

## Impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses: A case study of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 25(01), 1182-1190

Publication history: Received on 23 November 2024; revised on 13 January 2025; accepted on 15 January 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.25.1.4036>

### Abstract

Strategic alliances play an important role in enabling agribusinesses to access global markets, enhance competitiveness, and integrate into global value chains. This study examines the impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. Using a case study approach, data were collected from 55 agribusinesses through semi-structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were employed to assess the influence of various partnership models, including horizontal linkages, forward linkages with foreign value chain buyers, cooperatives for exports, and collaborations with financial institutions and state corporations. The findings reveal that agribusinesses predominantly engage in horizontal and forward linkages, each accounting for 32.7% of partnerships, while cooperatives for exports constituted 12.7%. These alliances were reported to significantly enhance market reach, business expansion, supply chain efficiency, and profitability. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, limited technology adoption, and compliance issues were noted as barriers to maximizing the potential of these partnerships. The study concludes that strategic alliances are a critical driver of globalization for agribusinesses, enabling them to navigate international market complexities and achieve sustainable growth. Recommendations include fostering horizontal and vertical partnerships, promoting cooperative models, and enhancing awareness of partnership opportunities. These strategies can help agribusinesses in Kenya and similar contexts better make use of strategic alliances to access and thrive in global markets.

**Keywords:** Strategic Alliances; Agribusiness Globalization; Strategic Management; Horizontal/Forward Linkages.

### 1. Introduction

The global agribusiness sector today faces a complex landscape marked by rapid shifts in climate, population growth, and consumer demands. As agricultural businesses adapt to these dynamics, they increasingly turn to international markets for expansion and resilience (Hassoun *et al.*, 2022). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017) emphasizes that urbanization, globalized food supply chains, and rising global populations are compelling agribusinesses to scale up and diversify their market reach, often involving cross-border operations. This trend aligns with broader globalization, described by Nugroho, Bhagat, Magda, and Lakner (2021) as the deepening interconnectedness of economies and societies worldwide, which has opened new avenues for agribusinesses to expand beyond traditional borders (Sansika *et al.*, 2023).

In this context, agribusinesses encounter both new opportunities and challenges. Environmental and demographic pressures have increased the demand for sustainable, climate-resilient food production, pushing companies to develop innovative, collaborative approaches to withstand unpredictable changes (Kumar *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, the projected growth in global population, expected to approach 9.8 billion by 2050, underscores the need for expanded food production and distribution (Giller *et al.*, 2021). These demands incentivize agribusinesses to explore partnerships that can amplify their reach and build resilience against market and environmental fluctuations. Strategic alliances offer

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a practical means for businesses to enter and grow in international markets while navigating local preferences and regulations.

Strategic alliances serve as an effective globalization tool by allowing agribusinesses to share resources, technology, and expertise with foreign partners (Umar, 2020; Mbabu & Ombok, 2024). These alliances, which can take the form of joint ventures, research partnerships, or distribution agreements, help companies reduce entry risks and enhance operational efficiencies as they move into new regions (Emami, Welsh, Davari & Rezazadeh, 2022). For agribusinesses in emerging markets like Kenya, alliances provide essential support for competing internationally by tapping into local market knowledge and distributing risks. This study investigated the impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya, examining how these partnerships influence the companies' global market presence and performance. The findings offer insights into how agribusinesses can utilize alliances to meet the demands of a growing and increasingly interconnected world.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Agribusinesses in Kenya play an important role in the economy, contributing significantly to employment, food security, and export revenue. However, despite their potential, many Kenyan agribusinesses face considerable challenges in expanding internationally. The globalization of these businesses is often hindered by limited access to resources, complex regulatory environments, insufficient market knowledge, and a lack of operational scale needed to compete in international markets. Strategic alliances could provide a solution to these obstacles, enabling agribusinesses to share resources, access new markets, enhance product offerings, and improve operational efficiency through collaboration. Research has shown that strategic alliances, especially in agribusiness, can foster international competitiveness by taking advantage of complementary strengths and reducing the risks associated with foreign market entry (Mbabu & Ombok, 2024).

However, despite the potential benefits, there is limited empirical research focused on the specific impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kenya. Most studies in this area concentrate on developed markets, where agribusinesses often have better access to resources and more established market networks. Thus, there is a critical knowledge gap concerning how alliances influence the growth and globalization of agribusinesses in emerging economies like Kenya. Understanding how these partnerships impact key metrics, such as market reach, profitability, and operational efficiency, can provide vital insights for both agribusiness leaders and policymakers seeking to support the sector's international expansion.

