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Formulation Strategy and Performance of Agribusiness Firms in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya

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Abstract

Strategic formulation methods are now widely accepted as being crucial to anticipating and managing performance successfully as well as addressing new concerns that are likely to arise. This study examined the influence of formulation strategy on performance of agribusiness firms. The study was grounded in the understanding that effective strategic formulation is essential for organizational success, especially in the competitive and dynamic agribusiness sector. A mixed methods approach using an embedded research design was adopted to integrate both qualitative and quantitative data. The target population comprised 106 employees from five selected agribusiness firms, and using Slovin's formula, a sample size of 84 respondents was determined. The findings revealed that strategy formulation was found to align to organizational internal capabilities, resulting in more focused and effective planning. The study concluded that strategic formulation practices have a significant and positive influence on the performance of agribusiness firms. It recommended that agribusiness firms institutionalize strategic formulation frameworks that incorporate continuous environmental analysis, and participatory strategy development. By adopting such practice, agribusiness firms can enhance productivity, service delivery, and profitability. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on strategic formulation in the agribusiness sector and offers practical implications for managers and policymakers.

Keywords: Agribusiness, Competitive, Firms, Formulation, Strategy.

1. Introduction

Strategic management practices are necessary for improved oorganizational performance. Research studies attribute productivity, service delivery and profitability of organizations to the quality of management at top, middle and low-levels. Strategic management involves environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation (Johnson & Scholes, 2003). The strategies would further be the blue print the leadership needs in utilizing making sure the firm gains an advantage position in the market hence competing favourably with others hence meeting the demands of their clients for positive business results attainment (Thompson & Strickland, 2019).

With respect to formulations of strategies, prolonged strategies must therefore be created in order to effectively and better make utilizations of the opportunities available within the environment while managing through the risks by paying keen attention to the weak and strong points of the institutions (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). The processes are made up of profiling the mission of the institution, shortlisting the goals that are attainable, creating plans and putting regulation policies and regulation frame work in place.

Strategic planning comes with a good productive result in relation with strategic management. Plan creation and adoption comes adoptions of structures. According to the practices and then analysis, strategic planning is a critical driver effective in institutions and their effectiveness because if a plan is badly implemented it could easily give birth to challenges. For leaders and the management to be in a position to embrace effective strategic planning, they must understand well the intuitive and their anticipatory planning where intuitiveness plays a critical role in the imaginative thinking for austerity formal plans development that are systematic. For this activity, institutions must properly come up with goals after they have defined their plans on what objectives they need to attain. With this analysis in the context, scenario planning was the context that directed strategic planning (Ogollah, et al., 2011).

Firms are characterized differently based on scales, sizes, output, growth and also the profits they gain (Heyder & Theuvsen, 2008). Each variation can impact the decisions of status of strategic management practices (STM) and the firm's overall performance. As per Fajnzylber et al. (2006), variations of firms like the managerial experiences and age have made a conclusion that performance in strategies tends to go down with the aging firms. This is because introduction of new practices, the newly established firms are more likely to adopt while the older firms find them to be costlier and would therefore prefer to maintain their old practices. There are others who disagrees that staffs in old firms have great experience and they would therefore get it easier to adapt to new practices. The experience staff has gained greater institutional knowledge that have easily transferred from the previous strategic challenges (Hitt et al., 2009).

Empirical studies have previously shown there exists a major network between the performance of an organization and the practices that managements put forward. However, strategic management practices have influences to the organizational performance although elusive and it is what prongs up the empirical studies' debate (Twaissi & Aldehayt 2011). The found blocks describe the actual facts on company objectives and missions that are crucial for making decisions to address issues that are likely impacting organizational performance. With this context in mind, the research set out to apply strategy formulation to impact the organizational performance of agriculturally-based Kenyan agribusiness firms.

In ideal situation agribusiness firms like any other firms embrace strategic management practices for enhanced productivity, service delivery and profitability. A recent survey of agribusiness firms in Kenya by the Kenya Bureau of Statistics (2021) shows that many firms from the western region record low profitability, productivity and the quality of their services to clients is wanting. The report suggests that strategy formulation can make a difference in bolstering the productivity and profitability of agribusiness firms. If the situation remains as it is agribusiness firms especially in Trans-Nzoia county are likely to collapse causing unwarranted damage to the agricultural sector in the food basket of Kenya, hence, the need for this study.

