



Sustainability practices of entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda: A review of selected case studies

¹ Stella Kanyunyuzi, ² Oweka Simon & ³ Kibuuka Muhammad

^{1,2,3} Directorate of Research, Innovation, Consultancy and Extension, Kampala International University, Uganda
Email: stella.kanyunyuzi@kiu.ac.ug

Abstract

This study systematically reviews sustainability practices among entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda, with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Using a six-year review period (2020–2025), 73 peer-reviewed studies were analyzed through a systematic narrative synthesis guided by the PRISMA framework. The findings reveal that while sustainability has gained prominence globally, its integration among Ugandan SMEs remains limited, uneven, and largely informal. Key drivers of sustainability adoption include innovation, entrepreneurial competence, access to finance, institutional support, and leadership. Exemplary ventures such as SolarNow, SafeBoda, Fenix International, and Tugende demonstrate that profitability and sustainability can coexist when supportive policies, inclusive financing, and capacity-building mechanisms are in place. Persistent challenges such as inadequate financing, weak regulatory enforcement, low awareness, and infrastructural deficiencies hinder widespread adoption. The study concludes that addressing these structural and institutional barriers is critical for advancing sustainable entrepreneurship in Uganda and achieving relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Recommendations include policy and institutional support, access to green finance, capacity building, standardized sustainability measurement, promotion of best practices, and applied research to strengthen Uganda's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The review provides a comprehensive synthesis that informs policymakers, investors, and entrepreneurs on pathways to mainstream sustainability in resource-constrained enterprises.

Keywords: Sustainable entrepreneurship, SMEs, Uganda, Triple Bottom Line, Sustainability practices, Innovation, Institutional support

Introduction

Sustainability has become a defining agenda for business and development worldwide. In an era

of escalating climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality, enterprises are increasingly

evaluated not only by their profitability but also by their ability to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship and social responsibility. Globally, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are recognized as the backbone of most economies; however, they are also among the most vulnerable to sustainability challenges due to their limited resources and short-term survival orientation (OECD, 2023). Research indicates that while many global start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures embrace sustainability through green technologies, circular economy models, and inclusive business practices, others remain narrowly focused on profit maximization, often at the expense of environmental and social well-being (Audretsch & Belitski, 2020; Elkington, 1997). This tension between economic growth and sustainability underscores the urgent need for a paradigm shift toward sustainable entrepreneurship.

At the continental level, Africa presents a unique paradox. On one hand, the continent possesses vast natural resources, a youthful population, and a growing network of innovation hubs. On the other hand, weak regulatory frameworks, limited access to financing, and fragile infrastructure often push entrepreneurs toward short-term profit-seeking behaviors that compromise long-term sustainability. For instance, while informal enterprises are vital for livelihoods, they are frequently linked to unsustainable practices such as poor waste management, overexploitation of natural resources, and unsafe working conditions (African Development Bank, 2023). Nevertheless, emerging success stories such as M-Pesa in Kenya and renewable energy start-ups across East Africa demonstrate the potential of entrepreneurship to drive both economic empowerment and sustainable development when sustainability principles are embedded in business models.

In Uganda, entrepreneurial ventures play a central role in national development, accounting for over 70% of employment and contributing significantly to GDP (GEM, 2022). Yet, many of these ventures face critical sustainability gaps. Small entrepreneurs often prioritize immediate profits over long-term sustainability, paying limited attention to environmental and social impacts. This has resulted in challenges such as unregulated waste disposal, heavy reliance on non-renewable energy, and minimal investment in employee welfare or community well-being. While initiatives like SolarNow and SafeBoda illustrate how Ugandan entrepreneurs can successfully align profitability with sustainability, the majority remain entrenched in unsustainable practices that threaten the resilience of their enterprises and the broader society (Njenga & Muendo, 2022; Oloko & Kamau, 2023).

Despite the growing global discourse on sustainability, many small entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda continue to be predominantly profit-driven and slow to incorporate environmental and social dimensions into their operations. Whereas studies in developed economies have extensively examined sustainable entrepreneurship, limited empirical and review-based evidence exists for Uganda's context, where financial constraints, structural weaknesses, and weak regulatory enforcement persist. Existing research has largely focused on the economic contributions of entrepreneurship, neglecting how small ventures align with sustainability goals such as environmental conservation, social inclusion, and long-term business resilience. Furthermore, the absence of standardized sustainability indicators for SMEs complicates policy formulation and benchmarking, highlighting an urgent need for evidence-based insights into sustainability practices among Ugandan ventures.

Accordingly, this paper seeks to review sustainability practices among selected entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda. It examines the specific strategies entrepreneurs adopt to promote sustainability, the challenges they face in implementation, and the extent to which they balance profit-making with environmental and social responsibility. The study also explores existing gaps and opportunities for strengthening sustainability within Uganda's entrepreneurial ecosystem. To achieve these objectives, the paper addresses key questions: What sustainability practices are currently implemented by small ventures? What challenges hinder their adoption of sustainable practices? How do entrepreneurs balance profit maximization with sustainability concerns? And what opportunities exist for enhancing sustainable entrepreneurship in Uganda?

