



Detty December as a Diaspora-Driven Seasonal SME Economy in West Africa: Ethical and Developmental Implications

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ABSTRACT

Detty December has emerged as a recurrent feature of urban economies in West Africa, driven by large-scale diasporic return and intensified seasonal consumption. Despite its growing visibility in policy, tourism, and media discourse, the phenomenon remains under-theorised within development studies and is rarely examined as an economic system with governance and ethical implications.

This paper conceptualises Detty December as a diaspora-driven, SME-centred seasonal economy characterised by compressed demand cycles, informal enterprise dominance, and weak institutional mediation. Drawing on development economics, SME and informal economy scholarship, and moral economy perspectives, the paper argues that short-term demand surges interact with institutional voids to generate concentrated but unstable value creation. While seasonal inflows produce significant income opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, they also intensify risk exposure, labour precarity, and asymmetric responsibility between mobile diasporic consumers and place-bound local economic actors.

To situate these dynamics within longer-run development patterns, the paper introduces the illustrative case of Eruku Oshodi, a locally embedded cocoa-based beverage, to demonstrate historical continuity in the informal circulation of African-origin value without durable institutional protection or developmental consolidation. This parallel highlights how recurring informal economic systems can generate visibility and value while remaining structurally unmanaged.

The paper contributes to development scholarship by reframing diaspora engagement beyond remittances and entrepreneurship, foregrounding seasonal time as an organising economic dimension, and integrating ethical governance into the analysis of informal SME economies. It concludes by outlining selective, ethics-informed policy directions for engaging with predictable seasonal demand systems in ways that reduce vulnerability and enhance developmental outcomes in urban African contexts.

Keywords: Seasonal economies, Diaspora engagement, Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Informal economy, Urban economic development, Institutional voids, Moral economy

1. INTRODUCTION

From Festivity to Economic Phenomenon

December occupies a distinctive position within the global social and economic calendar. In much of the Western world, it is framed as a period of seasonal withdrawal characterised by winter, domestic celebration, and symbolic closure of the economic year. However, patterns of migration and diasporic return have reshaped the meaning of December in many parts of West Africa, where the season is marked not by climatic retreat but by intensified social presence, public festivity, and heightened economic activity (Etefe, 2023; Kolade et al., 2025).

This reconfiguration has given rise to what is now widely known as *Detty December*, a term that captures the lived experience of large-scale diasporic return, urban nightlife expansion, cultural performance, and accelerated consumption across major West African cities, particularly Lagos and Accra (Ajayi, 2025). While the phrase has gained prominence in popular discourse, tourism promotion, and digital media, its economic dimensions remain under-examined within academic scholarship. Existing discussions tend to celebrate *Detty December* as a cultural spectacle or branding opportunity, with limited attention to its structural economic characteristics or ethical implications (Kolade et al., 2025).

Yet *Detty December* is not merely a cultural moment. It produces a short but intense cycle of economic activity centred largely on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within hospitality, transportation, food services, entertainment, fashion, and informal retail sectors. These enterprises experience dramatic demand spikes, compressed revenue timelines, and heightened exposure to operational risk during the festive period. Once the season ends, many face abrupt demand collapse, debt accumulation, and labour instability. This pattern reflects broader features of informal and semi-formal SME economies in African urban contexts, where firms act as economic shock absorbers in the absence of institutional smoothing mechanisms (Little, 1982; Chang, 2011).

This paper is positioned as a conceptual and analytically grounded study rather than an

empirical measurement exercise. Its purpose is not to quantify the monetary value of *Detty December* or to estimate sector-specific impacts, but to clarify how the phenomenon functions as an economic system and why its ethical and governance implications matter. Given the rapid expansion of public and policy discourse around *Detty December* in the absence of established analytical frameworks, a conceptual intervention is both timely and necessary.

Despite the scale and recurrence of this seasonal economic surge, *Detty December* has not been conceptualised as a temporary economic system. Development and SME literature have traditionally focused on remittances, entrepreneurship, or long-term firm growth, often overlooking cyclical, culturally embedded forms of value creation driven by diaspora mobility and seasonal consumption (Etefe, 2023). As a result, questions of ownership, labour conditions, value capture, and ethical responsibility remain largely unaddressed.

This gap mirrors earlier patterns in African economic history, where culturally rooted products generated widespread value while remaining institutionally unprotected. The case of *Eruku Oshodi*, a cocoa-based beverage known in Nigerian street culture, illustrates this dynamic. Although cocoa products derived from African agriculture underpin a global chocolate industry worth billion, local processing practices such as *Eruku Oshodi* have historically remained informal, culturally devalued, and unpatented (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011). Popular references to *Eruku Oshodi* as “dust from the streets of Oshodi” reflect a broader pattern of symbolic and economic marginalisation, even as scientific studies have documented its nutritional and medicinal properties, including relevance to hypertension and diabetes management (Christianah et al., 2019; Jayeola et al., 2011).

The absence of intellectual property protection, regulatory recognition, and structured value capture in such cases has enabled long-term extraction of African-origin resources without corresponding developmental returns. This paper argues that *Detty December* risks reproducing similar dynamics on a larger and more visible scale. While diasporic participation brings capital, visibility, and global attention, the economic risks are disproportionately borne by locally embedded

SME actors operating within informal and weakly governed systems.

