■ EDITORIAL

# Light up those dark city streets

There were high hopes five years ago as Parliament created 10 new cities in Uganda, among them brighter streets, safer movement and modern urban living.

However, a stroll through the streets of Arua, Mbarara, Gulu, Jinja, Fort Portal, Mbale, Masaka, Hoima, Lira and Soroti now shows that many remain shrouded in darkness. This is an indictment of city authorities tasked with ensuring safety. Dark streets paint a picture akin to danger lurking in the dark and make it fertile ground for them to become dens of thieves.

This affects urban progress and cripples the economies of these cities. Well-lit streets are the foundation of security, yet the current state of affairs points to deeper problems: The lack of planned maintenance, chronic underfunding, poor-quality infrastructure and inadequate technical expertise.

» DARK STREETS PAINT A PICTURE AKIN TO DANGER LURKING IN THE DARK.

In Gulu, Hoima, Soroti, Lira, Jinja and Mbale, residents endure nights filled with dim or non-functional streetlights. This situation is occasioned by various factors, including solar-powered lights failing due to substandard batteries installed underground, which succumb to rainwater, while others fall prey to vandalism. The poor procurement processes sometimes compound these woes, as seen in Soroti, where low-quality lights stopped working within two years. The limited manpower, too, cripples repairs just like it is the case with Gulu, which relies on one electrician to maintain over 500 solar-powered lights.

Because these streets are dimly lit, criminal activity thrives, businesses close early and revenue from night economies evaporates. To address this, city authorities should prioritise training in-house personnel to build manpower. They should also improve procurement oversight and budget adequate funds for maintenance.

WEEKEND VISION

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