By situating Uganda's experience within global and continental debates, this paper highlights both best practices and persistent gaps, offering insights into how small ventures can transition from profit-maximization toward sustainable business models that safeguard future generations.

Literature Review

Sustainability has evolved from being primarily an environmental concern to a multidimensional paradigm that integrates economic, social, and ecological dimensions. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework proposed by Elkington (1997) remains central, encouraging organizations to measure performance not only financially but also in terms of social and environmental impact. Sustainability has also been contextualized within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize inclusive growth, responsible consumption, and climate action (United Nations, 2015). Contemporary sustainability discourse has shifted from compliance-driven initiatives to strategic integration, where

enterprises gain a competitive advantage by embedding ecological efficiency, social responsibility, and long-term resilience into their operations (Bocken et al., 2019; Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). In developing economies, sustainability tends to reflect survival and resilience rather than corporate reputation, with entrepreneurs adopting incremental, frugal, or circular innovations tailored to local realities (George et al., 2021).

Sustainable entrepreneurship, therefore, involves establishing ventures that pursue economic viability while simultaneously addressing environmental and social challenges, contrasting with traditional entrepreneurship, which often emphasizes short-term profit (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). Common practices include the adoption of green technologies, circular economy models, socially inclusive business approaches, and digital innovations that support sustainability, such as mobile platforms for agriculture, health, and financial inclusion (Masi et al., 2022; Dean & McMullen, 2007; George et al., 2021). Nevertheless, small ventures frequently face resource and capacity constraints that limit adoption. As a result, many continue unsustainable practices such as excessive resource consumption, inadequate waste management, and neglect of employee welfare (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). This makes Uganda a critical context for investigating how sustainability can be integrated into resource-constrained enterprises.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) dominate both global and Ugandan economies, accounting for over 90% of businesses worldwide and contributing approximately 70% of Uganda's GDP while employing the majority of the labor force (OECD, 2023; GEM, 2022). Despite their economic importance, SMEs face significant barriers to sustainable practice, including limited financing, weak regulatory enforcement, and insufficient awareness

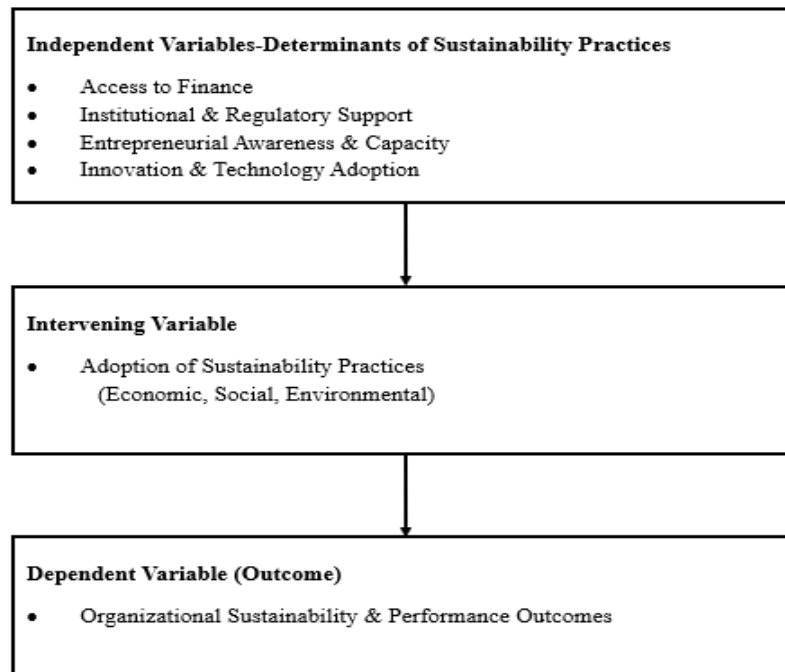
(African Development Bank, 2023). Nonetheless, several small ventures have successfully integrated sustainability when supported by enabling policies and innovation ecosystems. For instance, renewable energy firms such as SolarNow combine innovative financing with environmental solutions (Njenga & Muendo, 2022), while platforms like SafeBoda integrate safety, social inclusion, and job creation into their business models (Oloko & Kamau, 2023). However, adoption remains uneven, as most small entrepreneurs continue to prioritize immediate profits over long-term sustainability. This underscores the need for targeted strategies and institutional mechanisms to mainstream sustainable practices among Ugandan SMEs.