The paper proceeds by conceptualising Detty December as a temporal, social, and economic phenomenon distinct from generic festive economies. It then situates the argument within existing literature on diaspora engagement, seasonal economies, and informal SMEs, before introducing an interdisciplinary framework to examine ethical tensions and governance gaps. The discussion concludes by outlining policy implications for ethically informed engagement with seasonal SME economies in West Africa.

This paper makes a single, focused contribution. It conceptualises Detty December as a diaspora-driven, SME-centred seasonal economic system, rather than as a cultural spectacle or tourism moment. It argues that short-term diasporic return generates an intense but compressed demand surge which, when combined with institutional voids and weak urban governance, produces high-risk SME cycles characterised by revenue concentration, labour precarity, and asymmetric responsibility. By foregrounding cyclical time, mobility asymmetry, and ethical governance failure, the paper extends existing scholarship on diaspora engagement, informal SMEs, and African urban economies, which has largely overlooked seasonal demand systems of this scale. In doing so, it introduces an analytical and ethical framework that renders Detty December legible as a development phenomenon, rather than a celebratory anomaly, and provides a foundation for future empirical research and policy engagement with seasonal SME economies in West Africa.

2. Conceptualising Detty December

This section conceptualises Detty December as diaspora-driven demand surges, interacting with institutional voids in urban African economies, generate compressed cycles of SME activity characterised by heightened risk, temporal intensity, and uneven distribution of rewards and responsibility. Understanding Detty December as a temporary economic system organised around this mechanism provides the analytical basis for distinguishing it from generic festive or tourism economies.

Detty December is frequently invoked as a

cultural slogan, a marketing device, or a shorthand for festive excess. Such usages, while descriptively evocative, obscure the structural dynamics that underpin the phenomenon. For analytical clarity, this paper conceptualises Detty December not as an abstract cultural label but as a temporary economic system constituted by time-bound mobility, intensified consumption, and SME-led value creation.

At its core, Detty December is a temporal phenomenon. It is cyclical rather than continuous, recurring annually and concentrated within a narrow time window between late November and early January. Unlike standard festive periods, its economic intensity is compressed, producing short-cycle demand spikes that exceed normal market rhythms. This temporal compression matters because it reshapes production, labour allocation, pricing behaviour, and risk exposure for SMEs operating within the period. Economic activity is not merely increased; it is accelerated, front-loaded, and unstable, with limited mechanisms for post-season smoothing (Little, 1982; Chang, 2011).

Detty December is also a social phenomenon, anchored in diasporic return and visibility. The seasonal movement of African diasporans back to urban centres such as Lagos and Accra introduces not only capital but symbolic and cultural expectations. Presence itself becomes performative, expressed through nightlife participation, consumption of experiences, and public celebration. This aligns with scholarship that moves beyond remittances to emphasise physical return, social recognition, and symbolic capital as key channels through which diasporas influence local economies (Etefe, 2023). Importantly, this return is unevenly distributed: diasporic consumers often retain mobility and exit options, while local SME actors remain embedded within place-bound economic constraints.

Most critically for this paper, Detty December constitutes an economic phenomenon centred on SMEs operating within largely informal or semi-formal systems. Hospitality businesses, event planners, transport operators, food vendors, fashion retailers, and creative service providers experience extraordinary demand during the season (Kolade et al., 2025). However, this demand is temporally fragile. Revenue generation

is highly concentrated, labour is often informal and precarious, and costs are front-loaded in anticipation of peak activity. Once the season ends, many enterprises confront abrupt demand collapse, unpaid debts, and surplus labour, revealing the structural vulnerability embedded within seasonal economies.

Conceptualising Detty December as a temporary economic system distinguishes it from generic festive or tourism economies. Unlike established festival economies that are institutionally planned, regulated, and amortised across time, Detty December operates with minimal governance, weak coordination, and limited policy recognition (Ajayi, 2025). Its informality is not incidental but structural, reflecting broader patterns in African urban economies where informality functions as an organising principle rather than a residual category (Chang, 2011).

This conceptual framing also enables historical continuity with earlier African economic practices. The case of Eruku Oshodi illustrates how culturally embedded products can circulate widely within informal systems while remaining economically and ethically unprotected. Despite scientific studies documenting cocoa-based beverages' nutritional and medicinal properties (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011), Eruku Oshodi has remained symbolically devalued and institutionally marginalised. This mirrors contemporary dynamics in Detty December, where value creation is visible and celebrated, yet ownership, protection, and long-term developmental capture remain absent.

In this sense, Detty December should be understood as neither accidental nor anomalous. It is part of a recurring pattern in which African-origin economic activities generate intense but short-lived value under conditions of informality, limited governance, and ethical neglect. Recognising Detty December as a temporary economic system provides the analytical foundation for examining its ethical tensions, governance failures, and developmental implications, which subsequent sections of the paper address.

Figure 1. Detty December as a Diaspora-Driven Seasonal SME Economy: Core Mechanism

This figure presents a conceptual representation of Detty December as a diaspora-driven seasonal SME economy. It illustrates how intensified, time-bound diaspora-led consumption interacts with institutional voids to produce compressed and high-risk SME cycles. These cycles generate concentrated but short-lived value creation alongside labour precarity, risk concentration, and ethical and developmental asymmetries within local economies.