2. Literature Review

Strategies formulations is the process where the right choices are made so that objectives and the goals of an organization are realized. Thorough strategies formulation, workplace productions is ensured with objective justifications to enable strategies are accomplished (Santura et al., 2017). Strategies are modified during formulations so that it becomes easier attracting prosperity in the organization.

The world's organization in public sector is still dependent of strategic plans during processes of formation of strategies. There is however a drawback as per the Yazici (2014) scholars who made the conclusion that the approaches applied in strategic planning that the organizations public sectors have adopted as concepts of formalization (Bryson, et al, 2010). Several other studies have been done in the management of public sector to find the relationship in organizational performances. Andrews et al. (2011) conducted seven empirical studies to assure the impact posed by formulations of strategies on organizational performances. Walker (2013), in his studies meant to establish how organizational performance relates with logical incrementalism concluded that internal formations do not pose any influence to organizational performance.

To find out if strategy formations in the UAE impact organizational operations, AlDhaheri et al. (2020) utilized a quantitative study approach. The majority of the data came from people working for the UAE government. Organizational performance was found to be directly affected by strategy implementations as observed through human strategies and structures, according to the study. Chijioke and Olatunji (2018) investigated the possibility of a connection between the development of strategies and their subsequent

effectiveness in Nigeria. In their investigation, they employed a quantitative approach. Strategic performance is directly affected by the drivers involved in strategy formation, according to the conclusion.

Njeru in his (2018) study made a study to establish the effects posed by the scanning of traditional dynamic environment towards the results of firms which are specifically business minded. The survey was conducted on a target population of 55 whom all are from the agribusiness firms. As a final sample, the 48 agribusiness firms were selected in a random stratified sampling. All of the participants were top managers in human resource and finance. The findings showed the traditions of dynamic environmental scan has a very positive significant but great impacts outcomes that forces the firms to place themselves in a position of positive change. The harsh settings carry a competitive advantage that indicates an improved but still promising results.

Formulation of strategies have impacts on the strategic performance Nwachukwu, et al. (2019). With leadership's advancing projects as the main analysis roles, the summary was conducted with the Nigeria's multinationals intending to come up with ways of maintaining and also improving strategic performance according to strategy assessment formulation drives. From the analysis, it was found that TELCO's strategic performance is impacted by the strategies that the management formulates. The focus was on the goals of the firm as well as the prolonged plans that are there to offer positive influence on performance resulting from strategies put in place.

3. Research Methodology

This study embraced the mixed methods research approach. This approach facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a complete view of the relationship between the study variables. This study employed descriptive research design as defined by Kothari in (2004). Descriptive research design examines, interprets and elucidates past or present conditions. The descriptive research collects data by observing participants in their natural surroundings without external interference hence gives accurate insights individuals' thoughts and perspectives (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Employing this research design was an efficient approach to gather information and data regarding the influence of strategic management practices on the performance of agribusiness enterprises in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya.

The target population of this study was 106 participants, comprising of 10 top managers, 33 middle level managers and 63 low-level managers respectively as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	**Target Population (Employees)**
Operational level	63
Middle management	33
Top management	10
Total	**106**

Source: Ministry of Trade, County Government of Trans-Nzoia (2024).

Stratified sampling technique was used to identify the sample for middle and low-level managers while top level managers was selected purposively. The top-level managers would provide qualitative data through interview schedules while middle and low-level managers would provide both quantitative and qualitative data using unstructured questionnaires.

The sample size was 84 as determined using Slovin's formula as shown.

$$n_o = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n_o – desired sample size

N – Population

e– Margin of error level (95% confidence level = 0.05)

Table 2: Sample Size

Target Population	Proportion	Sample Size
Top Management	10/106*84	8
Middle Management	33/106*84	26
Operation Level	63/106*84	50
Total		**84**

Source: Researcher, (2024)

To collect primary data for this study, semi-structured questionnaires were utilized. This data collection method is advantageous for balancing structure with flexibility, as it allows the researcher to obtain standardized responses while also capturing rich, in-depth insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Semi-structured questionnaires enhance confidentiality and encourage honest responses, which is vital in assessing participants' preferences, perceptions, attitudes, and opinions (Bryman, 2016).