Several theoretical frameworks illuminate sustainability in entrepreneurial ventures. The TBL theory emphasizes the balance between profit and social–environmental performance (Elkington, 1997). Sustainable Entrepreneurship Theory (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011) extends this perspective by highlighting the dual pursuit of economic opportunities and social–environmental solutions. Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014) underscores the influence of regulatory, cultural, and normative environments in shaping enterprise practices, implying that external pressures and support systems are vital for sustainability adoption. The Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that unique, valuable, and difficult-to-imitate resources such as sustainability capabilities—enhance firm competitiveness and performance (Barney, 1991). Finally, Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of addressing the expectations of multiple stakeholders to build legitimacy, trust, and long-term success (Freeman, 1984).

Despite increasing global attention to sustainable entrepreneurship, gaps remain regarding how small ventures in Uganda and similar African contexts adopt sustainability principles. Existing studies have predominantly focused on large corporations or high-profile innovations, providing limited insights into the small-scale ventures that constitute the majority of Uganda's economy (George et al., 2021). Moreover, while TBL and Sustainable Entrepreneurship theories provide valuable global frameworks, their application to Uganda's socio-economic and institutional realities remains underexplored. This justifies the need for an in-depth investigation of sustainability practices among Ugandan entrepreneurial ventures.

The conceptual framework guiding this study integrates TBL, Sustainable Entrepreneurship, and Institutional theories, illustrating how internal and external factors influence sustainability adoption and its subsequent effects on performance and resilience. The model posits that access to finance, institutional support, entrepreneurial awareness, and technology adoption serve as key determinants of sustainability integration. The adoption of economic, social, and environmental sustainability practices functions as an intervening variable, while organizational performance measured by long-term viability, stakeholder satisfaction, and environmental stewardship constitutes the outcome. The framework suggests that when enabling resources, institutional support, and entrepreneurial capacity are present, small ventures are more likely to adopt sustainability practices that enhance business resilience, social welfare, and environmental conservation.

Theoretical Frame work



(Source: Adapted from Elkington (1997), Shepherd & Patzelt (2011), and Scott (2014))

Methodology

This study adopted a systematic review design, involving a transparent, replicable, and structured process of identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant literature on sustainability practices among entrepreneurial ventures and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Uganda. The systematic approach was appropriate for integrating empirical evidence, revealing research trends, and identifying gaps for future investigation within the Ugandan context.

The review covered a six-year period (2020–2025) to capture recent developments, emerging debates, and policy reforms related to sustainability and entrepreneurship. This period coincided with increased national and global attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustainable industrialization, and SME resilience following the COVID-19 pandemic. Relevant studies were retrieved primarily from the Google Scholar database using a systematic search strategy. Boolean operators (“AND,” “OR”) were employed to combine search terms

such as “sustainability practices,” “sustainable entrepreneurship,” “SMEs,” “green innovation,” “Triple Bottom Line,” and “corporate sustainability.”

The initial search yielded approximately 17,500 documents. A multi-stage screening and eligibility process guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework was applied to ensure methodological rigor and transparency. The process involved screening of titles and abstracts to eliminate duplicates and irrelevant studies, assessment of full-text papers for methodological and contextual relevance, verification of eligibility based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and extraction of data guided by a standardized review matrix. The inclusion criteria covered publications between 2020 and 2025 that were peer-reviewed, focused on sustainability practices, entrepreneurship, innovation, or SME development in Uganda. Studies that addressed only large corporations, examined non-Ugandan contexts, or lacked methodological clarity were excluded. After the

screening process, a total of 73 eligible studies were retained for final synthesis.

For each study, key details including author(s), year, title, focus area, and key findings were extracted and summarized in a tabular matrix. The data were then analyzed thematically to identify patterns, relationships, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge. The reviewed studies were categorized into six major thematic areas reflecting the multidimensional nature of sustainability in Ugandan SMEs. The first category, environmental sustainability and institutional pressures (32%), comprised studies such as Sendawula et al. (2021, 2024), Alinda et al. (2022, 2024), and Muhammad et al. (2024), which established that environmental commitment, regulatory compliance, and institutional pressures enhance the adoption of sustainable practices among manufacturing SMEs. The second category, entrepreneurial competence, innovation, and sustainable performance (25%), included studies such as Rulangaranga and Isoh (2021), Nakyejwe et al. (2021), and Okumu and Buyinza (2020), which showed that entrepreneurial competence, innovation, and ethics are critical drivers of sustainable SME growth and competitiveness.

The third category, institutional, policy, and governance frameworks (15%), included works such as Arthur et al. (2021), Patrick et al. (2023), and Kato et al. (2024), which revealed that effective policy support, government regulation, and sustainable finance mechanisms promote SME sustainability. The fourth category, financial inclusion, performance, and

investment decisions (14%), involved research by Eton et al. (2021), Agaba and Mugarura (2023), and Bindeeba et al. (2025), which demonstrated that access to finance, digital integration, and sound investment decision-making improve SME resilience and long-term sustainability. The fifth category, social and gender-based sustainability (8%), drew on studies such as Kimuli et al. (2022, 2025), Isabirye (2023), Mayanja et al. (2025), and Mwesigwa et al. (2025), which indicated that women's entrepreneurship, networking, and institutional support enhance inclusiveness and empowerment. The final category, sustainability reporting, intellectual capital, and leadership (6%), included works by Bananuka et al. (2023), Nakyejwe et al. (2023), Kezaabu et al. (2024), and Lwanga et al. (2023), showing that sustainability reporting, managerial competence, and CEO values contribute to improved organizational learning and performance.