Detty December as a Diaspora-Driven Seasonal SME Economy

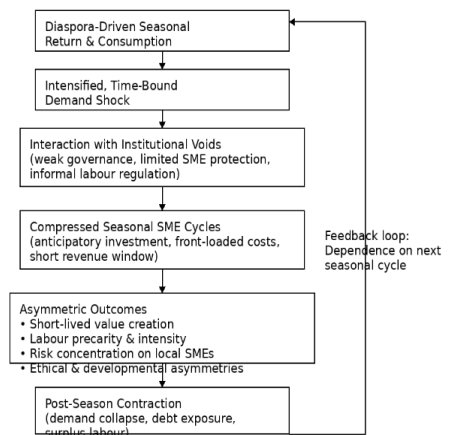


Fig 1

Analytical Boundaries and Conceptual Scope

For analytical clarity, this paper distinguishes Detty December from adjacent but conceptually distinct economic phenomena. Detty December is not equivalent to conventional tourism-led festival economies, which are typically institutionally planned, formally regulated, and integrated into long-term urban development strategies. Nor does it encompass one-off cultural events or isolated festive gatherings. Rather, it refers to a recurring, diaspora-driven seasonal demand system that operates largely outside formal governance structures and is sustained through SME and informal economic activity.

The concept is also distinct from general urban nightlife or entertainment economies, which persist year-round. What differentiates Detty December is its temporal compression, scale of diasporic return, and the intensity with which value creation, labour mobilisation, and risk exposure are concentrated into a narrow seasonal window. These characteristics produce economic dynamics and ethical tensions that are not

adequately captured by existing tourism or festival economy frameworks.

By delimiting the concept in this way, the paper treats Detty December as a specific form of seasonal SME economy whose developmental significance lies precisely in its informality, predictability, and lack of institutional ownership

3. Situating the Paper in Existing Literature

The phenomenon of Detty December intersects multiple bodies of literature, including diaspora studies, seasonal and cultural economies, and SME and informal economy scholarship. While each provides partial insight, none fully captures the temporal, ethical, and governance dimensions of diaspora-driven seasonal SME economies. This section situates the paper within these strands and identifies the conceptual gap it addresses.

3.1 Diaspora, Return, and Economic Circulation

Research on diaspora and development has traditionally focused on remittances as the primary channel through which diasporic populations contribute to home-country economies. Remittances are often framed as stabilising income flows, household-level safety nets, or macroeconomic buffers (Little, 1982). More recent scholarship, however, has challenged this narrow focus, highlighting the significance of physical return, consumption, entrepreneurship, and symbolic engagement in shaping local economic activity (Etefe, 2023).

Studies of diasporic return emphasise presence rather than transfer. Return visits stimulate demand in urban centres, reshape consumption patterns, and reinforce cultural and social hierarchies. In the context of Detty December, diasporic return is not incidental but constitutive of the seasonal economy itself. Yet existing literature tends to celebrate diaspora engagement without adequately interrogating the asymmetries it produces. The ability of diasporic actors to enter and exit the local economy contrasts sharply with the immobility of SME operators whose livelihoods depend on navigating the volatility of seasonal demand. This paper extends diaspora literature by foregrounding these asymmetries and their ethical implications.

3.2 Cultural and Seasonal Economies

A second relevant body of work examines cultural, festival, and seasonal economies. This literature highlights how time-bound events can temporarily transform urban spaces, generate employment, and stimulate local business activity. Well-documented examples include music festivals, sporting events, and heritage celebrations, often analysed within tourism and urban development frameworks (Ajayi, 2025).

However, most studies of seasonal economies focus on contexts where events are formally planned, institutionally supported, and integrated into broader development strategies. In contrast, Detty December lacks formal governance structures, clear policy ownership, or long-term planning mechanisms. Its scale and recurrence resemble institutionalised festival economies, yet its informality aligns more closely with survivalist and opportunity-driven SME activity. Existing frameworks struggle to account for this hybrid condition, where large-scale economic mobilisation occurs without corresponding institutional architecture.

3.3 SMEs and Informality in African Urban Economies

The third strand of literature centres on SMEs and informality in African economies. SMEs are widely recognised as engines of employment, innovation, and economic resilience, particularly in contexts of weak formal sector absorption (Chang, 2011). Informality, once treated as economic absence or failure, is increasingly understood as a structured and adaptive response to institutional constraints.

Nevertheless, much of the SME literature assumes relatively stable operating environments, even when acknowledging risk and uncertainty. Seasonal economies such as Detty December expose a different reality: SMEs operating under extreme temporal compression, anticipatory investment, and post-season collapse. Informality here is not merely a coping strategy but a condition that intensifies vulnerability when demand evaporates and institutional support is absent.

The Eruku Oshodi example further illustrates how informality can enable long-term value extraction without ownership or protection. Despite

scientific validation of cocoa-based products' quality and health implications (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011), informal processing and cultural devaluation have historically limited local value capture. This historical pattern resonates with contemporary Detty December dynamics, where SMEs generate significant value yet remain structurally exposed.

This analysis aligns with, but also extends, established African urban and informality scholarship. Work by Hart, Meagher, and Simone has demonstrated that informality in African cities functions as a structured and adaptive economic system rather than as residual disorder. However, much of this literature emphasises everyday survival, livelihood improvisation, or spatial practice. By contrast, the present paper foregrounds seasonal time and diaspora-driven demand as organising forces that temporarily intensify informality, redistribute risk, and reshape SME behaviour. In doing so, it complements urban informality scholarship by showing how informality operates not only across space, but across compressed temporal cycles tied to global mobility.

