

Impact of Foreign Market Entry Strategies in Globalizing Agribusinesses: A Case Study of Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study investigated the effects of foreign market entry strategies on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County in Kenya. It was based on a surveyed of 68 agribusinesses that had formal registration with Kiambu County trade offices. A sample of 55 firms were selected through stratified random sampling according to the category of agribusiness engaged. Four foreign market entry strategies were surveyed namely: Direct Exporting, Joint Ventures, Agency Exporting, and Global Sales Team. Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The findings revealed that direct exporting was the most widely adopted foreign market entry strategy at 60% with Joint ventures accounting for 20% of the firms. Another 13% were relying on a state agency, while 7% relied on the use of global sales teams. It was found that each of the foreign market entry strategy adopted had different impact on the firms in performance. Direct exporting emerged as the most effective method for achieving successful business outcomes. The study recommends that agribusinesses should diversify their market entry strategies in order enhance their competitiveness in global markets, and much support should be provided to enable them do direct exporting.

Keywords: Foreign market entry, agribusiness globalization, strategic management, direct exporting, joint ventures, agency exporting, and global sales team

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the global agricultural sector has undergone profound changes, driven by a convergence of global challenges and shifting market dynamics (Hassoun *et al.*, 2022). As pointed out by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017), factors such as population growth, climate change, urbanization, and evolving consumer preferences have reshaped how agribusinesses operate, pushing them toward global markets. Globalization, as defined by Nugroho, Bhagat, Magda and Lakner (2021), refers to the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of economies, cultures, societies, and businesses on a global scale. This phenomenon has transformed the agricultural landscape, enabling agribusinesses to expand their operations beyond national borders and participate in the global economy (Sansika *et al.*, 2023).

One of the key drivers of globalization in agribusiness is the pressing need for sustainable food production in response to environmental and demographic pressures. The unpredictable weather patterns caused by climate change have created the need for more resilient and sustainable farming practices (Kumar *et al.*, 2022). This shift, in turn, has encouraged agribusinesses to explore international collaborations and innovations to remain competitive. Moreover, with the global population projected by the United Nations to reach 9.8 billion by 2050, the demand for food is expected to increase significantly (Giller *et al.*, 2021). Agribusinesses are, therefore, compelled to adopt more efficient production methods and expand their markets to meet growing food demands.

As a result, globalization has not only opened up new markets for agribusinesses but also brought with it the opportunity to utilize advanced technologies, access international capital, and integrate into global value chains (Amanor, 2019; Sansika *et al.*, 2023). However, expanding into foreign markets presents its own set of challenges, such as navigating complex regulatory frameworks, adapting to local consumer preferences, international trade policies, currency fluctuations, geopolitical events, and competing with established international players (Raji, Ijomah & Eyieyien, 2024). It is within this context that foreign market entry strategies become crucial for agribusinesses looking to globalize successfully.

Foreign market entry strategies encompass the methods and approaches employed by a company to establish its presence in a new international market, ensuring that it navigates the challenges of foreign competition, regulatory environments, and cultural differences while capitalizing on opportunities for growth (Kalra, 2023). These strategies are essential for agribusinesses aiming to globalize as they directly influence the ease and success with which they can enter and compete in international markets. Strategies for foreign market entry vary widely, ranging from direct exporting, joint ventures, franchising, and licensing to more comprehensive approaches such as wholly owned subsidiaries and mergers or acquisitions (Divrik, 2023). The choice of entry strategy is influenced by factors such as the nature of the foreign market, the resources available to the business, the level of control desired, and the risk tolerance of the agribusiness.

For agribusinesses in developing regions such as Kenya, globalization represents an opportunity to scale operations, improve productivity, and enhance competitive advantage in international markets (Staatz, 2011). However, the effectiveness of their global expansion efforts depends significantly on their foreign market entry strategies. As agriculture remains a key sector in Kenya's economy, understanding how these entry strategies facilitate agribusiness globalization is critical. The study reported in this paper aimed at investigating the effect of foreign market entry strategies on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. It explores how different entry approaches have impacted the success and challenges of these businesses as they expand globally.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Agribusiness is a cornerstone of Kenya's economy, contributing approximately 33% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing over 40% of the population, including the majority of rural residents (KNBS, 2020). As the population continues to grow, with a significant proportion of youth entering the workforce, agribusiness offers a vital source of employment and income, particularly in regions such as Kiambu County, where agriculture plays a major role in local livelihoods. For this sector to continue driving economic growth and job creation, especially in the context of a competitive global market, the ability to access and operate in foreign markets is of critical importance.