To ensure validity and reliability, only peer-reviewed and methodologically sound studies were included. The PRISMA framework strengthened transparency and reproducibility, while triangulation across themes and data sources enhanced the credibility of findings. The systematic review culminated in a synthesized dataset of 73 studies, presented in the summary table that outlines each study's author(s), publication year, title, focus area, and key findings. The synthesis provides an empirical foundation for understanding how sustainability is conceptualized, implemented, and challenged within Uganda's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

No	Author(s)	Year	Title	Focus Area	Key Findings
1	Sendawula, K, Bagire, V, Mbidde, C.I., & ...	2021	Environmental commitment and environmental sustainability practices of manufacturing SMEs in Uganda	Relationship between environmental commitment and sustainability practices	Strong environmental commitment enhances adoption of sustainability practices among

					manufacturing SMEs.
2	Sendawula, K, Turyakira, P, Akileng, G, & ...	2024	Environmental knowledge, regulatory compliance mechanisms, and environmental sustainability practices of manufacturing SMEs in Uganda	Effect of environmental knowledge and compliance on sustainability	Environmental knowledge and compliance mechanisms significantly improve sustainability practices.
3	Alinda, K, Tumwine, S, Kaawaase, T, & ...	2022	Sustainability practices among manufacturing firms in Uganda: challenges and opportunities	Challenges and opportunities in sustainability	Firms face financial and technical barriers but recognize sustainability as key to competitiveness.
4	Muhammad, K, Salawu, R.O., Masibo, S, & Sikuku, I	2024	The Government's Role in Nurturing Management for Sustainability Practices among SMEs in Uganda	Government's influence on SME sustainability	Government support and policy enforcement enhance sustainability adoption among SMEs.
5	Sendawula, K, Turyakira, P, Ikiror, C.M., & ...	2021	Regulatory compliance and environmental sustainability practices of manufacturing entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda	Regulatory compliance and sustainability	Compliance with regulations directly correlates with improved sustainability behavior.
6	Alinda, K, Tumwine, S, Nalukenge, I, & ...	2024	Institutional pressures and sustainability practices of manufacturing firms in Uganda	Institutional pressures (coercive, normative, mimetic)	Institutional pressures positively influence sustainability adoption in manufacturing firms.
7	Nakyejwe, K.S, Kasimu, S, & ...	2021	Sustainable entrepreneurship of small businesses in Uganda: A confirmatory factor analysis	Sustainable entrepreneurship	Innovation, environmental concern, and ethics drive sustainable entrepreneurship among SMEs.
8	Rulangaranga, D.M, & Isoh, A.V.N	2021	Entrepreneurship competence and SME sustainability in Kampala, Uganda	Entrepreneurial competence and sustainability	Entrepreneurial competence is a key determinant of SME sustainability.

9	Alinda, K, Tumwine, S, & Kaawaase, T.K	2024	Environmental innovations and sustainability practices of manufacturing firms in Uganda	Environmental innovation and sustainability	Environmental innovations foster effective and long-term sustainability practices.
10	Kabbera, S, Tibaingana, A, Kiwala, Y, & ...	2024	Triple bottom line practices and the growth of agro-processing enterprises in Uganda	Triple bottom line (economic, social, environmental)	Firms embracing triple bottom line reporting experience stronger growth and reputation.
11	Sendawula, K	2022	Environmental sustainability practices of manufacturing SMEs in Uganda (PhD Thesis)	Comprehensive review of sustainability among SMEs	Found low to moderate adoption; recommended increased training and policy incentives.
12	Kimuli, S.N.L, Sendawula, K, & Nagujja, S	2022	Sustainable entrepreneurship practices in women-owned micro enterprises in Owino Market, Kampala, Uganda	Women entrepreneurship and sustainability	Women entrepreneurs practice informal but impactful sustainability measures.
13	Alinda, K, Tumwine, S, Kaawaase, T.K, & ...	2023	Intellectual capital and sustainability	Intellectual capital and firm sustainability	Intellectual capital (knowledge, innovation, relationships) enhances sustainability performance.
14	Sendawula, K, Najjinda, S, Kisubi, M.K., & ...	2025	The contribution of social media competencies and privacy in catalyzing the sustainable performance of SMEs in Uganda	Role of social media skills and privacy in sustainability	SMEs with higher social media competence and privacy awareness achieve better sustainable performance.
15	Nuwagaba, G, Nyende, F, & Namanya, D	2021	Financing Options and Sustainable Small Business Growth in Uganda: An Optimal Model	Financing models for SME growth	Access to diverse financing options significantly enhances sustainable small business growth.
16	Patrick, B, Eric, M, & Eliab, B	2023	Effect of regulatory framework on sustainability of SMEs in Central Uganda	Impact of regulation on SME sustainability	Effective regulatory frameworks support compliance and improve SME sustainability outcomes.
17	Arthur, S, Caleb, T, Abanis, T, Siraje, K, & Eliab, B	2021	Analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on the operations and	Impact of COVID-19 on SME sustainability	COVID-19 severely disrupted SME operations, reducing

