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EFFECT OF STRATEGIC CONTROLS ON PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: To examine the effect of strategic control on the performance of agricultural cooperative societies in Kenya, with emphasis on governance, accountability, sustainability, and the moderating role of firm size.

Statement of the Problem: Agricultural cooperative societies in Kenya face governance weaknesses, inefficiencies, and accountability challenges that affect their performance and sustainability. Limited empirical evidence exists on the influence of strategic controls and the moderating role of firm size on cooperative performance.

Methodology: Anchored in trait leadership theory, the study adopted a mixed research design integrating descriptive and explanatory approaches. The target population comprised 1,206 agricultural cooperative societies across five counties in Kenya, from which a sample of 301 was selected using Yamane's formula. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and secondary records from the State Department of Cooperatives (2019–2023). Analysis was conducted using SPSS through correlation and regression.

Findings: The study found that strategic controls, including premises monitoring, special alert systems, and implementation controls, have a strong, statistically significant effect on cooperative performance. These controls enhance accountability, efficiency, adaptability, and resilience. The findings further revealed that firm size positively moderates the relationship between strategic controls and performance, with larger cooperatives experiencing stronger benefits due to improved accountability frameworks and management.

Conclusion: The study concludes that strategic controls are critical governance and strategic leadership mechanisms that enhance sustainable performance in agricultural cooperative societies. Firm size strengthens the effectiveness of these controls in improving organizational outcomes.

Recommendation: The study recommends that cooperative societies institutionalize structured monitoring and evaluation systems to strengthen accountability, adaptability, and long-term sustainability.

Keywords: *Strategic control, agricultural cooperative societies, organizational performance, firm size, governance, accountability, sustainability, Kenya*

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Nowadays, strategic leadership practices are increasingly recognized as a vital component for governing 21st-century organizations, particularly in unpredictable environments (Kegeni, 2021). Within this framework, strategic control emerges as a critical dimension, ensuring that organizations remain aligned with long-term objectives while adapting to external challenges. Strategic control reinforces governance systems by embedding accountability and transparency into decision-making processes. According to Wambua and Karihe (2023), strategic controls serves as a mechanism for implementing organizational strategies, assessing both internal and external environments, and incorporating feedback into the strategic management process. This alignment of strategic control with governance principles ensures that organizations are better equipped to navigate complexity and uncertainty.

Scholars argue that effective strategic control practices are necessary to address performance challenges, particularly those related to governance and accountability. Evidence from Malaysia, Dahri, Amin, and Waseem (2019) pointed out that enterprises facing intense competition relied on strategic leadership practices, including control mechanisms, to adopt robust governance frameworks. Strategic control enabled these organizations to achieve objectives efficiently while adhering to governance standards. Most organizations struggled to secure sufficient operational capital due to weak performance, emphasizing that adopting effective strategic control and governance practices is crucial for enhancing organizational outcomes and strengthening qualitative performance indicators (Yeboah, et al., 2023).

In Nigeria, Nzewi et al. (2021) highlighted the critical importance of strategic leadership knowledge, noting that strategic leaders enhance firm performance by embodying governance principles such as accountability and ethical decision-making. Strategic control plays a central role in this process, as it provides benchmarks and monitoring systems that ensure leaders remain responsive to organizational complexities. The development of strategic control mechanisms is recognized as a pivotal driver for business success, particularly given that the failure of many entities, especially start-ups, can be traced to insufficient leadership and weak control systems. Ratanya, Mukulu, and Sakwa (2019) similarly found that leadership competencies related to strategic planning and control were key antecedents of performance in Kenyan parastatals, reinforcing the need for leadership development as a national priority.

In Kenya, Orito (2021) notes that an organization's capacity for continuous performance improvement depends on adopting diverse strategies that align with effective governance

frameworks. Strategic control is central to this process, as it enables leaders to evaluate operational practices, financial oversight, and leadership effectiveness holistically. The ability to make strategic decisions is paramount, and control systems ensure that these decisions are implemented consistently across organizational levels. Moreover, the integration of technical abilities and collaborative leadership within top management is strengthened by strategic control, which provides mechanisms for monitoring and adjusting performance. Thus, the convergence of strategic control and governance practices fosters an environment conducive to sustained organizational success.

Strategic controls are widely conceptualized by scholars as essential for monitoring execution and ensuring accountability. Taj, Zulfiqar, and Nasir (2020) assert that strategic controls provide benchmarks for official goals and feedback systems that allow leaders to assess whether organizations are achieving desired outcomes. Wambua and Karihe (2023) emphasize that strategic control facilitates the establishment of measurement criteria and feedback systems essential for evaluating the execution of strategic plans. These practices involve tracking the implementation of strategies, identifying deviations, and instituting corrective measures. By embedding control systems into governance frameworks, organizations enhance transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency, all of which directly influence performance outcomes.