Synthesis: Identifying the Gap

Taken together, this paper makes three interrelated theoretical extensions. First, it extends diaspora and development scholarship by shifting analytical attention away from remittances, visibility, or episodic return toward the asymmetric distribution of economic risk that accompanies diaspora-driven seasonal consumption. In doing so, it reframes diaspora engagement not only as a source of demand or cultural capital, but as a structuring force that redistributes vulnerability within local SME economies.

Second, the paper extends SME and informal economy literature by foregrounding cyclical time as a central, rather than peripheral, organising dimension of enterprise activity. By conceptualising Detty December as a compressed seasonal system, it shows how risk, labour precarity, and firm survival are intensified under short-cycle demand conditions, challenging assumptions that SME performance and resilience can be adequately understood through linear or continuous economic models.

Third, the paper extends work on cultural and seasonal economies by introducing ethical governance failure as a core analytical dimension. Rather than treating festive or cultural economies as primarily symbolic or developmental opportunities, the analysis demonstrates how the absence of institutional responsibility shapes who captures value and who bears risk. In this sense, Detty December exposes not only an economic gap, but a moral and governance gap in the treatment of large-scale, recurring cultural-economic systems in African urban contexts.

4. Interdisciplinary Framework

Understanding Detty December as a diaspora-driven seasonal SME economy requires an analytical approach that extends beyond single-discipline explanations. Neither development economics, SME studies, nor cultural analysis alone can adequately capture the interaction between time-bound value creation, informal economic structures, and ethical responsibility. Accordingly, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary framework that integrates economic, ethical, and phenomenological lenses.

4.1 Economic Lens: SME-Led Seasonal Value Creation

From an economic perspective, Detty December is characterised by diaspora-induced demand spikes that temporarily reshape urban markets. The influx of returning diasporans intensifies consumption of services and experiences, leading to rapid turnover in SME-dominated sectors such as hospitality, transport, food services, and entertainment (Kolade et al., 2025). Unlike continuous markets, value creation during Detty December is compressed into a short cycle, requiring SMEs to anticipate demand, mobilise capital, and expand labour capacity within tight time constraints.

This form of seasonal value creation is structurally unstable. SMEs absorb significant upfront costs, often relying on informal credit, personal savings, or family labour. When the festive period ends, demand collapses sharply, exposing firms to debt, excess inventory, and underutilised labour. Development economics has long recognised the vulnerability of enterprises operating without institutional buffers or smoothing mechanisms (Little, 1982; Chang,

2011). Detty December exemplifies this vulnerability in intensified form, revealing how cyclical time magnifies risk within informal SME economies.

4.2 Ethical Lens: Moral Economy and Responsibility

Economic analysis alone is insufficient to address the distributive and moral questions raised by Detty December. The ethical lens adopted here draws on moral economy perspectives, which emphasise the social norms, obligations, and power relations that shape economic life. In the context of Detty December, ethical tensions emerge around who benefits from seasonal value creation and who bears its associated risks.

Diasporic consumers enjoy mobility, discretionary spending power, and symbolic status, while local SME operators and informal workers confront precarity, long working hours, and income volatility. The absence of formal regulation does not eliminate ethical responsibility; rather, it diffuses it. As with the historical case of Eruku Oshodi, where informal production facilitated value extraction without protection or recognition, Detty December reveals an ethical vacuum in which economic gains are celebrated while structural vulnerabilities are normalised (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011).

This ethical lens foregrounds the role of the state and policymakers, not merely as regulators but as moral actors. Policy neglect is itself an ethical stance, one that implicitly accepts risk concentration, labour precarity, and uneven value capture as acceptable features of seasonal economic life.

This framing draws on moral economy traditions associated with Thompson and Scott, in which economic arrangements are evaluated not only by efficiency but by the norms, obligations, and power relations that govern who bears risk and who captures value.

4.3 Phenomenological Lens: Time, Work, and Meaning

The third component of the framework is phenomenological, focusing on lived experience and the meaning of time within seasonal economies. Detty December operates according to

cyclical rather than linear economic time. For SME actors, the year is organised around anticipation, peak exertion, and post-season exhaustion. Income, hope, and survival are compressed into a narrow temporal window, shaping decision-making, labour practices, and risk tolerance.

This experiential dimension is often absent from macro-level development analysis. Yet understanding how SME operators experience Detty December is essential for ethical evaluation. The season is not only a period of opportunity but also one of strain, uncertainty, and deferred vulnerability. Recognising this lived reality helps explain why informal practices persist and why structural reform cannot be reduced to technical policy fixes alone.

Framework Summary

Together, these three lenses allow Detty December to be analysed as an economic system embedded in time, social relations, and moral expectations. The interdisciplinary framework reveals dynamics that remain invisible within single-discipline approaches and provides the foundation for examining Detty December's practical operation, ethical tensions, and governance implications in subsequent sections.

5. Methodological Positioning

This paper is designed as a conceptual and analytically grounded study rather than an empirical measurement exercise. Its purpose is to clarify what Detty December is, how it functions as a seasonal SME economy, and why its ethical and governance implications matter for development debates in West Africa. Because the existing public conversation has outpaced formal academic conceptualisation, a rigorous conceptual approach is appropriate at this stage of scholarship (Kolade et al., 2025; Etefe, 2023).

The paper adopts an interdisciplinary, qualitative orientation, combining three forms of evidence. First, it engages peer-reviewed academic literature across development economics, SME and informal economy studies, diaspora and mobility scholarship, and institutional governance debates (Little, 1982; Chang, 2011). Second, it draws on policy and institutional documents where available, including development policy framings that relate to SMEs, informality, tourism,

and urban economic management. Third, it incorporates high-visibility media and industry narratives on Detty December, not as “data” to be generalised, but as discourse that signals how the phenomenon is being framed, marketed, and normalised in practice (Ajayi, 2025; Kolade et al., 2025). These sources are used for triangulation of claims about meaning, structure, and governance absence, rather than for statistical inference.