			sustainability of SMEs in South Western Uganda		sales and employment but encouraged digital adaptation.
18	Kato, A.I., Chiloane-Tsoka, E.G., & ...	2024	Unlocking the potential: The influence of sustainable finance solutions on the long-term sustainability of SMEs	Sustainable finance solutions	Sustainable financing enhances long-term growth, innovation, and environmental responsibility of SMEs.
19	Bananuka, J, Tauringana, V, & ...	2023	Intellectual capital and sustainability reporting practices in Uganda	Intellectual capital and reporting	Intellectual capital improves quality, transparency, and credibility of sustainability reporting.
20	Ssekiziyivu, B, & Banyenzaki, Y	2021	Business incubation practices and sustainability of incubatee start-up firms in Uganda	Business incubation and startup sustainability	Effective incubation practices enhance survival and sustainability of new firms through mentorship and networking.
21	Bagire, V, Wafler, M, Rieck, C, Asiimwe, J, Abaho, E, & ...	2021	Waste as business: emerging Ugandan micro and small-sized businesses in resource recovery and safe reuse	Waste recycling entrepreneurship	Resource recovery and waste reuse create new green business opportunities and contribute to circular economy.
22	Kabatunzi, R.E	2022	Entrepreneurial strategies for the survival of small business enterprises in Uganda	Entrepreneurial survival strategies	Strategic planning, innovation, and cost control are key for small business survival.
23	Orobia, L.A, Tusiime, I, Mwesigwa, R, & ...	2020	Entrepreneurial framework conditions and business sustainability among youth and women entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurship framework conditions	Favorable business environments and training improve sustainability for women and youth enterprises.
24	Isabirye, P	2023	What is peculiar in the sustainability practices of indigenous female business owners in Uganda?	Women entrepreneurs and sustainability	Indigenous women integrate culture, ethics, and local knowledge into sustainability practices.
25	Okere, K.I, Ibe, G.I, Muoneke, O.B, & Nwaeze, N.C	2023	Environmental sustainability, SMEs, and finance in Africa: a triplicate relationship	Sustainability–finance nexus	Sustainable finance and environmental practices jointly improve SME resilience and profitability.

26	Tauringana, V	2021	Sustainability reporting adoption in developing countries: managerial perception-based determinants from Uganda	Sustainability reporting determinants	Managers' perceptions, awareness, and regulatory influence determine reporting adoption.
27	Kyabarongo, B, Moses, A, & Siraje, K	2022	Provision of managerial skills by microcredit institutions and sustainability of MSMEs during COVID-19 in Kigezi Region	Managerial training and SME sustainability	Training from microcredit institutions enhanced managerial capacity and post-COVID recovery.
28	Kimuli, S.N.L, Sendawula, K, Najjinda, S, & ...	2025	The potential of industrial symbiosis in fostering sustainable entrepreneurship among micro and small enterprises	Industrial symbiosis and sustainability	Collaboration among firms for waste and resource sharing improves sustainability outcomes.
29	Eton, M, Mwosi, F, Okello-Obura, C, & ...	2021	Financial inclusion and the growth of small medium enterprises in Uganda: empirical evidence from selected districts in Lango sub-region	Financial inclusion and SME growth	Access to financial services positively influences SME growth and sustainability.
30	Moses, A, Siraje, K, & Nafiu, LA	2022	Micro-credit institution's services and sustainability of MSMEs during COVID-19 in Kigezi region, Uganda	Micro-credit services and SME sustainability	Microcredit support helped SMEs maintain operations and resilience during COVID-19 disruptions.
31	Bindeeba, DS, Tukamushaba, EK, & Bakashaba, R	2025	Toward a holistic model of sustainable investment decision-making in SMEs: a structural approach in a developing economy	Sustainable investment decision-making	Structural decision models improve SME investment sustainability and resource allocation.
32	Bindeeba, DS, Atuhaire, S, Bakashaba, R, & ...	2025	Digital business process integration and sustainability among SMEs: the mediating role of operational efficiency and moderating role of credit access	Digital integration and SME sustainability	Digital processes increase operational efficiency, enhancing sustainability, especially when credit access is available.
33	Kimuli, SNL, Orobia, L, Sabi, HM, & ...	2020	Sustainability intention: Mediator of sustainability behavioral control and sustainable entrepreneurship	Sustainability behavior and entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial intentions mediate behavioral control to drive sustainable business practices.