Foreign market entry not only provides agribusinesses with opportunities to expand their customer base but also allows them to access new technologies, secure investments, and integrate into global value chains. However, despite these potential benefits, agribusinesses in Kenya, like the rest of the sub-Saharan Africa, face considerable challenges when attempting to enter foreign markets. These include regulatory hurdles, stiff competition from established global players, the high cost of market entry, and limited knowledge of effective entry strategies. Such barriers prevent many businesses from fully capitalizing on the opportunities presented by globalization. Moreover, there is limited empirical research focused on the foreign market entry strategies that can help agribusinesses in Kenya successfully overcome these challenges. Without a clear understanding of the most effective approaches, these businesses risk making decisions that may impede their ability to scale and compete internationally. The study sought to address this gap by investigating the impact of foreign market entry strategies on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kenya.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of foreign market entry strategies on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the foreign market entry strategies currently employed by agribusinesses in Kiambu County.
2. Examine the challenges faced by agribusinesses in Kiambu County when entering foreign markets.
3. Evaluate the effects of different foreign market entry strategies on the success of agribusinesses in global markets.

II. Literature Review

Foreign market entry strategies refer to the various methods and approaches that businesses use to establish a presence in international markets ((Brouthers, Chen & Li, 2022; Kalra, 2023). These strategies are particularly important for agribusinesses, which often face unique challenges when expanding into foreign markets, such as dealing with perishable products, regulatory constraints, and fluctuating global demand (Naik & Suresh, 2018). In the context of agribusinesses in developing countries, foreign market entry strategies play a crucial role in helping firms tap into the growing demand for agricultural products globally, while also addressing local challenges that hinder market entry.

Several theories have been developed to explain how businesses internationalize, with the Born Global theory standing out as one of the most relevant for agribusinesses. The Born Global theory posits that firms that internationalize rapidly from their inception - without relying on a prolonged period of domestic market saturation - are more likely to succeed in global markets (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Gripsrud, Hunneman, Solberg, 2023). This theory is particularly applicable to SMEs in agribusiness, which often lack the resources to expand slowly and must take

advantage of global opportunities early on to remain competitive. Research by Rodriguez-Serrano and Martin-Armario (2019) highlights how SMEs, including those in agriculture, can benefit from a rapid internationalization strategy, provided they adopt flexible and adaptive entry strategies tailored to the markets they target.

One of the most commonly employed foreign market entry strategies is exporting. Exporting allows businesses to enter foreign markets with relatively low investment, as it avoids the need for physical infrastructure in the target market. Empirical studies, such as one conducted by Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson(2017), demonstrate that export-led strategies have proven effective for agribusinesses seeking to globalize. In particular, agribusiness SMEs in developing regions like Kenya can take advantage of exports to gain market access without incurring the high costs associated with setting up operations abroad. According to Manuel (2022), exporting also allows businesses to test foreign markets before committing additional resources, making it a low-risk entry mode. However, this strategy is not without its challenges, as it often exposes firms to trade barriers and fluctuating exchange rates, which can impact profitability.

In addition to exporting, strategic alliances have emerged as a critical market entry strategy for agribusinesses. Strategic alliances, including joint ventures and partnerships, enable businesses to share resources, mitigate risks, and tap into local knowledge in foreign markets (Abdul *et al.*, 2023). These alliances are particularly valuable for agribusinesses in Kenya, where local partners can help navigate complex regulatory environments and cultural differences. A study done by Luo and Tung (2007) highlighted the importance of strategic alliances in facilitating foreign market entry, especially for SMEs with limited resources. By collaborating with local partners, agribusinesses can enhance their market penetration and competitiveness in global markets. This approach also aligns with the Born Global theory's emphasis on speed and adaptability, as strategic alliances allow businesses to quickly scale their operations in new markets.