Analytically, the paper proceeds through a structured conceptual method. It (1) defines Detty December as a temporary economic system, distinguishing it from generic festive periods; (2) maps its likely value-creation channels through SMEs and informal labour; (3) identifies ethical tensions by examining how risks and rewards are distributed across diasporic consumers, SME operators, and informal workers; and (4) derives governance and policy implications based on institutional economics and moral economy reasoning (Chang, 2011; Little, 1982). The goal is to produce a coherent theoretical and ethical account that can guide later empirical research and inform policy design.

The inclusion of Eruku Oshodi functions as a historically grounded illustrative case within this conceptual design. The case is not presented as a direct causal analogue to Detty December, nor as evidence of quantified economic loss. Rather, it is used as a conceptual anchor for recurring development patterns: culturally embedded African-origin value creation, informal production and distribution, symbolic devaluation, and weak institutional capture of long-term economic returns. The argument is supported through traceable academic sources on cocoa-based beverage evaluation and related public health and quality concerns (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011), alongside interpretive framing that connects these dynamics to current seasonal economies.

The inclusion of Eruku Oshodi serves a conceptual rather than empirical function. It is employed as a historically grounded analytical analogue that illustrates recurring patterns in African economic development: culturally embedded value creation, informal production and circulation, symbolic devaluation, and weak institutional capture of long-term returns. The case is not presented as causal evidence for Detty December, nor as a claim of equivalence between historical and

contemporary contexts. Instead, it provides historical depth to the ethical argument by demonstrating continuity in how African-origin economic activities generate value without corresponding protection, ownership, or developmental consolidation.

Transparency about what this paper does not do is essential. It does not estimate the monetary value of Detty December, measure GDP impact, or provide sector-specific revenue figures. Those are important tasks, but they require primary data access, firm-level accounting, and cross-border mobility data that are not available within the present design. Instead, the paper contributes by developing the conceptual architecture and ethical vocabulary required to undertake such measurement responsibly and to interpret future findings within an institutional and moral framework.

Limitations follow from the chosen design. Because the paper is non-empirical, its claims about economic intensity and SME exposure are inferential and based on documented characteristics of diaspora consumption patterns, seasonal urban economies, and informal SME structures rather than direct observation or survey data. In addition, Detty December is not uniform across West Africa; it varies by city, class, infrastructure, and regulatory context. The paper therefore avoids over-generalising and treats Detty December as a regional phenomenon with locally specific manifestations, using Lagos and related Nigerian examples primarily for conceptual clarity (Ajayi, 2025; Kolade et al., 2025).

Finally, this conceptual positioning is not an endpoint but a foundation. The methodological contribution is to make Detty December researchable in a structured way by specifying mechanisms, ethical questions, and governance variables that future empirical studies can operationalise. Possible next-stage designs include ethnographic work with SME operators, value-chain mapping of seasonal sectors, labour and wage condition studies, and mixed-method diaspora consumption research aligned to policy evaluation.

6. Detty December as an SME Economy in Practice

When examined as a temporary economic system, Detty December can be understood as generating a distinctive pattern of SME activation, revenue concentration, and post-season vulnerability. While the precise scale and configuration vary across cities and sectors, existing scholarship on informal and seasonal economies suggests that diaspora-driven demand surges of this kind are likely to produce broadly similar structural dynamics in urban contexts where SMEs dominate service provision.

The sectors most visibly activated during Detty December are those dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises. These include hospitality and accommodation services, event planning and promotion, transportation and logistics, food and beverage services, fashion and beauty, nightlife and entertainment, and a wide range of informal retail and service provision. Many of these enterprises operate at the margins of formality, relying on flexible labour, informal credit, and personal networks rather than institutional finance or contractual employment structures (Chang, 2011).

Economic activity during Detty December is marked by revenue concentration and temporal compression. A substantial share of annual income for many SMEs is generated within a few weeks. This creates strong incentives for anticipatory investment, including temporary expansion of premises, advance stock procurement, and short-term labour hiring. These decisions are made under conditions of uncertainty, often without insurance, price stabilisation mechanisms, or enforceable contracts. While peak-season revenues may appear substantial, they must be understood in relation to elevated costs, debt exposure, and the absence of post-season income smoothing. For many SMEs, post-season survival therefore depends on the ability to stretch peak-period earnings across subsequent lean months. This reliance on cyclical income concentration reinforces vulnerability over time and underscores why Detty December should be evaluated not solely in terms of peak economic activity, but as a system whose developmental implications unfold across the full seasonal cycle.

Labour arrangements during Detty December are likely to be predominantly informal, short-term, and intensity-driven, reflecting well-documented

characteristics of SME-led seasonal economies. Workers may experience extended hours, elevated physical and emotional demands, and unstable compensation structures, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, transport, and event-related services. Payment arrangements that tie earnings to daily turnover or event success tend to transfer economic risk downward, a pattern widely observed in informal labour markets operating under demand volatility.