This study addresses this gap by examining the role of strategic alliances in the globalization efforts of agribusinesses in Kiambu County. By assessing how these partnerships influence market presence, export performance, and overall competitiveness, this research sought to offer actionable insights on the effectiveness of alliances as a globalization strategy. The findings aim to guide agribusinesses in making informed decisions about partnership strategies, thereby enhancing their capacity to compete on a global scale and contribute to Kenya's economic growth.

### 1.2 Objective of the study

The main objective of this research was to establish the effect of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study also aimed at making recommendations on how agribusinesses can take advantage of strategic alliances to enhance their presence in the global agribusiness sector.

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## 2. Literature Review

The role of strategic alliances in fostering globalization has garnered considerable attention in the agribusiness sector, particularly as firms aim to navigate competitive and complex international markets. Strategic alliances are formalized cooperative arrangements between businesses that allow them to share resources, expertise, and risks to achieve mutually beneficial goals (Serrat, 2009). In the agribusiness sector, alliances enable firms to increase their market reach, benefit from economies of scale, and respond to global challenges like supply chain disruptions and changing consumer preferences (Oberoi, Schun, Kropff, Vyas, Oroko & Peterson, 2023). Researchers highlight that these alliances can be critical for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developing economies, helping them overcome resource limitations and establish a presence in competitive global markets (Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2020).

Alliances in the agribusiness sector often take the form of joint ventures, distribution partnerships, or technology-sharing agreements. These arrangements can provide agribusinesses with enhanced access to foreign markets, advanced production techniques, and vital networks for distributing products internationally (Yumkella, Kormawa,

Roepstorff & Hawkins, 2011).). Barnard, Akridge, Dooley and Foltz (2012) argue that strategic alliances are particularly beneficial for agribusinesses because they allow firms to mitigate market entry barriers, such as high costs and regulatory constraints. For instance, joint ventures facilitate shared investment, minimizing the financial risks associated with global market entry and enabling both parties to contribute complementary resources, knowledge, and market insights (Emami *et al.*, 2022). As agribusinesses expand into international markets, strategic alliances with local firms often assist in navigating the regulatory, cultural, and logistical challenges of operating in diverse environments (Valdés, 2024).

The positive impacts of alliances on market reach, operational efficiency, and profitability are well-documented. Alliances help agribusinesses access new customer bases, thereby increasing sales and enhancing profitability (Chen, Yueh & Liang, 2016). Evidence also suggests that alliances can streamline operational efficiency, as they enable firms to optimize production processes, improve supply chain management, and reduce logistical costs (Juhara, 2024). An analysis by Yumkella *et al.* (2011) found that agribusinesses engaged in strategic partnerships experienced growth in market share and productivity levels compared to non-partnered businesses, underscoring the role of alliances in driving competitive advantage. This is particularly relevant for agribusinesses in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where SMEs often lack the scale or resources to expand independently.

For strategic alliances to be successful, they often require effective governance structures to manage differences in partner objectives, resources, and cultural perspectives. Researchers suggest that misalignment in goals, poor communication, and resource imbalances can hinder the success of strategic alliances (Das & Teng, 2000). In the agribusiness context, these challenges can be compounded by differing priorities between firms in developed and developing markets, making it crucial for partners to establish clear roles, expectations, and conflict resolution mechanisms (Faulkner, 1995). Trust and transparency are also critical components of successful alliances, as they facilitate cooperation and minimize potential misunderstandings that can disrupt partnership efficacy (McEvily, Perrone & Zaheer, 2003).

The role of alliances in the Kenyan agribusiness context specifically has been noted as critical due to the industry's resource-intensive nature. Studies have shown that for Kenyan agribusinesses, partnerships with international firms or local cooperatives provide critical support in areas like quality control, production innovation, and regulatory compliance (Rankin *et al.*, 2016). Since Kenyan agribusinesses are known to face challenges such as resource constraints, limited technological capacity, and insufficient knowledge of foreign market dynamics (Alila & Atieno, 2006; Birch, 2018), it becomes important for players in this sector to embrace strategic alliances as a competitive strategy. As agribusinesses in Kenya strive for global competitiveness, understanding the dynamics of strategic alliances becomes essential for fostering sustainable globalization and economic growth in the country. This study builds on this body of knowledge by exploring the specific impact of strategic alliances on agribusinesses in Kiambu County, offering insights into how partnerships can be structured to maximize their globalization outcomes.