The integration of digital technologies into foreign market entry strategies has also become increasingly important in recent years. Digital platforms, including e-commerce and digital marketing, offer agribusinesses new avenues for reaching foreign customers without the need for a physical presence in the target market. Watson, Weaven, Perkins, Sardana and Palmatier (2018) argue that the use of digital tools for market analysis, customer engagement, and distribution channels significantly enhances the effectiveness of market entry strategies. For agribusinesses in Kenya, digital technologies can help overcome traditional barriers to entry by providing access to real-time market data, enabling businesses to tailor their products to the needs of specific foreign markets. Moreover, the adoption of e-commerce platforms allows agribusinesses to sell directly to consumers in foreign markets, reducing reliance on intermediaries and increasing profitability. In their study, Meyer, Li, Brouthers and Jean (2023) found that businesses that integrated digital technologies into their foreign market entry strategies were more successful in maintaining a presence in international markets and achieving sustainable growth.

Despite the advantages offered by these foreign market entry strategies, agribusiness SMEs in Kenya still face numerous challenges. High entry costs, regulatory hurdles, and competition from established global firms are common obstacles (Raji *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, many SMEs lack the financial and human resources to conduct in-depth market research, which is critical for identifying the most suitable entry strategy for each target market. One study done by Barrett, Dooley and Bogue (2021) emphasizes the importance of having a well-rounded entry strategy that considers both traditional and modern approaches. For instance, combining exporting with strategic alliances and digital tools can help businesses mitigate some of the challenges they face while providing them with the flexibility needed to adapt to the ever-changing global marketplace. By carefully selecting and implementing the most appropriate entry strategies, agribusinesses can increase their chances of success in the global market.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a case study research design. The case study approach is particularly well-suited for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within real-life contexts, making it ideal for examining the foreign market entry strategies of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. According to Yin (2018), a case study design enables the researcher to investigate contemporary issues within a bounded system, focusing on understanding the dynamics, processes, and contextual factors that influence the subject of study. In this research, the case study design was chosen to provide a detailed understanding of how selected agribusinesses in Kiambu County employ foreign market entry strategies to globalize their operations. This design facilitated an in-depth examination of the decision-making processes, strategic approaches, and challenges faced by these agribusinesses in their quest to enter and establish a presence in international markets.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 68 registered and licensed agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya, identified from a sampling frame provided by the County Trade Office for the year 2023. Kiambu County, a key agricultural hub in Kenya, was chosen due to its diverse agribusiness landscape. The study focused on these businesses to explore their foreign market entry strategies, recognizing the specific challenges and opportunities that SMEs in the agricultural sector face in developing nations. This selection aimed to provide insights into how agribusinesses in Kiambu navigate the complexities of globalization (Birch, 2018).

3.2 Sampling and sample size

A stratified random sampling method was used to select a representative sample of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya, from a total population of 68 firms. The Taro Yamane formula (1968) was applied, yielding a sample size of 58 firms. The sample was proportionally distributed across key agribusiness categories to ensure diversity: 19 agro-inputs and aggregators, 8 value addition and processing firms, 11 crop farming and horticulture businesses, 13 livestock farming enterprises, and 7 others. This approach aimed to capture the strategic management practices across various sectors of the agribusiness industry.

3.3 Data collection procedures

Data for this study was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire, which allowed for a mix of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The questionnaires included closed-ended questions to gather structured responses and open-ended questions to facilitate in-depth discussions with key stakeholders in the selected agribusiness SMEs. This approach enabled the capture of both measurable data and more in-depth insights into the foreign market entry strategies employed by the businesses.

3.3 Data analysis procedures

The data analysis for this study involved both descriptive and inferential procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present basic features of the data, including frequencies, percentages, and means, providing an overview of trends and patterns in the foreign market entry strategies of agribusinesses. Inferential analysis, specifically linear regression, was employed to explore the relationships between various factors and the globalization of agribusinesses. This approach allowed for the examination of how different market entry strategies influence the globalization process, identifying significant predictors and assessing the strength and direction of these relationships.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Nature of agribusinesses

Out of the targeted 58 firms, 55 were responsive, which is a questionnaire return rate of 95%. The data in Table 1 illustrates the distribution of agribusiness firms that took part in the study by sector, revealing key trends in the nature of agricultural activities in the region. A significant proportion of the firms (33.3%) were involved in floriculture, indicating the sector's prominence in the county's agribusiness landscape. This is followed by manufacturing and processing firms, which comprised 20% of the total, highlighting the growing importance of value addition within the agricultural supply chain. The tea industry and other agricultural exports each accounted for 13.3% of the firms, underscoring the region's contribution to Kenya's export economy. Smaller sectors, such as apiary, dairy, and horticulture, each represented 6.7% of the agribusinesses. Despite being less represented, these sectors play a crucial role in promoting product diversification and enhancing rural incomes. The overall profile of agribusinesses in the area clearly shows that a majority of firms (approximately 60%) are engaged in export-oriented activities, which reflects the strategic importance of international markets to these firms.