34	Akankunda, B, Nkundabanyanga, SK, & ...	2024	Sustainable performance among power companies in Uganda: Role of stakeholder orientation, human capital, regulatory governance, and management control	Sustainable performance in utilities	Stakeholder focus, human capital, and governance significantly enhance sustainability outcomes.
35	Bindeeba, D Stephenson, Tukamushaba, EK, & ...	2025	Toward a holistic model of sustainable investment decision-making in SMEs: A structural approach in a developing economy	Sustainable investment decision-making	Comprehensive structural models guide SMEs toward sustainable and efficient investment choices.
36	Moses, A, Siraj, K, & Benon, K	2022	Provision of Managerial Skills by Micro Credit Institutions and Sustainability of MSMEs During COVID-19 in Kigezi Region, South Western Uganda	Managerial training and SME sustainability	Managerial skill support from micro-credit institutions enhanced SMEs' operational continuity during COVID-19.
37	Okumu, IM, & Buyinza, F	2020	Performance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Uganda: The Role of Innovation	Innovation and SME performance	Innovation is a critical driver of SME growth, competitiveness, and market sustainability.
38	Arinaitwe, A, Tukamuhabwa, BR, Bagire, V, & ...	2024	Nudging manufacturing SMEs in developing communities to energy management: role of institutional pressures	Energy management and institutional pressure	Institutional pressure positively influences SMEs' adoption of energy management practices.
39	Mwesigwa, R, Alupo, S, Nakate, M, Mayengo, J, & ...	2025	The role of institutional support on female-owned business sustainability from a developing country perspective	Institutional support for female SMEs	Institutional support enhances sustainability and growth of female-owned businesses.
50	Lwanga, F, Korir, M, & Bonuke, R	2023	Organizational learning process, CEO values and sustainability performance of manufacturing firms in Uganda	Organizational learning and sustainability	Organizational learning and CEO values strongly impact sustainable performance of SMEs.
51	Odegbesan, OA, Ayo, CK, & Salau, O	2023	A Systematic Review of the Factors Affecting the Sustainability of SMEs	SME sustainability	Financial, managerial, and institutional factors critically affect SME sustainability.

52	Bartolacci, F, Caputo, A, & ...	2020	Sustainability and financial performance of SMEs: A bibliometric and systematic literature review	Sustainability and financial performance	Strong correlation exists between sustainability practices and financial performance in SMEs.
53	Mayanja, SS, Mutebi, H, & Isingoma, JW	2025	Entrepreneurial networking and sustainability of women-owned micro-enterprise performance	Networking and women-owned SMEs	Entrepreneurial networking and self-organization positively mediate women-owned SME sustainability.
55	Mwesigwa, R, Alupo, S, Nakate, M, Mayengo, J, & ...	2025	The role of institutional support on female-owned business sustainability	Women-owned SMEs, Institutional support	Institutional support enhances sustainability and business performance of female-owned SMEs.
56	Odegbesan, OA, Ayo, CK, & Salau, O	2023	Systematic Review of Factors Affecting Sustainability of SMEs	SME sustainability	Key factors include financial access, innovation, leadership, and environmental compliance.
57	Bartolacci, F, Caputo, A, & ...	2020	Sustainability and financial performance of SMEs: A bibliometric and systematic literature review	SME performance, Sustainability	Sustainability practices positively correlate with financial performance and long-term competitiveness.
58	Morepje, MT, Sithole, MZ, Msweli, NS, & Agholor, AI	2024	Influence of E-commerce platforms on sustainable agriculture practices among smallholder farmers	E-commerce, Sustainable agriculture	E-commerce adoption improves market access and sustainability practices for smallholder farmers.
59	Muhammad, K, Salawu, RO, & ...	2024	Sustainability of Tax Reforms in Developing Countries: The Ugandan Case	Tax reforms, Sustainability	Well-structured tax reforms promote economic stability and SME compliance in Uganda.
60	Benson, T, & Lydia, E	2023	Role Played by Research and Development in Uganda's MSME Toward Promoting SDGs	R&D, MSMEs	Investment in R&D enhances innovation, sustainability, and contribution of SMEs to SDGs.
61	Nakyeyune, GK, Bananuka, J, Tumwebaze, Z, & ...	2023	Knowledge management practices and sustainability reporting: the	Knowledge management, Sustainability reporting	Intellectual capital mediates the impact of knowledge management on

