and facilitating more effective use of infrastructure and capital. The NTE also fosters entrepreneurship by providing low-barrier opportunities for micro- and small enterprises, thereby aiding income generation and economic diversification. Lastly, the expansion of nightlife, entertainment, and cultural events significantly boosts tourism revenues and urban vibrancy, thereby reinforcing the NTE's importance within the larger service economy.

Bottlenecks to the Growth of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The research findings reveal that the expansion of Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) is hindered by various interconnected obstacles. Deficiencies in infrastructure such as insufficient street lighting, unreliable electricity supply, limited late-night public transport, and inadequate waste management and drainage significantly compromise the safety, scale, and efficiency of night-time business operations. Regulatory and governance issues further obstruct growth, as inconsistent enforcement of licensing, noise regulations, and vendor controls generates uncertainty and deters investment. Economic limitations, particularly low consumer purchasing power and restricted access to credit, capital, and digital payment systems, curtail demand and impede enterprise growth. Social and security issues, including crime, harassment, and gender-based violence, disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, especially women, thereby diminishing their participation in night-time activities. The prevalence of structural informality remains a significant constraint, as the lack of social protection, financial inclusion, and pathways for growth keeps the majority of night-time enterprises confined to low-productivity operations. Lastly, inadequate urban planning and the lack of intentional frameworks for the night-time economy restrict the integration, organization, and long-term viability of night-time activities.

Discussion of Findings

Nature of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The findings of the present study revealed that Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) was mainly informal and closely reflected the structure of the broader urban informal economy. Night-time activities in Kampala and other urban areas were primarily focused on low-wage and labor-intensive sectors, which included street vending, informal transport services like boda-bodas, food vending, small-scale retail trade, and entertainment. Additionally, the study determined that the NTE consisted of a combination of formal, semi-formal, and informal participants, with informal enterprises accounting for the largest proportion. Geographically, night-time economic activities were concentrated around transport hubs, informal settlements, and commercial districts, while they were most active temporally between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. These results indicated that Uganda's NTE operated mainly as a livelihood-driven subsystem within the urban economy.

In comparison to the existing literature, the results were predominantly in agreement with both regional and global research regarding night-time economies in developing urban settings. UN-Habitat (2022) similarly noted that in numerous African cities, night-time economic activities were primarily characterized by informal and survival-based livelihoods rather than leisure-focused consumption. The present study further supported this viewpoint by illustrating that Uganda's night-time economy was intricately linked to daily economic survival, especially among youth, women, and migrant communities. This alignment suggested that the structural features of Uganda's night-time economy were consistent with wider continental trends identified in recent urban research.

The spatial concentration of night-time activities identified in the current study aligns with the assemblage-based conceptualization proposed by Acuto et al. (2024). Their research highlighted that, night-time economies arise from the interplay of infrastructure, institutions, market participants, and social practices. The aggregation of night-time activities around transport hubs and commercial areas in Uganda exemplified these interactions, particularly emphasizing the influence of mobility infrastructure and population density on nocturnal economic behavior. However, in contrast to the more formally organized nighttime governance frameworks noted by Acuto et al. (2024), Uganda's night-time economy seemed to function with minimal institutional coordination, underscoring a contextual divergence between cities in the Global North and those in the Global South.

The results further corresponded with the institutional viewpoint put forth by Seijas and Gelders (2021), who contended that acknowledging the night as a separate policy area enhanced its economic importance. While their 2021 research documented the rise of night mayors and governance entities in various global cities, the present study discovered minimal formal institutional acknowledgment of the night-time economy in Uganda. Nonetheless, the economic significance of night-time activities in Uganda, as indicated by their scale and labor absorption, reflected the economic centrality emphasized by Seijas and Gelders (2021), implying that economic relevance can persist even without formal governance frameworks.

Regarding informality, the results were strongly corroborated by evidence from WIEGO (2025), which indicated that urban employment in Uganda remained largely informal, with numerous livelihoods functioning during extended hours. The present study built upon this evidence by placing informal employment specifically within the context of night-time economic activity, illustrating how flexible operating hours enabled informal workers to adjust to the constraints of the urban labor market. This reinforced the assertion that the night-time economy (NTE) is vital for livelihood diversification and income stabilization in environments marked by scarce formal employment opportunities.