Table 1: Distribution of firms by nature of agribusiness

| Nature of Agribusiness | No. of Businesses | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing & Processing | 11 | 20 |
| Floriculture | 18 | 33.3 |
| Tea | 7 | 13.3 |
| Horticulture | 4 | 6.7 |
| Dairy | 4 | 6.7 |
| Bee Products | 4 | 6.7 |

| | | |
|----------------------------|----|------|
| Other Agricultural Exports | 7 | 13.3 |
| Total | 55 | 100 |

4.2 Foreign market entry strategies

This study aimed to assess the impact of foreign market entry strategies on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County. Respondents were asked to specify the methods they employed to sell their products in international markets. The results revealed that the majority of firms (60%) relied on direct exporting, making it the most common foreign market entry strategy. A smaller proportion of firms (20%) used joint ventures to access global markets, while 13.3% sold their products through the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA), a state corporation facilitating export. Only 6.7% of the firms utilized their own global sales teams to reach international customers. These findings highlight the significance of direct exporting as the dominant market entry strategy among agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. This suggests that many firms prefer maintaining control over their export activities, possibly due to the lower risks and costs compared to more complex strategies like joint ventures. However, the reliance on direct exporting could also indicate limited capacity or resources to engage in more collaborative or integrated approaches, such as forming strategic alliances or establishing foreign subsidiaries.

The use of joint ventures by 20% of firms points to the importance of partnership-based strategies for certain agribusinesses, which may benefit from shared resources, local market knowledge, and reduced entry risks. Similarly, the involvement of KTDA in tea exports reflects the role of state institutions in facilitating access to global markets, particularly for smaller or less resourced firms that might struggle to navigate international trade independently. The relatively small percentage (6.7%) of firms utilizing their own global sales teams suggests that only a few have the capacity to establish an on-the-ground presence in foreign markets. This underscores the potential need for more investment in building global sales networks or fostering strategic partnerships to enhance market penetration.

Table 2: Exporting methods used

| Exporting method | No. of Businesses | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Direct exporting | 33 | 60.0 |
| Joint venture | 11 | 20.0 |
| State corporation (KTDA) | 7 | 13.3 |
| Marketing by global sales team | 4 | 6.7 |
| Total | 55 | 100 |

4.3 Impact of exporting methods

The results in Table 3 show the impacts of various exporting methods in terms of business expansion, community engagement, market reach, operational efficiency, profitability, and quality of products. The analysis shows that direct exporting was the most effective method for the agribusinesses, particularly in terms of profitability, market reach, and business expansion. Firms utilizing direct exporting experience higher profits and greater customer bases by eliminating intermediaries, which also supports faster business growth. The data reveals direct exporting scored highest in market reach and profitability, indicating its importance for firms seeking global growth. This suggests that agribusinesses in the region should prioritize direct exporting for maximizing international success.

Joint ventures, while not as profitable, were highly beneficial in expanding market reach and improving operational efficiency by leveraging partnerships with local firms. These collaborations reduce risks and foster community engagement, ensuring reliable access to new markets (Nippa&Reuer, 2019). As proposed by Lubis and Muniapan (2024), agribusinesses seeking to diversify their international strategies should consider joint ventures as a way to mitigate risks while maintaining operational efficiency. KTDA’s role as a state corporation offered firms consistent demand and market access, particularly in the tea industry, though its impact on profitability and business expansion was limited. The method, however, provides reliable market reach, which can be valuable for agribusinesses focusing on stability rather than rapid growth. These results suggest that direct exporting offers the most comprehensive benefits for agribusinesses aiming for global growth, while joint ventures and KTDA partnerships provide specific advantages that can enhance market reach and operational efficiency. Firms should adopt strategies that align with their goals, combining methods to balance profitability, market expansion, and risk management in the global marketplace.