62	Kezaabu, S, Nkundabanyanga, SK, & ...	2024	mediating role of intellectual capital Managerial competences and integrated reporting practices: perception-based evidence from Uganda	Managerial competencies, Reporting	SME sustainability reporting. Managerial skills positively affect integrated reporting quality and sustainability disclosures.
63	Lukwago, J, Martins, AMDA, & Tefera, O	2023	Drivers and barriers in developing sustainability leadership: natural scientists at Ugandan universities	Sustainability leadership	Key drivers include training and organizational support; barriers include resource constraints.
64	Kakuba, SJ, & Kanyamurwa, JM	2021	Management of wetlands and livelihood opportunities in Kinawataka wetland, Kampala-Uganda	Wetland management, Livelihoods	Sustainable wetland management enhances community livelihood opportunities.
65	Martins, A, Branco, MC, Melo, PN, & Machado, C	2022	Sustainability in SMEs: A systematic literature review and future research agenda	SME sustainability	Identifies critical research gaps and trends in SME sustainability adoption globally.
66	Buda, G, & Ricz, J	2023	Industrial symbiosis and industrial policy for sustainable development in Uganda	Industrial symbiosis, Sustainability	Industrial symbiosis fosters sustainable development and resource efficiency in SMEs.
67	Agaba, AM, & Mugarura, E	2023	Microfinance Institution Services and Performance of SMEs in Kabale District, Uganda	Microfinance, SME performance	Access to microfinance services improves SME performance and financial sustainability.
68	Baporikar, N	2021	Handbook of research on sustaining SMEs and entrepreneurial innovation in the post-COVID-19 era	SME sustainability, Innovation	Post-COVID SMEs require innovation and sustainable strategies to remain competitive.
69	Alfi, S, Taleghani, M, Vatanparast, MR, & ...	2024	A Dynamic Model for Assessing the Sustainability of SMEs	SME sustainability, Modeling	Dynamic models help assess and improve SME sustainability over time.
70	Appiah-Kubi, E	2024	Management knowledge and sustainability reporting in SMEs: The role of perceived benefit and stakeholder pressure	Management knowledge, Sustainability reporting	Perceived benefits and stakeholder pressure positively influence sustainability reporting practices.

71	Das, M, Rangarajan, K, & Dutta, G	2020	Corporate sustainability in SMEs: A literature analysis and road ahead	Corporate sustainability, SMEs	Identifies gaps and future directions for corporate sustainability practices in SMEs.
72	Athia, I	2023	Management of cashflow practices in micro enterprises: Perspectives from women-owned SMEs	Cashflow management, Women-owned SMEs	Proper cashflow practices enhance sustainability and growth in women-owned SMEs.
73	Wakibi, A, Ntayi, J, Ngoma, M, Nkote, I, & ...	2023	Sustainable innovations in Ugandan financial institutions	Financial innovation, Sustainability	Adoption of sustainable innovations improves operational efficiency and market competitiveness.

Review Findings

The systematic review revealed that sustainability has become a strategic priority for entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) striving to balance economic growth with environmental and social responsibility. The reviewed studies show increasing awareness of sustainability principles driven by regulatory pressure, market competition, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, many SMEs continue to emphasize short-term profitability over long-term environmental and social impact, resulting in uneven adoption of sustainable practices.

The findings indicate that Ugandan SMEs are progressively integrating sustainability through green innovations, resource efficiency, ethical leadership, and community-oriented initiatives. Evidence from the reviewed literature highlights that access to affordable finance, digital innovation, and institutional support are key determinants of sustainability adoption. Studies such as Sendawula et al. (2021, 2024) and Alinda et al. (2024) demonstrate that environmental commitment and regulatory compliance significantly enhance SME sustainability performance. Similarly, Nakyejwe et al. (2021)

and Rulangaranga and Isoh (2021) establish that entrepreneurial competence, ethical orientation, and innovation are central to sustainable performance outcomes.

Empirical evidence also points to the role of institutional and governance mechanisms in advancing sustainability. Research by Arthur et al. (2021) and Patrick et al. (2023) shows that policy consistency, institutional enforcement, and access to sustainable finance are vital in promoting environmentally responsible business operations. Financial inclusion and investment decisions further emerged as critical themes, with studies such as Eton et al. (2021) and Agaba and Mugarura (2023) linking digital financial services and investment planning to SME resilience and sustainability.

Social and gender-based sustainability practices were another emerging focus area. Studies by Kimuli et al. (2022, 2025) and Isabirye (2023) highlight that inclusive entrepreneurship, women's participation, and social networks promote equitable and community-driven growth. At the leadership and reporting level, Bananuka et al. (2023) and Kezaabu et al. (2024) found that effective leadership, sustainability reporting, and intellectual capital development

enhance accountability and performance outcomes.

To illustrate these findings, several Ugandan enterprises were identified in the reviewed studies as examples of successful sustainability adoption. SolarNow integrates renewable energy technology through a pay-as-you-go financing model, expanding access to clean and affordable energy while fostering environmental responsibility (Njenga & Muendo, 2022). SafeBoda, a digital transport enterprise, enhances social and economic sustainability by formalizing informal work, improving road safety, and promoting youth employment (Oloko & Kamau, 2023). Fenix International promotes off-grid solar solutions that support both SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while Tugende demonstrates social sustainability through asset financing for low-income entrepreneurs, thereby promoting economic empowerment and inclusive growth.