The presence of formal hospitality establishments alongside informal night markets and transport services noted in the study aligned with the World Bank's (2024) examination of Uganda's urban economy. The World Bank emphasized that urban service sectors, many of which operate significantly after dark, made considerable contributions to economic output and employment. The findings of the current study enhanced this analysis by demonstrating how formal and informal night-time activities collectively supported urban economic operations, despite disparities in productivity and security.

Ultimately, the findings offered crucial context for understanding studies that utilize satellite-based night-time light data, including those conducted by Gibson et al. (2021) and Zheng et al. (2023). While these researchers illustrated the effectiveness of night-time lights in reflecting economic activities during the night, the present study indicated that a significant portion of Uganda's night-time economy takes place in low-intensity and informal environments that may not be adequately represented by such metrics. This emphasized the necessity of contextual, ground-based analysis when employing remote sensing proxies to evaluate night-time economic activities in developing urban areas.

In conclusion, the discussion revealed that the outcomes of the current research largely aligned with recent literature published from 2021 to 2024, while also enhancing existing knowledge by offering insights specific to Uganda. The results highlighted that Uganda's night-time economy is primarily informal, spatially concentrated, focused on livelihoods, and economically important, yet remains insufficiently acknowledged in formal policy and governance structures.

Determinants of the Performance of the Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The findings of the present study revealed that the effectiveness of Uganda's night-time economy was influenced by a multifaceted interplay of infrastructural, regulatory, socioeconomic, spatial, and labor market elements. The results indicated that insufficient street lighting, erratic electricity supply, inadequate road infrastructure, and ineffective drainage systems considerably hindered business activities, consumer movement, and safety during nighttime hours. The limited availability of late-night public transportation further curtailed engagement in nighttime events, leading to an increased dependence on boda-bodas, which, although offering operational flexibility, raised safety issues that dampened demand. Additionally, regulatory inconsistencies, low purchasing power, spatial concentration around transport hubs, and the prevalence of informal labor were identified as significant factors affecting the overall performance of the sector.

These results are in strong agreement with infrastructure-centered analyses found in the literature. UN-Habitat (2022) also recognized shortcomings in street lighting, electricity reliability, transport infrastructure, and sanitation as significant barriers to nighttime economic performance in African cities. The present study further supported this claim by illustrating that infrastructural deficiencies in Uganda not only limited operating hours but also increased risks for both businesses and consumers. Specifically, inadequate lighting and poor road conditions were shown to worsen insecurity and accidents, which deterred nighttime mobility and restricted economic activity, particularly in informal settlements and outlying urban areas.

The study identified the role of transport systems, which closely aligned with the findings of Acuto et al. (2024). Their analysis from 2024 underscored the necessity of extended-hour mobility systems for the maintenance of night-time economies. The current research corroborated that without dependable late-night public transport, Uganda’s night-time economy became significantly reliant on boda-bodas. Although this dependence allowed for some degree of nighttime activity, it also brought about safety concerns and financial obstacles that restricted the geographical scope and intensity of economic engagement. This observation underscored how the availability of transport served as both a facilitator and a limitation within the Ugandan context.

The regulatory and governance-related factors identified in the study were in agreement with the institutional analyses conducted by Seijas and Gelders (2021) and Goodfellow and Ssamula (2021). The present study revealed that the inconsistent enforcement of licensing requirements, noise regulations, and vendor controls generated uncertainty for both formal and informal operators, which in turn discouraged long-term investment and business growth. Goodfellow and Ssamula’s 2021 comparative analysis of Kampala and Kigali similarly illustrated that erratic regulatory enforcement hindered nighttime economic performance in Kampala, whereas clearer and more consistent regulatory frameworks bolstered extended operating hours and private sector confidence in Kigali. This comparison reinforced the conclusion that regulatory clarity and institutional coherence were pivotal to the performance of nighttime economies.

The socioeconomic and demographic factors revealed in the findings also aligned with recent empirical research. The World Bank (2024) emphasized that Uganda's youthful demographic structure created significant demand for nighttime services, especially in transportation, food vending, and entertainment. The present study validated that high youth unemployment and rural-to-urban migration increased the labor supply willing to participate in nighttime employment. Nevertheless, it also indicated that low urban purchasing power restricted the demand for higher-value leisure services, thus maintaining the prevalence of low-cost, informal options. This dual impact illustrated how demographic factors both expanded labor supply and constrained the scale and profitability of nighttime businesses.