Table 3: Impact of exporting method

| Exporting Method | Business | Community | Market | Operational | Profit | Quality |
|------------------|----------|-----------|--------|-------------|--------|---------|
|------------------|----------|-----------|--------|-------------|--------|---------|

| | Expansion | Engagement | Reach | Efficiency | Products | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|------------|----------|---|
| Direct Exporting | 8 | 1 | 16 | 1 | 11 | 1 |
| Joint Ventures | 4 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| Marketing through sales teams | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| State Corporation (KTDA) | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 |

4.4 Globalization of Agribusinesses

The primary objective of this study was to assess the globalization performance of agribusinesses in Kiambu County. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding their firms’ increased market presence and export levels as a result of globalization efforts. The results, as shown in Table 4, revealed a strong consensus among the agribusinesses surveyed. A combined 100% of respondents either agreed (46.7%) or strongly agreed (53.3%) that their firms had achieved significant market presence in international markets. Similarly, 100% of the respondents affirmed that globalization had led to an increase in export levels, with an identical split between strong agreement (53.3%) and agreement (46.7%). Both variables recorded a high mean score of 4.5, indicating positive perceptions of globalization's benefits.

These findings imply that globalization strategies have had a substantial impact on the international market performance of agribusinesses in Kiambu County. The unanimity in responses indicates that firms are successfully expanding their market reach and export volumes, which are key indicators of business growth and competitiveness in global markets. The consistency of responses also highlights that the agribusinesses, regardless of size or sector, are benefiting from globalization efforts in similar ways. This suggests that the strategies employed, such as direct exporting and joint ventures, are universally effective across the industry.

Table 4: Globalization of Agribusinesses

| Globalization of Agribusinesses | Strongly disagree (%) | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) | Strongly agree (%) | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|------|----------|
| Increased Market Presence | 0 | 0 | 0 | 46.67 | 53.33 | 4.53 | 0.52 |
| Increased Export Levels | 0 | 0 | 0 | 46.67 | 53.33 | 4.53 | 0.52 |

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore the impact of foreign market entry strategies on the globalization of agribusinesses in Kiambu County, Kenya. Specifically, it sought to identify the methods agribusinesses use to penetrate global markets and assess the effectiveness of these strategies in expanding market presence and export levels. The key findings revealed that direct exporting is the most effective method, with the majority of firms using it to achieve higher profits, market reach, and business expansion. Joint ventures and the use of the State Corporation (KTDA) also proved beneficial, particularly in enhancing operational efficiency and market access. These results align with Korhan, Sehnaz and Taspinar (2015), who emphasized that a diversified approach, combining export-led initiatives with strategic alliances, yields favorable outcomes for agribusinesses.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated a strong consensus among firms regarding the positive impact of globalization on their market presence and export volumes, indicating that the strategies employed have been effective in navigating the challenges of international markets. This is consistent with Brege and Kindström’s (2020) findings that proactive market entry strategies and careful selection of international markets are crucial for achieving sustained growth. The Born Global theory, which emphasizes rapid internationalization, is also validated by the success of direct exporting strategies observed in this study (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994).

The results of this study suggest that agribusinesses in Kiambu County are well-positioned to compete in the global marketplace, particularly through direct exporting. As Islam and Bhuiyan (2022) highlighted, the use of digital technologies and data analytics can further enhance market entry strategies by providing better market intelligence and customer engagement, a point that agribusinesses in the region could leverage for future growth. However, joint ventures and strategic collaborations with state entities can provide additional value in specific contexts. Policymakers

should consider enhancing support for export facilitation and international market entry, such as through trade agreements, capacity-building initiatives, and technological infrastructure, to further strengthen the global competitiveness of these firms.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that agribusinesses diversify their foreign market entry strategies, combining direct exporting with partnerships and digital technologies to optimize their global reach. Additionally, continued investment in export promotion and infrastructure by the government can help unlock further growth opportunities. Firms should also focus on building strong relationships within the global supply chain and leveraging market intelligence to navigate emerging markets effectively. Ultimately, a comprehensive approach to globalization will ensure long-term success for agribusinesses in Kiambu County and contribute to the overall growth of Kenya's agricultural sector.

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