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EFFECT OF MARKET ACCESS ALLIANCES ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM BROOKSIDE DAIRY LIMITED, KENYA

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ABSTRACT
Strategic alliances allow firms to use the distribution systems, market knowledge and customer networks of partners to reach markets they could not reach alone. This matters in the dairy industry, where milk is perishable and must reach buyers quickly. This study examined the effect of market access alliances on the organizational performance of Brookside Dairy Limited, Kenya. A descriptive correlational, cross-sectional survey was used. A census of 77 management and supervisory employees at the company headquarters was undertaken, and 67 usable questionnaires were returned (87.0%). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple and multiple linear regression. Market access alliances recorded an overall mean of 3.869, with collaboration to access regional and international markets rated highest (mean = 4.164) and distribution partnerships with retail chains and institutions rated lowest (mean = 3.552). Market access alliances had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance ($R = .668$, $R^2 = .447$, $B = .681$, $p < .001$). Among four alliance dimensions tested together, market access alliances were also the strongest predictor ($\beta = .343$). The study recommends that the firm deepen distribution partnerships with retail chains and institutional buyers, formalize service level agreements, and diversify its partners to avoid over-dependence on any single one.

KEYWORDS: *Strategic Alliances, Market Access Alliances, Organizational Performance, Dairy Industry, Brookside Dairy, Kenya*

1. INTRODUCTION

Firms no longer rely only on internal capabilities. They collaborate with external partners to obtain resources, knowledge and markets (Gomes, Barnes & Mahmood, 2016). A strategic alliance is a cooperative agreement between firms that remain legally independent but pursue shared objectives. Market access alliances are a specific form of alliance. They are arrangements through which a firm uses the distribution systems, market knowledge and customer networks of partners to widen its market reach, make its products more accessible and strengthen its competitive position (Varadarajan & Cunningham, 1995). Entry into new markets and access to distribution channels are among the most common reasons firms form alliances.

Market access is especially important in dairy processing. Milk is perishable, consumers expect daily availability, and shelf space in retail chains is competitively allocated. A processor that cannot move its product through retail chains, institutions and regional markets quickly loses revenue to spoilage. Resource Dependence Theory explains why firms respond by forming alliances to secure critical external resources such as distribution channels (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The same theory warns that heavy dependence on one partner can weaken bargaining power and squeeze margins (Hillman, Withers & Collins, 2009).

Kenyan evidence on this question is thin. Muthoka, Kilika and Muathe (2022) studied alliance motives among manufacturing SMEs. Kiende and Muthimi (2024) studied strategic leadership in dairy processing firms. Ngatia (2025) studied green supply chain management in dairy manufacturers. None of these studies isolates market access alliances in a Kenyan dairy processor. This paper addresses that gap using Brookside Dairy Limited, one of the country's leading dairy processors.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study was to evaluate the effect of market access alliances on the organizational performance of Brookside Dairy Limited. The study tested the following null hypothesis: H0: Market access alliances have no significant effect on the organizational performance of Brookside Dairy Limited.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive correlational, cross-sectional survey design. The descriptive component showed how far market access alliances are practised at the firm. The correlational component tested the direction, strength and significance of their relationship with performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Primary data were collected with a structured questionnaire. Market access alliances were measured with four items covering distribution partnerships, regional and international market collaborations, branding partnerships and retail network expansion. Organizational performance was measured with five items covering revenue growth, profitability, cost savings, market share and operational efficiency. All items used a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

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Content validity was ensured by building the items from the theoretical and empirical literature. Face validity was confirmed by the university supervisor and two experts in strategic management. A pilot test with eight respondents at New KCC gave Cronbach's alpha values of 0.718 for market access alliances and 0.868 for organizational performance, both above the 0.70 threshold (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). On the main data (n = 67), alpha rose to .938 and .954 respectively. Research authorization was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and questionnaires were delivered and collected personally using the drop-and-pick method.

4. SAMPLING DESIGN

The target population was the 77 management and supervisory employees at Brookside Dairy Limited headquarters. These staff are directly involved in strategic decisions, alliance coordination and performance monitoring, and they work across six departments: procurement and supply chain, production and quality assurance, logistics and distribution, sales and marketing, finance and administration, and human resources. Because the population was small and accessible, a census was conducted and no sampling was applied. Of the 77 questionnaires distributed, 67 were returned fully completed, a response rate of 87.0%, which is above the 70% considered excellent in social science research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The 10 non-responses were spread across all six departments, so no departmental pattern of non-response was evident.

5. STATISTICAL DESIGN

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 29. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to describe responses. Simple linear regression was used to test the effect of market access alliances on performance, using the model $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$, where Y is organizational performance and X is market access alliances. Multiple linear regression was then run with all four alliance dimensions to compare their relative contributions. Regression assumptions were checked for the full model: the Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.063, Tolerance values ranged from .660 to .709 (VIF from 1.410 to 1.516), residuals were normal (Shapiro-Wilk W = .989, p = .820) and variance was constant (Breusch-Pagan p = .204) (Field, 2018). All tests used a 95% confidence level.

6. GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

The study was carried out at the headquarters of Brookside Dairy Limited in Kenya. Brookside is a large dairy processor that works with partners in distribution, retailing, branding and regional trade.