Spatial factors identified in the research further corroborated existing literature on urban nighttime economies. The concentration of activities around transport hubs, markets, and densely populated informal settlements was consistent with the spatial patterns outlined by UN-Habitat (2022) and Acuto et al. (2024). The findings indicated that closeness to mobility infrastructure and high-density residential zones increased foot traffic and lowered transaction costs, thereby improving viability. However, this spatial concentration also heightened competition among informal operators, restricting income growth and perpetuating low-productivity equilibria.

Ultimately, the findings of the study concerning informality were in strong alignment with the wider literature on urban informal economies. Although the prevalence of informality was shown to offer operational flexibility and facilitate entry into night-time economic activities, it concurrently compromised productivity, job security, and the long-term resilience of businesses. This insight was in agreement with the World Bank’s (2024) evaluation, which indicated that while informal enterprises are crucial for absorbing employment, they frequently encounter structural obstacles that hinder their growth and the enhancement of working conditions. The present study further developed this argument by illustrating how informality influenced both the opportunities and limitations within Uganda’s night-time economy.

In conclusion, the discussion revealed that the factors affecting Uganda’s night-time economic performance identified in this study largely aligned with empirical and theoretical perspectives from literature published between 2021 and 2024. Nevertheless, the study also contributed to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating how these factors interacted within Uganda’s unique infrastructural, regulatory, and socioeconomic environment. The findings emphasized that enhancing the performance of the night-time economy necessitated coordinated efforts across infrastructure development, regulatory reform, transport planning, and inclusive urban economic policies.

Contribution of the Night-Time Economy to Uganda’s Economic Growth

The findings of the present study revealed that Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) significantly contributed to both national and urban economic growth, although this contribution remains largely unquantified. The results indicated that the informal sector represented nearly half of Uganda's gross domestic product, and since a considerable number of informal activities took place during the night, the NTE emerged as a vital yet underreported element of economic output. This contribution was especially notable in Kampala, which accounted for approximately one-third of the nation's GDP. Furthermore, the study highlighted that the NTE was essential for job creation and livelihood support, particularly for youth, migrants, women, and low-skilled workers, while also improving urban efficiency through longer operating hours and better use of infrastructure and capital.

The results obtained were highly aligned with the theoretical propositions put forth by Seijas and Gelders (2021), who highlighted that, economic activities during the night enhanced the productive capabilities of urban areas beyond traditional working hours. Their research in 2021 contended that nighttime economies maximized the utilization of urban spaces and infrastructure, simultaneously creating multiplier effects in the hospitality, transport, retail, and creative industries. The present study further substantiated this claim by illustrating that prolonged operating hours in Uganda alleviated daytime congestion, enhanced consumer convenience, and boosted business turnover, thus contributing to productivity improvements and economic development.

The employment and income-generation impacts identified in the current research closely correspond with findings from informal economy studies. Meagher (2020) illustrated that informal nighttime activities in developing nations absorbed excess labor and created essential income opportunities for individuals marginalized from formal employment. The current findings further developed this argument by demonstrating that in Uganda, nighttime economic activities functioned as both primary and supplementary income sources, thereby enhancing household income stability and resilience. This contribution was especially important in light of the high youth unemployment rates and swift rural-to-urban migration, where nighttime work provided flexible entry points into urban labor markets.

The findings of the study were in alignment with the empirical data provided by the World Bank (2024) concerning Uganda's urban economy. The World Bank indicated that Kampala represented over one-third of the national economic output, primarily fueled by service sectors such as hospitality, transport, retail, and entertainment, many of which functioned extensively during nighttime hours. While the World Bank did not break down output by time of day, the present study offered additional evidence indicating that nighttime operations boosted business turnover and created employment opportunities, thus indirectly fostering economic growth. This analysis underscored the concealed yet crucial role of nighttime activities within Uganda's overall service-driven growth trajectory.