Across the sectors, strategic controls are not merely a monitoring tool but a strategic leadership practice that drives continuous improvement. By embedding control systems into cooperative governance, leaders ensure that resources are managed efficiently, ethical practices are upheld, and strategic direction is consistently pursued (Wambua & Karihe, 2023). This alignment enhances cooperative performance, enabling organizations to remain competitive, resilient, and responsive to stakeholder needs. In Kenya's agricultural cooperatives, strategic control thus emerges as a vital pillar of leadership that directly influences both short-term efficiency and long-term sustainability (Taj, Zulfiqar & Nasir, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Agricultural cooperative societies are pivotal to Kenya's rural economy, serving as engines of food security, income generation, and inclusive development. They facilitate access to credit, farm inputs, markets, and collective bargaining, thereby empowering smallholder farmers to enhance productivity and resilience. In 2023, agriculture contributed 21.2% to Kenya's GDP, underscoring its economic significance (KNBS, 2024). The sector also accounted for over 70%

of rural employment, and 40% of total employment nationally, reflecting its centrality to livelihoods (Central Bank of Kenya, 2023). Despite this strategic importance, agricultural cooperatives continue to underperform due to persistent leadership and governance challenges that undermine their operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

Recent data reveals widespread governance deficits and weak financial accountability across cooperative societies. Out of 2,806 registered agricultural cooperatives, only 1,206 submitted audited financial statements in 2023, indicating a compliance rate of just 43% (SDC, 2023). Sectoral disparities are stark: coffee cooperatives reported 35% compliance, while fishing cooperatives lagged at 2%, and pyrethrum cooperatives submitted no financial reports at all (KNBS, 2024). These figures point to systemic leadership failures, including poor oversight, lack of transparency, and ineffective strategic planning. Weaknesses in strategic control systems, such as inadequate monitoring, poor feedback mechanisms, and a lack of performance benchmarks, compromise cooperative credibility, hinder access to funding, and erode member trust, which are core pillars of sustainable performance.

Financial instability further compounds these leadership shortcomings. In Kericho County, only 3.63% of agricultural cooperatives were classified as financially sustainable in 2023, with most relying on external borrowing due to weak internal resource mobilization (Central Bank of Kenya, 2023). Nationally, the average debt-to-equity ratio for cooperatives rose to 1.8, while profit margins declined by 12.4% compared to 2022, signaling deterioration in financial health (KNBS, 2024). Additionally, over 60% of cooperatives reported cash flow constraints, limiting their ability to invest in growth or meet member obligations (CBK, 2023). These trends reflect gaps in strategic control practices, particularly in financial planning, risk management, and adaptive governance. Without robust monitoring and responsive control systems, cooperatives risk stagnation, member disengagement, and diminished relevance in Kenya's evolving economic landscape.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to:

i. To investigate effect of strategic controls on performance of agricultural cooperatives societies in Kenya.

ii. To establish the moderating effect of firm size on strategic control and performance of agricultural cooperatives societies in Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Allport (1937) advanced Trait Leadership Theory. The theory emphasizes that leaders possess innate qualities shaped by physical, social, and task-related factors that shape their effectiveness (Colbert et al., 2012). Traits such as intelligence, confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability have been consistently identified as transformative in enhancing organizational performance (Cherry, 2025). These traits provide the foundation for leaders to design and enforce strategic control systems. For example, intelligence supports analytical decision-making when interpreting performance data, while integrity ensures fairness and accountability in monitoring processes. Strategic control depends on leaders applying these traits to establish benchmarks, evaluate progress, and enforce corrective measures, thereby aligning organizational activities with long-term objectives.

Although trait theory highlights the importance of innate qualities, scholars caution that traits alone are insufficient for organizational success. Leadership effectiveness is also shaped by situational demands, organizational culture, and external pressures (Colbert et. al., 2012; Cherry, 2025). Strategic control reflects this interaction, requiring leaders to combine personal attributes with contextual adaptability. For example, determination and confidence enable leaders to enforce corrective measures when deviations occur, while sociability strengthens communication with stakeholders during feedback processes. Integrity ensures transparency in monitoring, reinforcing trust among members. Thus, trait theory supports strategic control by showing how personal qualities interact with environmental realities to sustain cooperative performance.

Cherry (2025) identified five transformative traits, intelligence, confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability, that closely align with strategic leadership practices. Intelligence supports analytical decision-making in evaluating performance data, while confidence enables decisive action in implementing corrective measures. Determination drives persistence in achieving strategic goals, integrity fosters accountability in reporting, and sociability enhances collaboration during feedback processes. These traits directly strengthen strategic control systems by ensuring leaders can monitor execution, identify gaps, and institute corrective actions (Cherry, 2025). By embedding these traits into governance frameworks, leaders enhance competitiveness and resilience, even in cooperative contexts, where principled and adaptive governance is essential for long-term sustainability.