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### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Research design

This study employed a case study research design to investigate the impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. A case study design was deemed suitable because it enables an in-depth examination of specific cases within a real-world context, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how agribusinesses utilize strategic partnerships to expand internationally (Coombs, 2022). The case study approach also allows for rich data collection that captures complexities in the experiences and perceptions of agribusinesses regarding strategic alliances.

#### 3.2. Study population and sampling

The target population for this study included agribusiness firms registered in Kiambu County, which are actively engaged in export activities. A total of 68 agribusinesses in Kiambu County met these criteria, based on data provided by the County Trade Office for the year 2023. From this population, a sample of 55 firms was selected through stratified random sampling. The stratification was based on factors such as firm size, type of agribusiness (e.g., horticulture, dairy, or coffee), and duration of export operations to ensure that the sample was representative of the diverse agribusinesses operating in the country. Stratified sampling allowed for a balanced representation across these subgroups, improving the generalizability of the findings.

### 3.3. Data collection methods

Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire, which was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, with questions targeting key areas such as types of strategic alliances, perceived benefits and challenges of these alliances, and their impact on market reach and profitability. The questionnaire included Likert-scale questions to quantify responses on alliance effectiveness and open-ended questions to allow for deeper insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. The questionnaires were distributed to the management teams of the selected agribusinesses, primarily to those responsible for strategy and international operations. The respondents were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire, and follow-up reminders were sent to ensure a high response rate.

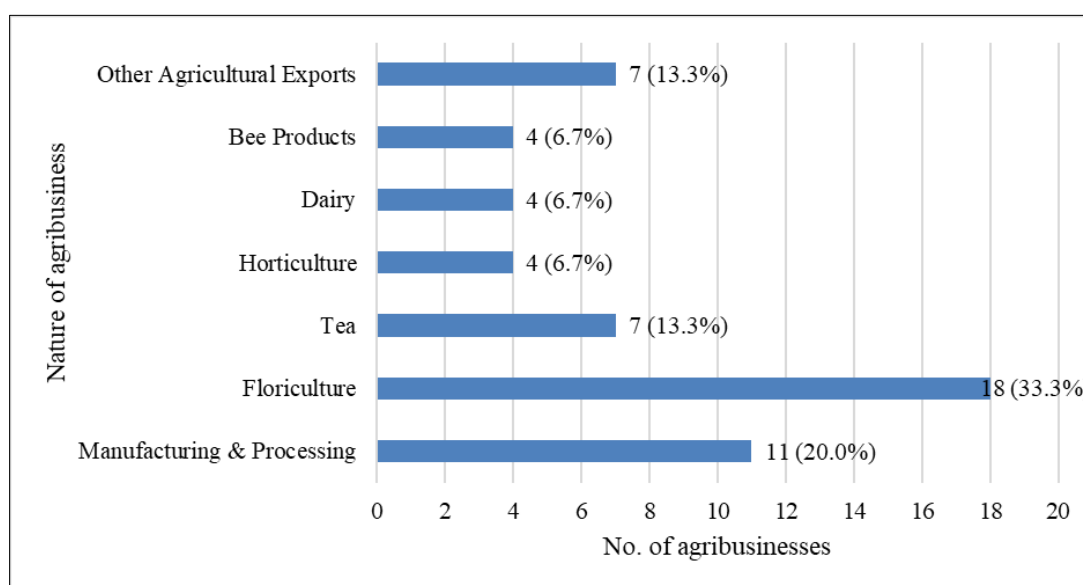
### 3.4. Data analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to address the study objective. Descriptive analysis was employed to summarize and describe the characteristics of the agribusinesses and their strategic alliances. Key metrics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to present an overview of the respondents' experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of strategic alliances on globalization.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Sectoral distribution of agribusinesses

The study achieved a questionnaire response rate of 95%, with 55 firms out of the targeted 58 participating in the survey. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the agribusinesses by sector. Floriculture emerged as the dominant sector, representing 33.3% of the firms, which underscores its critical role in the region's agribusiness economy. Manufacturing and processing firms followed at 20%, emphasizing the growing importance of value addition in enhancing agricultural products' marketability. The tea industry and other agricultural exports each accounted for 13.3% of the businesses, showcasing the county's significant contributions to Kenya's export trade. The smaller subsectors, including apiary, dairy, and horticulture, each constituted 6.7% of the respondents. Although these sectors represent a smaller share, they are vital for diversifying the agricultural economy and supporting rural livelihoods.



**Figure 1** Sectoral distribution of agribusiness firms

### 4.2. Strategic alliances establishment methods for global market entry

To explore how agribusinesses in Kiambu County establish strategic alliances for global market entry, respondents were asked to identify the methods used in selecting partners. The focus of this inquiry was to understand the nature and diversity of alliances formed by agribusinesses to facilitate their globalization efforts. Table 1 summarizes the findings, shedding light on the various approaches employed by agribusinesses in the study area.