Collectively, the reviewed evidence underscores that innovation, financing, institutional support, and leadership are the main drivers of sustainability among Ugandan entrepreneurial ventures. Nevertheless, widespread adoption remains constrained by limited access to affordable green financing, weak institutional enforcement, inadequate managerial and technical capacity, and insufficient policy and infrastructural support.

Overall, the findings position Uganda's entrepreneurial ecosystem at a critical transition point. The growing integration of sustainability principles within SME operations signals both an opportunity and a necessity for enhancing long-term competitiveness, resilience, and national development. Successful ventures illustrate that profitability and sustainability can coexist when environmental and social goals are embedded into strategic business models. Strengthening institutional frameworks and

financial mechanisms will therefore be essential to scale sustainable entrepreneurship across the country.

Conclusion

This study systematically reviewed sustainability practices among entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda. The findings indicate that, while sustainability has gained prominence in global business discourse, its integration among Uganda's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remains limited, uneven, and largely informal.

Notable ventures such as SolarNow, SafeBoda, Fenix International, and Tugende illustrate that the intersection of innovation, technology adoption, and inclusive financing can enable SMEs to achieve both profitability and sustainability. These cases demonstrate that sustainable entrepreneurship is feasible in developing economies when supportive policies, accessible finance, and capacity-building mechanisms are in place.

Despite these successes, most small enterprises in Uganda continue to prioritize short-term profitability over long-term sustainability. Persistent barriers including limited access to affordable credit, infrastructural deficiencies, weak enforcement of environmental and labor standards, and low awareness of sustainable business practices hinder wider adoption of sustainability principles.

The review concludes that addressing these structural and institutional constraints is critical. Without targeted interventions, a majority of small ventures may remain unsustainable, limiting Uganda's progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 13 (Climate Action).

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the adoption of sustainability practices among entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda:

- 1) **Policy and Institutional Support**
The government should strengthen environmental and labor regulations and ensure consistent enforcement across all sectors. Incentive-based policies such as tax reductions, subsidies, and preferential procurement for environmentally responsible enterprises should be introduced to encourage SMEs to adopt sustainable practices.
- 2) **Access to Green and Impact Finance**
Development banks, microfinance institutions, and private investors should expand access to affordable green financing specifically tailored for SMEs. Financing models such as pay-as-you-go, blended finance, and micro-leasing can facilitate investments in renewable energy, waste management technologies, and other sustainable solutions.
- 3) **Capacity Building and Awareness Creation**
Universities, vocational training institutions, and business incubators should integrate sustainability and green entrepreneurship into curricula. The Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives, in collaboration with business associations, should conduct nationwide awareness campaigns emphasizing the long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits of sustainable business practices.
- 4) **Standardized Measurement Frameworks**
Researchers and policymakers should collaborate to develop context-specific sustainability indicators for SMEs. These indicators would enable entrepreneurs to track, evaluate, and report their

environmental, social, and economic performance, supporting evidence-based decision-making and accountability.

- 5) **Promotion of Best Practices and Peer Learning**
Successful Ugandan enterprises, including SolarNow, SafeBoda, Fenix International, and Tugende, should be documented and shared through national entrepreneurship networks and peer-learning platforms. Public-private partnerships can facilitate knowledge exchange and replication of proven sustainability models across different regions and sectors.
- 6) **Research and Innovation Support**
Academic institutions, such as Kampala International University (KIU), should champion applied research on sustainability and entrepreneurship. This would identify sector-specific barriers, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and generate innovative solutions to enhance the sustainability performance of SMEs.

Final Reflection

The transition toward sustainable entrepreneurship in Uganda requires coordinated efforts among government, academia, private investors, and entrepreneurs. Shifting from purely profit-oriented business models to Triple Bottom Line approaches integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations can enhance business resilience, competitiveness, and societal impact.

If effectively implemented, the recommendations outlined in this study position Ugandan entrepreneurial ventures to become key drivers of inclusive, innovative, and environmentally responsible growth, thereby contributing significantly to the nation's sustainable development agenda.

Limitations of the Study

This review relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from published academic and

institutional sources in English, covering the period from 2015 to 2025. As a result, relevant studies published in other languages or outside this timeframe may have been excluded. Additionally, the absence of primary data collection limits the study's ability to capture firsthand insights into the lived experiences of Ugandan entrepreneurs regarding sustainability practices.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of existing literature, offering meaningful contributions to the understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship in developing economies, particularly in the Ugandan context.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should adopt empirical approaches both quantitative and qualitative to examine the direct relationship between sustainability practices and the performance of entrepreneurial ventures in Uganda. Comparative studies across different sectors or within the East African region could further illuminate contextual factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practices.

Longitudinal investigations are also recommended to explore how institutional reforms, financial innovations, and digital transformations shape the evolution of sustainable entrepreneurship over time. Such studies would generate evidence-based insights to guide policymakers, development partners, and entrepreneurs in fostering a more resilient and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Uganda.

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