The questionnaires comprised both closed-ended (structured) and open-ended (unstructured) questions. Closed-ended items, particularly those using a Likert scale**,** were employed to facilitate quantitative analysis and measure the extent of agreement or disagreement with various statements related to strategic management practices. This format is especially effective in capturing attitudes and opinions in a form (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Conversely, open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to express themselves freely, offering deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives. Such flexibility is essential when investigating complex, context-specific issues, especially under constraints of time and budget (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Moreover, allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire at their convenience increases response rates and data reliability.

Data analysis was guided by a convergent mixed-methods research design**,** in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive and corroborated understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach allowed for the strengths of both numerical measurement and contextual insight to be combined, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2023).

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and key study variables (Field, 2018). To explore relationships between the independent and dependent variables, inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis were conducted. These techniques enabled the researcher to assess the strength, direction, and predictive significance of associations among variables (Pallant, 2020).

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis**,** following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). This involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification and review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and final write-up. Themes were presented in narrative form, supported by representative excerpts, to capture participants' perspectives and contextual insights.

Findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses were presented using clearly labeled tables, charts, and narrative descriptions. During the integration phase, results from both strands were compared, contrasted, and merged to identify points of convergence, divergence, and complementarity (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This integration enhanced the study's explanatory power and contributed to a more holistic interpretation of the research problem.

4. Data Analysis

The study attained a high overall response rate of 92.3%, reflecting strong engagement from managers across all levels in the selected agribusiness firms in Trans-Nzoia County. Out of the 84 targeted respondents, 77 completed the research instruments, including interview schedules for top management and semi-structured questionnaires for middle and lower-level managers. The response rate was well-distributed

among the categories, with all 8 top-level managers (100%) participating, 24 out of 26 middle-level managers (92.3%), and 45 out of 50 lower-level managers (90%) responding.

High response rates such as this are crucial in enhancing data reliability and reducing the risk of non-response bias (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019). Factors contributing to the high participation included effective communication, the relevance of the study to the respondents' roles, and diligent follow-up by the researcher, which are known to improve response rates in organizational research (Dillman et al., 2014). This robust response rate strengthened the validity and generalizability of the study's findings.

Table 3 illustrates the gender distribution of managers in agribusiness firms, showing a predominance of males (65%) over females (35%). This gender imbalance reflects common trends in managerial roles within agricultural and business sectors, where male dominance persists due to socio-cultural and structural barriers limiting female advancement (ILO, 2022).

Table 3**.** Distribution of Managers by Gender with Age Descriptive Statistics

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean Age (years)	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation (SD)
Male	50	65.0	38.2	5.1	5.8
Female	27	35.0	37.1	5.8	6.7
Total	**77**	**100**	**37.8**	**5.4**	**6.2**

Source: Research Data; N=77

Table 3 shows that the mean age of male managers (38.2 years) is slightly higher than that of female managers (37.1 years), with moderate variability indicated by standard deviations. These findings suggest that both genders occupy mid-career managerial positions, consistent with research showing managers in agribusiness are often in their late 30s to early 40s, an age range associated with peak professional productivity and leadership readiness (Nguyen et al., 2021). Understanding gender and age dynamics is critical for designing inclusive leadership development programs that address existing disparities and leverage diverse managerial experiences (Smith & McLaughlin, 2023).

Table 4: Age Distribution of Managers in Agribusiness Firms

Age Group (years)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean Deviation	Standard Deviation (SD)
21–30	19	24.7	4.2	2.9
31–40	35	45.5	5.6	3.5
41–50	23	29.8	6.1	4.1
Total	**77**	**100**	**5.4**	**3.6**

Source: Field Data, (2024)

Table 4 shows that the mean deviation and standard deviation values show moderate variation in ages within each bracket, reflecting diversity in career progression timelines. The 21–30 age group, although smaller, represents emerging young managers, highlighting opportunities for succession planning and innovation adoption in agribusiness firms (Kim & Park, 2022). The 41–50 group (29.8%) indicates experienced managers who likely contribute strategic insights and organizational stability. These age dynamics emphasize the need for tailored training and mentoring approaches that cater to the distinct developmental needs of each age cohort to sustain firm performance (Johnson et al., 2021).