Crucially, Detty December produces uneven distribution of gains. Diasporic consumers benefit from favourable exchange rates, mobility, and discretionary spending power. Event organisers and high-visibility urban venues may capture outsized returns due to branding, location, or network advantages. In contrast, smaller SME operators and informal workers absorb volatility and face greater exposure to loss when anticipated demand fails to materialise or when external shocks intervene. These asymmetries echo long-standing patterns in African informal economies, where risk is decentralised while benefits are selectively concentrated (Little, 1982).

The historical parallel with Eruku Oshodi is instructive here. Despite cocoa's centrality to global value chains, local processing and informal beverage production have remained marginal to long-term wealth accumulation. Scientific studies have highlighted both the quality concerns and health relevance of cocoa-based beverages (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011), yet informal producers have remained excluded from institutional support, intellectual property protection, and structured market access. Similarly, Detty December generates visible value without embedding mechanisms for durability, ownership, or reinvestment into local productive capacity.

Finally, the post-December period reveals the fragility of the seasonal SME economy. Demand contracts sharply, leaving businesses with surplus inventory, outstanding debts, and idle labour. For many SMEs, survival depends on stretching peak-season earnings across lean months, reinforcing dependence on the next cycle. This cyclical exposure underscores why Detty December should not be evaluated solely on the basis of peak activity, but as a system whose developmental impact depends on how value,

risk, and responsibility are structured over time.

7. Ethical Tensions in Seasonal SME Economies

Detty December raises a set of ethical tensions that become visible when seasonal economic activity is examined through the distribution of risk, responsibility, and vulnerability. These tensions do not arise because seasonal economies are inherently problematic, but because value creation occurs within conditions of informality, mobility asymmetry, and limited institutional mediation. When assessed through a moral economy lens, Detty December can be understood as a system in which responsibility is diffused, exposure to loss is uneven, and vulnerability is frequently normalised.

It is important to acknowledge that participation in Detty December is not uniformly experienced as exploitative or harmful. Some SME operators engage strategically with the season, using it to generate surplus income, expand visibility, or finance activities across the remainder of the year. High-performing firms, well-networked venues, and experienced entrepreneurs may successfully capture disproportionate gains from seasonal demand. These dynamics indicate agency, adaptation, and heterogeneity within the SME landscape rather than passive victimhood.

However, the existence of strategic engagement and selective success does not negate the presence of structural asymmetry. The capacity to benefit from Detty December is unevenly distributed and closely tied to access to capital, networks, location, and risk tolerance. For many SMEs and informal workers, participation remains characterised by exposure to volatility rather than insulation from it. The ethical concern, therefore, lies not in the absence of opportunity, but in the predictable concentration of risk among actors least able to absorb loss when seasonal demand contracts.

The first ethical tension concerns who benefits and who bears risk. Diasporic participants enter the seasonal economy as consumers with temporal and spatial flexibility. They can choose when to arrive, how long to stay, and when to exit. Their participation is discretionary, and their exposure to loss is limited. By contrast, SME operators and informal workers are structurally embedded within the local economy. They invest

in anticipation of demand, commit labour and capital in advance, and absorb losses when expectations are not met. This asymmetry creates a moral imbalance: those least able to exit bear the greatest exposure to volatility.

A second ethical tension relates to labour precarity and informal employment. Seasonal SME economies rely heavily on informal labour arrangements that prioritise flexibility over protection. During Detty December, workers often endure extended hours, intensified workloads, and unstable compensation structures. While such arrangements are frequently justified as necessary for survival within informal markets, their normalisation raises ethical concerns about consent, dignity, and distributive justice. The celebratory framing of Detty December obscures these conditions, rendering labour strain invisible within narratives of fun and festivity.

Third, Detty December exposes an ethical gap in diaspora-local relations. Diaspora engagement is often framed as inherently beneficial to development, yet this assumption overlooks the power differentials that shape seasonal consumption. Diasporic privilege, expressed through foreign earnings, exchange rate advantages, and global mobility, intersects with local economic vulnerability in ways that intensify inequality rather than mitigate it. Without institutional mediation, diaspora-led consumption risks reinforcing extractive patterns, even when intentions are benign.

These ethical tensions are not new. The historical treatment of Eruku Oshodi demonstrates how informal African-origin products can circulate widely while remaining symbolically devalued and institutionally unsupported. Despite documented health relevance and widespread consumption, the absence of regulatory recognition, intellectual property protection, and quality assurance mechanisms left producers exposed to reputational, health, and economic risk (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011). The ethical concern lay not in informal production itself, but in the lack of collective responsibility for structuring value creation in ways that protect producers and communities.

At the centre of these tensions lies the ethical concern of policy neglect. States and local authorities often treat Detty December as a

spontaneous cultural occurrence rather than a recurring economic system. This stance allows governments to benefit indirectly through tourism visibility and consumption taxes while avoiding responsibility for labour standards, SME protection, or infrastructural alignment. Ethical governance requires more than non-interference; it requires recognition that inaction shapes outcomes just as decisively as regulation.

Importantly, this section does not argue for heavy-handed formalisation or moral condemnation of participants. Rather, it highlights that seasonal SME economies generate ethical obligations precisely because they are predictable, recurring, and economically significant. Ignoring these obligations risks entrenching cycles of precarity and reproducing historical patterns of unprotected African value creation under new cultural forms.

8. Governance and Policy Implications

The preceding analysis demonstrates that Detty December is neither an accidental nor a marginal economic occurrence. It is a predictable, recurring seasonal SME economy that mobilises capital, labour, and infrastructure at scale. The absence of governance surrounding this phenomenon is therefore not neutral; it is itself a policy position with ethical and developmental consequences. This section outlines why Detty December remains largely ungoverned and identifies policy directions that recognise its economic significance without undermining the adaptive capacities of informal SMEs.