**Table 1** Strategic partner selection methods for global market entry

Selected methods	No. of agribusinesses	Percentage (%)
Horizontal linkages	18	32.7
Forward linkages with value chain buyers in foreign countries	18	32.7
Cooperatives for exports	7	12.7
Bank, breeders and product suppliers	4	7.3
Global marketing team	4	7.3
State corporation	4	7.3
Total	55	100.0

The findings in Table 1 reveal that horizontal linkages and forward linkages with value chain buyers in foreign countries were the most commonly utilized methods, each accounting for 32.7% of the responses. Cooperatives for exports were also employed, representing 12.7% of responses, while other methods, such as partnerships with banks, breeders, product suppliers, global marketing teams, and state corporations, accounted for the remaining 22%. Horizontal linkages involve partnerships with businesses operating within the same sector, enabling agribusinesses to complement their operations, share resources, and expand market reach. These partnerships have been recognized as a key strategy for enhancing market competitiveness and operational efficiency. For example, in Malawi, horizontal linkages among smallholder farmers allowed them to pool resources, reduce logistical costs, and achieve greater access to export markets, a model that can be replicated in other regions (Marketlinks, 2023). Such collaborations also foster knowledge sharing and innovation, which are crucial for adapting to the dynamic demands of international markets.

Forward linkages with value chain buyers in foreign countries provide agribusinesses with direct access to global markets, aligning them with international standards and consumer preferences. These partnerships often facilitate technology transfer, provide insights into global trends, and support quality improvement initiatives. Studies have shown that forward linkages are particularly effective in reducing post-harvest losses and ensuring consistent supply to international buyers, as highlighted in successful agribusiness models in Africa (Mitchell, 2023).

Cooperatives for exports, while less prevalent, play an essential role in empowering smaller agribusinesses to compete in international markets. By taking advantage of collective bargaining power, cooperatives enable members to negotiate better terms, pool resources for economies of scale, and meet large-scale demand. This strategy has been effective in regions where individual producers lack the capacity to manage complex export requirements on their own (Sala-Ríos, Farré-Perdiguer & Torres-Solé, 2020). Other methods, such as collaboration with state corporations and the formation of global marketing teams, reflect innovative approaches to market entry. State corporations often provide credibility and institutional support, helping agribusinesses overcome regulatory challenges and establish a foothold in foreign markets. On the other hand, global marketing teams enhance brand visibility and target niche markets effectively, exploiting data-driven strategies to optimize their global presence. These results are indicative of the diverse strategies agribusinesses employ to build strategic alliances, highlighting the importance of tailoring approaches to specific operational contexts. The findings also demonstrate that while traditional methods like cooperatives remain relevant, innovative approaches involving technology and institutional support are increasingly critical for navigating the complexities of globalization.

#### 4.3. Impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of Agribusiness firms

The main goal of this study was to establish the effect of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses. To achieve this, the respondents were asked to identify the key impacts of their selected methods for forming strategic alliances. These impacts highlight the various benefits that agribusinesses derive from such collaborations, ranging from enhanced market access to improvements in product quality and customer service. The data, summarized in the Table 2, provides insights into how these strategic alliances influence agribusiness performance and globalization efforts.

**Table 2** Impact of strategic partner selection methods

Impact of Selection Method	(No. of Companies)	Percentage (%)
Partnerships	7	12.7
Market Reach	7	12.7
Business Expansion	7	12.7
Supply Chain	5	9.1
Quality Products	5	9.1
Funding	4	7.3
Customer Service	4	7.3
Community Engagement	4	7.3
Profit	3	5.5
Compliance	2	3.6
Technology	1	1.8
Sustainability	1	1.8
Total	55	100

The results as shown in Table 2 reveal the diverse impacts of strategic alliance selection methods on agribusinesses in Kiambu County. The top impacts reported include partnerships, market reach, and business expansion, each cited by 7 companies (12.7%). These results underscore the importance of collaborations in fostering globalization by enabling firms to expand their operational scale and access new markets. The prominence of partnerships as a strategic drive is in line with existing literature highlighting their role in enhancing resource-sharing, risk mitigation, and competitive advantage. According to Pfammatter, Tanner and Baldauf (2024), partnerships allow firms to pool complementary resources, thereby addressing constraints such as limited financial or technical capacity, which is particularly relevant for agribusinesses in developing economies like Kenya. Partnerships also create synergies that amplify the firms' ability to penetrate international markets, consistent with findings by Kennedy and Keeney (2006) on the role of strategic partnerships in the globalization process of software SMEs.