Table 5. Agribusiness Firms' Profitability in Trans-Nzoia County (2024)

Agribusiness Firm	N (Managers)	Mean Profit (KES Million)	Median Profit (KES Million)	SD (KES Million)	Min Profit	Max Profit	Mean Deviation
Firm A	17	32.40	32.10	3.50	28.20	38.10	2.88
Firm B	15	6.80	6.60	1.10	5.10	8.40	0.89
Firm C	13	13.90	13.60	2.20	10.00	17.50	1.78
Firm D	16	31.80	31.50	3.20	27.40	36.50	2.73
Firm E	16	14.50	14.20	3.00	10.80	19.30	2.01
Overall Mean	**77**	**19.88**	**19.30**	**9.65**	**5.10**	**38.10**	**2.46**

Source: Field Data, (2024)

Table 5 shows that Firms A and D emerged as high performers, each recording mean annual profits above KES 30 million KES 32.4M and KES 31.8M respectively. These firms demonstrate the benefits of effective strategic management, likely characterized by robust environmental scanning, clear strategic formulation, and efficient implementation. Their low standard deviations (Firm A = 3.50M; Firm D = 3.20M) and high minimum profitability further indicate consistent and stable financial outcomes.

In contrast, Firm B recorded the lowest mean profit at KES 6.8 million, with a relatively narrow standard deviation (KES 1.10M), suggesting uniformly low performance across the reporting year. This could imply underlying weaknesses in strategy execution or adaptation to market dynamics, as supported by Wambua and Kinyua (2024), who noted that strategic misalignment leads to poor profitability in agribusiness.

Firms C and E maintained moderate profitability (KES 13.9M and 14.5M, respectively), reflecting average performance levels likely influenced by partial application of strategic practices. Their mid-range variability and profitability indicate potential for growth if management interventions are reinforced.

Overall, the mean profitability across all five firms was KES 19.88 million, with a standard deviation of KES 9.65 million, highlighting substantial variability in firm performance. The wide range from KES 5.1 million to KES 38.1 million demonstrates the tangible impact that strategic management approaches can have on firm productivity in the agribusiness sector. These results reinforce findings by Kamau and Chege (2023) and Omondi et al. (2023), who emphasized that firms engaging in comprehensive strategic planning tend to achieve superior financial outcomes in dynamic environments.

To evaluate the influence of managers' strategy formulation on the profitability of agribusiness firms in Trans-Nzoia County, data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to managers at various organizational levels. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items assessing how often managers developed clear strategic goals, conducted SWOT analyses, aligned organizational objectives, and reviewed strategic plans. Supplementary interviews with top-level managers were conducted to explore the practical challenges and outcomes of strategic planning processes. Instrument reliability was confirmed through a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, specifically linear regression, to assess the degree to which strategy formulation predicts firm profitability. Qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to contextualize quantitative trends, highlighting practical dynamics and barriers to effective strategy formulation.

Descriptive analysis showed that strategy formulation practices were moderately implemented among agribusiness firms in Trans-Nzoia County. While many managers reported setting broad goals and conducting SWOT analyses occasionally, few engaged in regular strategy reviews or involved lower-level teams in the planning process. The composite mean score was 2.89, reflecting a below-moderate engagement with structured strategic planning.

Notably, standard deviations ranged from 0.84 to 0.97, suggesting wide variation in practice. This inconsistency may be attributed to the absence of formal strategic frameworks in smaller firms or a reliance on reactive rather than proactive planning approaches. These results align with findings by Oduor and Barasa (2022), who noted that many agribusinesses lack structured strategic departments, thereby weakening firm direction and competitiveness.