One reason Detty December remains weakly governed is that it falls between policy domains. It is simultaneously cultural, economic, diasporic, and urban, yet not fully owned by any single institutional actor. Tourism agencies frame it as branding, cultural ministries treat it as celebration, and economic planners often exclude it from formal development strategies due to its informality and seasonality (Ajayi, 2025). This fragmentation results in governance avoidance, where scale and visibility coexist with institutional silence.

A second factor is the persistent fear of over-formalisation. Policymakers often hesitate to intervene in informal economies out of concern that regulation will stifle entrepreneurial activity

or displace vulnerable actors. While this concern is valid, non-intervention has its own costs. In the context of Detty December, the absence of basic protective frameworks leaves SMEs and informal workers exposed to predictable risks associated with seasonal demand volatility, labour exploitation, and post-season collapse. Development scholarship has long argued that informality does not imply the absence of structure, but rather the presence of alternative, often fragile, organising logics (Chang, 2011).

A more appropriate governance approach is therefore one of selective, ethics-informed intervention. Rather than seeking to formalise Detty December wholesale, policy responses should focus on reducing vulnerability and redistributing risk. One avenue is seasonal SME protection, including access to short-term credit facilities, temporary tax relief, or demand-smoothing instruments that recognise the cyclical nature of income generation. Such measures would allow SMEs to capture peak-season value without bearing disproportionate post-season exposure.

Rather than advocating comprehensive formalisation or regulatory overhaul, the analysis points toward a set of selective policy levers that align with the seasonal, SME-led nature of Detty December while directly addressing its structural vulnerabilities. Four such interventions are particularly salient.

First, seasonal SME risk-smoothing mechanisms could mitigate the concentrated exposure created by compressed demand cycles. These may include short-term credit lines, seasonal insurance instruments, or flexible repayment schedules explicitly tied to post-December income contraction. Such mechanisms would allow SMEs to capture peak-season value without absorbing disproportionate post-season debt or liquidity stress.

Second, diaspora-linked enterprise engagement frameworks could convert episodic consumption into more durable economic participation. Given the centrality of diasporic return to Detty December, governments and development agencies could facilitate temporary co-investment schemes, diaspora-backed SME funds, or structured partnerships that extend beyond consumption toward shared risk and longer-term

productive capacity.

Third, temporary and adaptive regulatory arrangements could provide limited protection without undermining informality's adaptive advantages. Examples include time-bound licensing regimes, seasonal labour protections, or simplified compliance windows that recognise Detty December as a predictable demand shock rather than an anomaly. Such approaches reduce vulnerability without imposing permanent regulatory burdens on informal actors.

Fourth, anticipatory urban and infrastructural alignment is essential. Treating Detty December as a recurring economic cycle would enable cities to plan for predictable pressure on transport, power, waste management, and public safety systems. Improved alignment reduces indirect costs currently borne by SMEs and informal workers through congestion, service disruption, and operational inefficiencies.

These interventions are not without trade-offs. Selective governance carries risks of elite capture, uneven access, and exclusion of smaller or less visible informal actors. Over-regulation may erode the flexibility that enables SMEs to survive seasonal volatility, while under-regulation risks entrenching labour precarity and risk concentration. The challenge, therefore, is not to govern more, but to govern selectively, with attention to timing, scale, and ethical consequence.

Diaspora-linked enterprise support represents another policy opportunity. Given the central role of diasporic return in driving seasonal demand, governments could facilitate mechanisms that encourage longer-term engagement beyond consumption. This might include diaspora-backed SME investment schemes, co-financing arrangements, or temporary enterprise partnerships that convert seasonal spending into sustained productive capacity. Without such mechanisms, diaspora engagement risks remaining extractive, even when culturally celebratory (Etefe, 2023).

Urban and infrastructural alignment is also critical. Detty December places exceptional strain on transport systems, power supply, waste management, and public safety. Anticipatory urban planning that treats the season as a

predictable demand shock, rather than an anomaly, would improve efficiency and reduce costs borne by SMEs and informal workers. Importantly, such planning would signal institutional recognition of seasonal economies as legitimate sites of development intervention.

The ethical dimension of governance must remain central. As illustrated by the historical case of Eruku Oshodi, failure to protect locally generated value can result in long-term exclusion from global value chains and enduring reputational harm. Governance frameworks should therefore consider issues of intellectual property, quality assurance, and cultural valuation, ensuring that African-origin products and practices are not systematically devalued or externalised as informal residue (Oyetunji, 2006; Jayeola et al., 2011).

Ultimately, the policy challenge is not whether to govern Detty December, but how. Governance that ignores ethical responsibility reproduces vulnerability; governance that over-regulates risks destroying adaptive systems. An ethics-informed, SME-sensitive approach offers a middle path that recognises Detty December as a development opportunity while confronting the structural conditions that currently limit its long-term contribution.

In this sense, governance interventions are best understood not as external corrections, but as institutional responses to a predictable seasonal mechanism in which diaspora-driven demand, institutional voids, and compressed SME cycles interact to shape developmental outcomes.

9. DISCUSSION

This paper set out to move Detty December from the realm of cultural description into structured academic analysis. By conceptualising it as a diaspora-driven seasonal SME economy, the paper contributes a framing that existing literature has not adequately developed. The discussion here focuses on what this interdisciplinary approach reveals, why single-discipline analyses are insufficient, and how the paper advances debates in development studies, SME research, and African urban scholarship.