The study's identification of the NTE's contribution to inclusive growth aligns with the findings presented by UN-Habitat (2022). UN-Habitat highlighted that, nighttime economies in African cities created job opportunities for both youth and women, while also fostering local economic circulation through micro-enterprises, including street food vending, night markets, and informal transport. The present study supports these findings by illustrating that nighttime activities in Uganda encouraged entrepreneurship by providing low-barrier opportunities for micro- and small enterprises, thus facilitating income generation and economic diversification at both household and community levels.

Moreover, the results concerning tourism and urban vibrancy were consistent with recent research on cultural and creative economies. Acuto et al. (2024) observed that nighttime cultural activities, such as music events, nightlife, and entertainment, played a significant role in city branding, attracting tourists, and fostering creative employment. The current study corroborated this viewpoint by demonstrating that nightlife and cultural events in Uganda contributed to tourism revenues and improved urban vibrancy, thereby emphasizing the importance of the nighttime economy (NTE) within the larger service sector. This contribution was especially pertinent in Kampala, where entertainment and cultural activities constituted a prominent aspect of urban economic life.

At the macro level, the findings of the study aligned with methodological research that connects nighttime economic activity to economic growth through the use of satellite data. Gibson et al. (2021) illustrated that increases in nighttime light intensity were significantly correlated with economic development, especially in contexts where data is scarce. While recognizing the limitations of measurement, the present study offered contextual evidence indicating that Uganda's nighttime economy, which largely consisted of informal and low-intensity activities, still made a meaningful contribution to economic activity, even if it was not entirely reflected in official statistics or remote sensing data.

In conclusion, the discussion revealed that the contribution of Uganda's nighttime economy to economic growth, as identified in the current study, strongly aligned with empirical and theoretical literature published between 2020 and 2024. The findings validated that the nighttime economy facilitated economic growth through job creation, income diversification, improved urban efficiency, entrepreneurship development, and the promotion of tourism. Simultaneously, the study expanded the existing literature by providing Uganda-specific evidence that underscored the scale, structure, and importance of nighttime economic activity within a predominantly informal urban economy.

Bottlenecks to the Growth of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The results of the present study indicated that the expansion of Uganda's night-time economy (NTE) was hindered by various, interrelated obstacles encompassing infrastructure, governance, regulation, finance, security, and urban planning. Deficiencies in infrastructure especially insufficient street lighting, unreliable electricity supply, limited late-night transportation options, and inadequate waste management were identified as factors that compromised safety, operational efficiency, and the extent of night-time business activities. These issues were exacerbated by erratic regulatory enforcement, low consumer purchasing power, limited access to financial resources, ongoing insecurity, and the dominance of informal economic systems, all of which together restricted productivity and long-term viability.

These findings were closely aligned with the governance-related constraints identified by Seijas and Gelders (2021), who contended that inadequate coordination among public institutions represented a significant barrier to the advancement of night-time economies. Their 2021 comparative analysis revealed that the fragmented responsibilities among licensing authorities, security agencies, and transport regulators led to regulatory ambiguity and inconsistent enforcement. The current study supported this assertion by demonstrating that the irregular enforcement of licensing, noise regulations, and vendor controls in Uganda resulted in uncertainty for businesses, deterred investment, and limited enterprise growth. This comparison highlighted that governance failures, rather than market demand alone, considerably hindered the growth of nighttime economic activities.

The infrastructural challenges identified in the research were notably aligned with the evidence provided by UN-Habitat (2022). UN-Habitat highlighted that insufficient street lighting, inconsistent electricity supply, inadequate road networks, and fragile sanitation systems hindered nighttime economic engagement in various African cities. The current results expanded on this viewpoint by illustrating that these infrastructural shortcomings in Uganda directly heightened safety concerns, curtailed operational hours, and compromised efficiency for nighttime businesses. Informal enterprises were particularly at risk, as they did not possess the means to mitigate the deficiencies in public infrastructure, thus perpetuating cycles of low productivity and restricted growth.

Security issues surfaced as a significant limitation in the present study, especially concerning crime, harassment, and gender-based violence. These results were in line with the findings of Roberts, Eldridge, and Schofield (2022), who indicated that both actual criminal activity and perceived threats to safety considerably diminished nighttime participation among workers and consumers. Their 2022 research underscored that, women and informal workers were especially impacted by nighttime insecurity, resulting in a reduced labor supply and lower demand. Likewise, the current study revealed that the fear of crime and harassment limited involvement in nighttime activities in Uganda, leading to premature business closures and constraining sectoral development.