Table 6 presents the influence of managers' strategy on firm performance across gender, age groups, and managerial levels. The findings indicate that male managers reported a slightly higher mean influence score (M = 3.35, SD = 0.83) compared to their female counterparts (M = 3.10, SD = 0.87), suggesting a moderately stronger strategic impact among male managers. Age-wise, managers aged 31–40 years demonstrated the strongest perceived influence on firm performance (M = 3.42, SD = 0.79), followed by those aged 41–50 years (M = 3.25, SD = 0.85), indicating increased strategic impact with experience.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Formulation Practices

Group	N	Mean	Mean Deviation	SD	Interpretation
Gender					
Male	50	3.35	0.61	0.83	Moderate to strong influence
Female	27	3.10	0.67	0.87	Moderate influence
Age Group					
21–30 years	15	2.95	0.72	0.90	Mild influence
31–40 years	35	3.42	0.58	0.79	Strong influence
41–50 years	27	3.25	0.64	0.85	Moderate to strong influence
Managerial Level					
Top Management	8	3.60	0.52	0.75	High strategic influence
Middle Management	26	3.40	0.60	0.81	Strong influence
Lower Management	43	3.05	0.69	0.88	Moderate influence

Note. Mean scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale assessing strategic influence.
Source. Field Data (N = 77)

The youngest group (21–30 years) had the lowest mean (M = 2.95), suggesting limited strategic influence. At the managerial level, top management reported the highest influence (M = 3.60, SD = 0.75), followed by middle management (M = 3.40), while lower management had a moderate influence (M = 3.05). These results highlight that strategic influence increases with position and experience in the organizational hierarchy.

A linear regression analysis was performed to assess the extent to which strategy formulation practices influence the profitability of agribusiness firms in Trans-Nzoia County. The regression model used was:

Profitability (Profit in KES Million) = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ (Strategy Formulation Score) + ε

The analysis yielded an R^2 value of **0.325**, suggesting that **32.5%** of the variance in firm profitability is explained by the strategic formulation practices employed by managers. This indicates a moderate but meaningful relationship. The **F-statistic** was **38.47** with a **p-value < .001**, confirming that the regression model is statistically significant and that strategy formulation contributes meaningfully to explaining profitability. However, its effect is slightly less pronounced than that of environmental scanning.

Table 7: Simple Linear Regression of Strategy Formulation Practices on Profitability

Model	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	12.37	2.11	-	5.86	<.001
Strategy Formulation Score	4.22	0.68	.570	6.20	<.001

Model Summary: R = .570, R^2 = .325, Adjusted R^2 = .316, F (1,75) = 38.47, **p < .001**
Source: Field Data. **(N=77)**

On the other hand, ***strategy formulation*** **(β = .570)** made a statistically significant contribution, underscoring the importance of setting clear goals, aligning departmental objectives, and developing coherent strategic plans. As Hill, Jones, and Schilling (2015) explain, well-formulated strategies provide a roadmap for resource allocation, competitive positioning, and long-term sustainability.

These findings are consistent with previous empirical studies. For instance, Aosa, Machuki, and Letting (2012) found that Kenyan firms that integrated environmental analysis with structured strategic planning achieved superior performance outcomes. Similarly, Mutunga and Minja (2014) emphasized that strategic formulation especially when participatory was a key determinant of organizational effectiveness in Kenyan agribusinesses. Overall, the strategy formulation practices reinforce the necessity of ***direction-setting (formulation)*** which is equally emphasized. Firms that excel in such a dimension are better positioned to anticipate market shifts, allocate resources effectively, and ultimately achieve ***higher profitability.***

5. Conclusion

Descriptive analysis showed moderate engagement with simple linear regressions revealing that formulation practice individually explained roughly 32.5% of variance in profitability. A linear regression model showed a formulation strategy of (β = .570). Qualitative findings illustrated organizational routines and barriers such as siloed planning sessions, resource constraints during implementation, and weak feedback loops that helped interpret and corroborate the survey results. Internal processes remain critical with well-structured formulation and disciplined implementation are essential complements to scanning, ensuring that insights lead to coherent plans and effective execution.

6. Recommendations

Agribusiness firms in Trans-Nzoia County should institutionalize continuous market scanning through cross-functional intelligence forums and simple data-gathering tools to stay ahead of competitor, customer, and regulatory shifts; broaden strategy formulation by involving all departments and leveraging analytical frameworks like PESTEL and Porter's Five Forces; translate plans into action with dedicated budgets, detailed milestones, regular progress reviews, and clear communication channels; embed formal feedback loops such as digital suggestion boxes and pulse surveys into KPI dashboards and strategy-review workshops to drive continuous learning; and sustain these gains through ongoing training in strategic tools and by rewarding teams that effectively adapt their strategies, thereby ensuring agility, alignment, and enhanced performance of agribusiness firms.

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