7. RESULTS

7.1 Descriptive findings

Table 1 summarizes how respondents rated the four market access practices. The overall mean of 3.869 (SD = 0.802) shows that market access alliances are moderately to strongly practised, and 66.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. Collaboration with partners to access regional and international markets was rated highest (mean = 4.164), followed by working with partners to expand retail presence in new areas (mean = 4.015) and joint branding (mean = 3.746). Distribution partnerships with retail chains and institutional buyers scored lowest (mean = 3.552), and 37.3% of respondents were neutral on this item. This suggests that the firm's distribution partnerships are the least developed part of its market access strategy.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Market Access Alliances (n = 67)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Agree / Strongly agree (%)
Collaboration with partners to access regional and international markets	4.164	0.687	83.5
Working with partners to expand retail presence in new areas	4.015	0.788	73.2
Joint branding initiatives with alliance partners	3.746	0.876	58.2
Distribution partnerships with retail chains and institutions	3.552	0.858	52.2
Overall market access alliances	**3.869**	**0.802**	**66.8**

Source: Field data (2026)

7.2 Effect of market access alliances on organizational performance

Organizational performance recorded an overall mean of 3.922 (SD = 0.817). Table 2 shows the simple regression results. Market access alliances had a strong positive relationship with performance (R = .668) and explained 44.7% of its variance (R^2 = .447). The model was significant, $F(1, 65) = 52.482$, $p < .001$. The fitted equation is $Y = 1.288 + 0.681X$, so each one-unit increase in market access alliances is associated with a 0.681-unit increase in organizational performance ($t = 7.244$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

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Table 2: Simple Linear Regression of Organizational Performance on Market Access Alliances

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
R	.668	Strong positive relationship
R Square (Adjusted R Square)	.447 (.438)	44.7% of variance explained
F (1, 65)	52.482	Significant, $p < .001$
Constant (B)	1.288	$t = 3.482$, $p = .001$
Market access alliances (B)	.681	$t = 7.244$, $p < .001$
Standardized Beta	.668	Strongest of the four dimensions

Dependent variable: Organizational performance. Source: Field data (2026)

7.3 Market access alliances compared with other alliance dimensions

When resource sharing, knowledge sharing, technology partnership and market access alliances were entered together, they jointly explained 65.3% of the variance in performance ($R^2 = .653$, $F(4, 62) = 29.186$, $p < .001$). Table 3 shows that market access alliances had the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = .343$, $p < .001$). Holding the other three dimensions constant, a one-unit increase in market access alliances was associated with a 0.349-unit increase in performance ($t = 3.721$). The simple coefficient ($B = .681$) is larger than this partial coefficient because, on its own, market access also picks up variance it shares with the other dimensions. Market access alliances therefore remain the strongest single driver of performance even after the other alliance practices are accounted for.

Table 3: Standardized Coefficients of the Four Alliance Dimensions

Alliance dimension	Std. Beta	Sig.	Rank
Market access alliances	.343	.000	1st
Resource sharing alliances	.298	.001	2nd
Technology partnership alliances	.222	.016	3rd
Knowledge sharing alliances	.189	.044	4th

Dependent variable: Organizational performance. Source: Field data (2026)

7.4 Discussion

The strong effect of market access alliances fits the logic of Resource Dependence Theory. Firms that secure access to critical external resources such as distribution channels reduce uncertainty and improve results (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Hillman et al., 2009). It is also consistent with Varadarajan and Cunningham (1995), who identified access to distribution channels as a leading motive for alliances, and with Muthoka et al. (2022), who found that the pursuit of market share and a wider customer base had a significant positive effect on the performance of Kenyan manufacturing firms. For a perishable product, access to retail chains and institutional buyers decides how much processed milk is sold before it spoils, which links these alliances directly to revenue, market share and capacity use. The lower and more neutral rating of retail and institutional distribution partnerships may reflect the bargaining power of large retailers, which Resource Dependence Theory predicts can limit what a supplier gains from such relationships.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, the following are suggested. First, Brookside Dairy should deepen its distribution partnerships with retail chains and institutional buyers, since this was the weakest-rated practice and one with strong potential given the effect of market access on performance. Second, these partnerships should be backed by formal service level agreements that set out delivery times, quality standards and pricing terms. Third, the firm should spread its market access across several partners so that it does not become dependent on any single distributor or retailer, in line with the dependency risk described by Hillman et al. (2009). Fourth, it should build on its strongest practice by expanding collaboration for regional and international markets and by extending retail presence into new areas. Fifth, joint branding with partners should be strengthened, and partner performance should be reviewed regularly using agreed indicators. Dairy processors elsewhere in Kenya may also benefit from similar arrangements, although this should be tested.

9. CONCLUSION

Market access alliances have a positive and statistically significant effect on the organizational performance of Brookside Dairy Limited. They explain 44.7% of the variance in performance on their own and are the strongest of the four alliance dimensions when all are considered together. Partnerships that open up distribution channels, regional markets and retail space therefore appear to be a key route to better performance in Kenya's dairy industry. The findings should be read with caution. The study covered one firm, used a cross-sectional design that shows association rather than causation, and relied on self-reported perceptions from a single questionnaire, which may inflate relationships through common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

10. AREA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future studies could track market access alliances and performance over several years to establish causality, compare several dairy processors including cooperatives and medium-sized firms, and use objective financial data such as audited revenue and

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market share instead of perceptions. Researchers could also test whether partner dependence, trust or alliance governance changes the strength of the relationship.

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