The regulatory limitations identified in the study were consistent with the findings of Goodfellow and Ssamula (2021). Their comparative examination of Kampala and Kigali revealed that the discretionary enforcement of bylaws, inconsistent licensing systems, and intermittent crackdowns on informal traders compromised business stability in Kampala. The current study corroborated this observation by demonstrating that regulatory inconsistency heightened compliance costs, deterred formalization, and diminished the long-term sustainability of night-time enterprises. Although regulations were frequently defended in the interest of public order, their uneven application surfaced as a significant obstacle to sustainable growth.

The socio-cultural resistance to night-time activities highlighted in the findings aligned with Shaw's (2022) analysis of moral narratives related to nightlife. Shaw contended that cultural perceptions depicting nighttime activities as deviant or disorderly often influenced restrictive policies such as curfews and strict noise regulations. The present study uncovered similar dynamics in Uganda, where social attitudes and moral discourses contributed to regulatory constraints that restricted the diversification of nighttime economic activities. This comparison illustrated how cultural norms interacted with institutional frameworks to influence the growth trajectory of the nighttime economy (NTE).

Financial limitations highlighted in the study were corroborated by evidence from the World Bank (2024). The World Bank indicated that restricted access to credit, capital, and digital financial services hindered the development of micro- and small enterprises in urban Africa, especially those functioning informally. The present findings validated that financial exclusion in Uganda limited investments in equipment, security, and infrastructure enhancements, consequently trapping numerous nighttime businesses at subsistence levels. This restriction was further intensified by low consumer purchasing power, which curtailed demand for higher-value nighttime services.

Transport-related challenges identified in the study closely reflected the findings of Acuto et al. (2024), who illustrated that insufficient late-night mobility systems limited the spatial reach and operational hours of nighttime economies. In Uganda, the lack of public transport during nighttime hours heightened reliance on boda-bodas, which, although flexible, raised concerns regarding safety and costs. This reliance constrained participation and diminished the scale of nighttime activities, thereby reinforcing transport limitations as a significant growth barrier.

Ultimately, the study's recognition of inadequate urban planning and the lack of intentional frameworks for the night-time economy aligned with the data and policy gaps pointed out by Gibson et al. (2021). Gibson and his team contended that the absence of time-disaggregated economic data led to the insufficient representation of nighttime activities in official statistics, which in turn restricted policy focus and investment. The current findings furthered this argument by showing that ineffective planning frameworks and minimal policy acknowledgment in Uganda obstructed the integration, organization, and long-term viability of nighttime economic activities.

In summary, the discussion revealed a significant alignment between the obstacles identified in this study and recent literature published from 2021 to 2024. The results validated that infrastructural shortcomings, governance issues, regulatory discrepancies, insecurity, financial exclusion, transportation challenges, socio-cultural opposition, and policy gaps collectively limited the expansion of Uganda's night-time economy. Simultaneously, the study provided context-specific evidence by demonstrating how these limitations interacted within a largely informal urban economy, emphasizing the necessity for cohesive and intentional night-time economy policy frameworks.

Conclusion

Nature of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The research indicates that Uganda's night-time economy is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of the nation's urban economic framework. Rather than being marginal, the NTE supports livelihoods, accommodates excess labor particularly among the youth, and adapts to the needs of a swiftly urbanizing population. Its pronounced informal nature mirrors wider structural limitations within Uganda's labor market and urban governance systems. Although the NTE plays a crucial role in generating income, fostering social connections, and enabling cultural expression, its informal status also subjects participants to risks associated with regulation, safety, and income instability. Therefore, comprehending the characteristics of Uganda's NTE is vital for effective urban planning, labor policies, and economic development initiatives focused on inclusive growth. Incorporating the NTE into policy discussions can amplify its beneficial impacts while tackling the challenges encountered by those reliant on it for their livelihoods.