A central contribution of the paper is its treatment of time as an economic structuring

force. Much of development and SME literature assumes linear or continuous economic activity, even when acknowledging volatility and risk. Detty December demonstrates how cyclical, compressed time fundamentally reshapes economic behaviour, labour relations, and risk exposure. SMEs are not merely responding to market signals; they are organising their entire annual survival strategy around a narrow temporal window. This insight complicates conventional understandings of firm resilience and performance, suggesting that success in seasonal economies may coexist with long-term vulnerability.

The interdisciplinary framework also reveals the limitations of celebratory diaspora narratives. While diaspora engagement is often positioned as an unqualified development asset, the analysis shows that mobility asymmetry matters. Diasporic actors enjoy flexibility and exit options that local SME operators and informal workers do not. Without institutional mediation, diaspora-driven consumption can reproduce extractive dynamics, even in the absence of exploitative intent. This finding challenges the tendency in diaspora and migration studies to prioritise presence and visibility over structural responsibility.

From an SME perspective, the paper highlights how informality operates not as disorder but as an organising principle under conditions of institutional absence. Detty December SMEs display adaptability, innovation, and risk tolerance, yet these qualities are mobilised within systems that externalise costs onto the most vulnerable actors. This reinforces arguments in institutional economics that markets are never neutral and that the absence of governance produces predictable distributive outcomes (Chang, 2011).

The historical parallel with Eruku Oshodi strengthens the discussion by demonstrating continuity rather than exception. The marginalisation of locally processed cocoa-based beverages, despite their documented value, illustrates how African-origin economic activities have repeatedly generated wealth without securing ownership, protection, or developmental return. Detty December represents a contemporary iteration of this pattern, amplified by scale and visibility but governed by similar

logics of neglect. Recognising this continuity is critical for avoiding policy responses that treat seasonal economies as novelty rather than as structurally embedded phenomena.

Importantly, the paper's discussion reframes ethics as a developmental variable, not a moral add-on. Ethical considerations shape who bears risk, who captures value, and whose labour remains invisible. By foregrounding moral economy perspectives, the paper responds to calls for development scholarship that integrates normative analysis with economic reasoning, particularly in contexts marked by informality and institutional weakness.

Finally, the discussion clarifies pathways for future research. Empirical studies are now needed to quantify SME revenue concentration, map labour conditions, and trace value chains across seasonal cycles. Ethnographic work could illuminate lived experiences of anticipation and exhaustion, while policy-focused research could evaluate the effectiveness of seasonal SME interventions. The conceptual framework developed here provides the scaffolding for such work, ensuring that future empirical findings are interpreted within a coherent ethical and institutional context.

10. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Detty December should be understood as a diaspora-driven seasonal SME economy rather than as a cultural celebration or branding phenomenon. By reframing Detty December as a temporary economic system, the analysis has shown how cyclical time, diasporic mobility, and informality interact to shape patterns of value creation, risk distribution, and governance absence in West African urban economies.

The paper demonstrates that Detty December generates substantial and recurrent economic activity, particularly within SME-dominated sectors such as hospitality, transport, entertainment, and informal retail. However, this activity is structurally compressed and weakly governed. SMEs and informal workers absorb anticipatory investment costs, labour intensification, and post-season demand collapse, while diasporic consumers retain mobility and exit options. These asymmetries are not

incidental; they are produced by the absence of institutional mechanisms capable of smoothing risk, protecting labour, or converting seasonal value into durable productive capacity.

By drawing a historical parallel with Eruku Oshodi, the paper highlights continuity rather than exception in African economic development. Culturally embedded, African-origin economic activities have repeatedly generated value under conditions of informality while remaining institutionally unprotected and ethically neglected. Detty December represents a contemporary manifestation of this pattern, amplified by scale and visibility but governed by similar logics of policy silence and responsibility diffusion. The ethical concern, in both cases, lies not in informality itself but in the persistent failure to structure value creation in ways that safeguard producers, workers, and communities.

The paper contributes to development studies and SME scholarship in three ways. First, it foregrounds cyclical and compressed time as a central organising dimension of economic life, challenging linear assumptions that dominate analyses of firm performance and resilience. Second, it complicates celebratory narratives of diaspora engagement by demonstrating how mobility asymmetries shape the distribution of risk and responsibility within seasonal economies. Third, it positions ethics and governance not as supplementary considerations, but as constitutive elements of how seasonal SME systems function and who they benefit.

The implications for policy are clear. Detty December is a predictable and recurring economic phenomenon that warrants selective, ethics-informed governance rather than neglect or heavy-handed formalisation. Policies that recognise seasonality, redistribute risk, and support SME resilience offer a pathway to converting episodic consumption into more equitable and sustainable development outcomes. Without such engagement, Detty December risks reproducing long-standing patterns of unprotected African value creation under new cultural forms.

Ultimately, treating Detty December seriously as an economic system, rather than a fleeting spectacle, enables a more honest engagement with questions of development, responsibility,

and economic time in West African urban contexts.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualisation of the study was led by Onoyona-Ekeocha, who developed the central argument, theoretical framing, and overall structure of the paper. Olusola Sam-Sorongbe contributed to the refinement of the conceptual framing, critical review of the literature, and development of the ethical and developmental analysis. Both authors contributed to drafting, revising, and approving the final manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Declaration

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