Market reach and business expansion are equally critical outcomes of strategic alliances. The results in Table 2 reflect the transformative potential of alliances in breaking barriers to entry into foreign markets, such as high logistics costs, regulatory challenges, and cultural differences. Based on their research, Freeman, Edwards and Schroder (2006) emphasize that alliances with foreign entities or local firms with global networks enhance visibility and credibility in international markets. The focus on market reach highlights the strategic importance of alliances in helping agribusinesses tap into the growing demand for agricultural products globally.

Five companies (9.1%) identified supply chain efficiency and the production of quality products as significant impacts of their alliances. Strategic alliances often lead to improved supply chain coordination, enabling timely delivery and reducing operational inefficiencies. Literature suggests that collaborative supply chain management, especially through horizontal and vertical linkages, enhances performance and customer satisfaction (Osei & Asante-Darko, 2023). Additionally, access to advanced technologies and expertise through alliances contributes to quality improvement, as noted by Ferreira, Franco and Haase (2022) in their study of technology-based firms.

The results in Table 2 further show that funding and customer service benefits were noted by 4 firms each (7.3%). Strategic alliances provide agribusinesses with access to financial resources, particularly in the form of joint investments, subsidies, or credit facilities from partner organizations. This is in line with findings by Garcia-Martinez *et al.* (2023), who argued that alliances with financial institutions or larger firms help small and medium enterprises overcome capital constraints. Enhanced customer service may stem from knowledge transfer and shared best practices among allied firms, leading to better responsiveness to market needs.

Interestingly, sustainability and technology were identified as impacts by only one company each (1.8%). This result could suggest that agribusinesses in the region have yet to prioritize long-term environmental and technological advancements in their globalization strategies. Researchers such as that by Schaltegger, Hansen and Lüdeke-Freund (2016) highlight that sustainability-oriented alliances are crucial for long-term competitiveness, especially in the face of climate change and resource scarcity. Similarly, limited emphasis on technology adoption points to a gap that could hinder innovation and scalability (Vimal *et al.*, 2023).

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## 5. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of strategic alliances on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. The findings reveal that agribusinesses utilize various forms of partnerships – horizontal linkages, forward linkages, cooperatives, and collaborations with stakeholders such as state corporations and global marketing teams – to enhance their market reach, business expansion, supply chain efficiency, and profitability. These alliances not only enable agribusinesses to overcome resource limitations but also facilitate entry into international markets and integration into global value chains.

The results underscore the critical role of strategic alliances in achieving key globalization outcomes. Partnerships allow firms to tap into complementary strengths, access new markets, and enhance product quality, aligning with the resource-based view theory, which emphasizes taking advantage of organizational resources and relationships for competitive advantage. The findings also resonate with empirical evidence from existing studies, such as those by Emami *et al.* (2022) and Mbabu and Ombok (2024), which highlight the transformative potential of alliances in improving firm competitiveness and operational efficiency. This study thus concludes that strategic alliances are indispensable for agribusinesses aiming to globalize.

Firms must adopt tailored approaches to forming partnerships that align with their strategic goals and resource needs. Policymakers and industry stakeholders should foster environments that facilitate such alliances through supportive policies, infrastructure development, and capacity-building programs. Future research could explore the long-term sustainability and dynamic evolution of these alliances to provide deeper insights into their role in driving global competitiveness.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of strategic alliances in driving the globalization of agribusinesses:

- Agribusinesses should focus on fostering both horizontal partnerships with similar firms and vertical linkages with value chain buyers in foreign markets. These alliances can help agribusinesses access complementary resources, share risks, and enhance their market reach. Policymakers and industry associations should create platforms to connect agribusinesses with potential partners to maximize the benefits of these collaborations.
- Cooperatives have shown potential for facilitating exports by pooling resources and enhancing bargaining power. Agribusinesses should consider utilizing cooperative frameworks to penetrate foreign markets more effectively. Support from government and private sector stakeholders is necessary to strengthen cooperative governance and operations.
- Many agribusinesses may lack knowledge about the full spectrum of strategic partnerships available. Training programs and workshops should therefore be organized to educate business owners and managers on the benefits and operational dynamics of partnerships such as forward linkages, cooperatives, and global marketing networks.
- Government agencies and state corporations should continue to provide a conducive policy environment and facilitate partnerships that integrate agribusinesses into global value chains. Financial and logistical support should also be extended to agribusinesses to overcome the barriers to establishing partnerships in international markets.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

### Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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