Determinants of the Performance of the Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The research indicates that the effectiveness of Uganda's night-time economy is significantly influenced by the structural conditions present in the urban landscape and the wider informal labor market. Although the night-time economy exhibits flexibility and is crucial for job creation and service delivery, its expansion and sustainability face challenges due to inadequate infrastructure, regulatory ambiguity, restricted consumer spending capacity, and widespread informality. These elements together hinder productivity, investment, and resilience among night-time businesses. It is vital to tackle these limitations by enhancing urban infrastructure, establishing clearer and more inclusive regulatory frameworks, improving transport safety, and implementing supportive labor and enterprise policies to boost the performance of the night-time economy. By fortifying these factors, the night-time economy would be better positioned to contribute to inclusive urban development, economic diversification, and job creation in Uganda.

Contribution of the Night-Time Economy to Uganda's Economic Growth

The research indicates that Uganda's night-time economy serves as a crucial catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and urban productivity, even though it is not prominently reflected in official economic data. By bolstering livelihoods, encouraging micro-entrepreneurship, improving market efficiency, and promoting tourism and cultural sectors, the night-time economy plays a vital role in supporting urban economies. Nevertheless, its largely informal character results in a significant portion of its contributions being overlooked and insufficiently backed by policy measures. Acknowledging and incorporating the night-time economy into national and urban development plans would enhance data collection and economic strategy while also reinforcing its ability to foster inclusive growth, alleviate poverty, and promote sustainable urban development in Uganda.

Bottlenecks to the Growth of Uganda's Night-Time Economy

The research indicates that while Uganda's night-time economy possesses considerable potential for job creation, income generation, and urban economic development, its growth is significantly hindered by various infrastructural, regulatory, economic, social, and planning-related obstacles. The prevalence of informality, along with insufficient urban services and poor governance coordination, diminishes productivity, safety, and resilience in the sector. In the absence of focused policy measures, the night-time economy is expected to continue being dominated by survival-oriented, low-yield activities. Tackling these issues through enhanced urban infrastructure, inclusive and reliable regulatory frameworks, improved security, access to financial resources, and deliberate night-time urban planning is crucial for realizing the full growth potential of Uganda's night-time economy and ensuring its role in sustainable and inclusive development.

Recommendations

According to the study's findings, it is advised that government authorities establish a coordinated policy framework to oversee the regulation and encouragement of night-time economic activities in Uganda. This framework should explicitly outline allowable activities, standardize licensing processes, and align the responsibilities of essential institutions engaged in urban management. Enhanced policy coordination would mitigate regulatory uncertainty, improve compliance, and foster a more predictable atmosphere for businesses functioning during night hours.

The research additionally suggested a greater allocation of resources towards urban infrastructure that facilitates economic activities during the night. Key focus areas encompassed street lighting, reliability of electricity, maintenance of roads, sanitation, and waste management. Enhancing these services would bolster safety, prolong operational hours, and increase productivity for businesses and employees engaged in night-time activities. Urban officials were urged to incorporate night-time requirements into comprehensive infrastructure planning rather than considering them as secondary concerns.

Enhancing security measures during nighttime was recognized as an essential practical intervention. It was advised that law enforcement agencies increase night patrols, foster community policing initiatives, and strengthen collaboration with local leaders and business operators. Safer nighttime conditions would promote higher engagement from workers and consumers, especially women and vulnerable populations, thus facilitating inclusive economic development.

The research additionally suggested enhancements to night-time transportation systems to improve accessibility and mobility. Extending the operating hours of public transport and enhancing the organization and safety of informal transport services would alleviate commuting difficulties for night-time workers and patrons. Improved transport connectivity would facilitate the growth of night-time economic activities beyond central urban regions and promote balanced urban development.

Furthermore, it was suggested that focused assistance be extended to small-scale and informal nighttime businesses. Practical measures encompassed access to low-cost credit, training in business skills, and streamlined processes for gradual formalization. This support would bolster the sustainability of enterprises, elevate incomes, and enhance working conditions while avoiding the imposition of excessive regulatory burdens.

Ultimately, the research suggested that policymakers enhance the documentation and oversight of night-time economic activities. Incorporating night-time indicators into urban economic planning and regular data collection would increase the sector's visibility and promote evidence-based decision-making. Better data availability would allow for more efficient assessment of policies and aid in long-term planning for sustainable night-time economic growth.

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