The relevance of trait theory lies in its ability to explain how leaders' personal qualities underpin strategic control practices. Traits such as integrity, empathy, assertiveness, and decision-making reflect internal beliefs that shape how leaders apply monitoring systems and

align organizational strategies. Strategic leadership effectiveness depends on how these traits are practiced, ensuring goals are met through clear direction and accountability. By cultivating intelligence, responsibility, creativity, and values, cooperative leaders can strengthen governance and embed effective control mechanisms. Substantively, trait theory supports strategic control by linking personal attributes to monitoring and corrective systems, thereby improving financial stability, operational efficiency, and member trust.

Conceptual Framework

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2010), a conceptual framework is a diagrammatic representation of the hypothesized relationship between independent and dependent variables in a study. The conceptual framework illustrates the hypothesized relationship between strategic controls, firm size, and performance of agricultural cooperative societies. Strategic controls, such as premises control, special alert control, and implementation control, are positioned as dimensions of strategic control and directly influence performance outcomes, such as net profits and return on assets. Firm size, measured through the logarithm of total assets, acts as a moderating variable, strengthening or weakening the effect of strategic controls on agricultural cooperative societies.

Independent Variable **Moderating Variable** **Dependent variable**

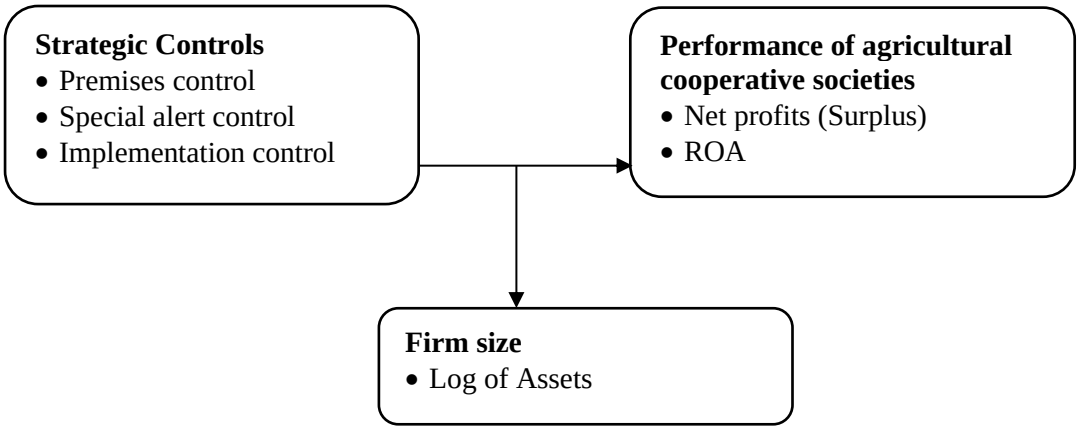

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, anchored in a cross-sectional survey, to investigate the influence of strategic leadership practices on the performance of agricultural cooperative societies in Kenya. The target population of this study was 1206 from the five counties: Meru, Nakuru, Nyandarua, Murang'a, and Kiambu. Yamane's formula was used to

determine a sample size of 301. A stratified sampling technique was adopted to ensure a distribution of sample sizes across the sub-sectors of agriculture within the cooperatives targeted in the selected counties. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires, which were pre-tested for validity and reliability. Secondary data was collected from the State Department of Cooperatives covering the period between 2019 and 2023. The data covered financial performance with a focus on total assets and turnover. For a period of five years from 2019 to 2023. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 28.0), and descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analysis, were applied to test relationships between strategic leadership dimensions namely human capital development, strategic controls, strategic direction, and ethical practices, and cooperative performance. Additionally, the study tested the moderating effect of firm size on these relationships. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process, including informed consent and confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Performance of Agricultural Cooperatives Societies between 2019 to 2023

According to data, the number of cooperatives filing for audits increased by 93, from 968 in 2019 to 1061 in 2020. The number increased by 20 to 1081 in 2021, then by 22 to 1103 in 2022, and finally by 103 to 1206 in 2023. Regarding net income, there was a major growth in KSh. 70537470 between 2019 and 2020, then KSh. 46311973 between 2020 and 2021. However, there was a decrease of KSh. 104643876 between years 2021 and 2022, before another growth of KSh. 91095955 between years 2022 and 2023. The value of total assets grew by KSh. 456402984 between the years 2019 and 2020, and a further growth of KSh. 219138072 between the years 2020 and 2021. However, the total assets of the cooperatives decreased by KSh. 2231503404 between years 2021 and 2022 before another growth of KSh. 3507707542 between the years 2022 and 2023.

The ROA decreased by 1.2% between 2019 and 2020, then grew by 0.46% between 2020 and 2021. This was followed by a 0.79% decrease between 2021 and 2022. Nevertheless, the sector bounced back and recorded a growth of 1.1% in ROA between years 2022 and 2023. In addition, the total income depicted a growth of KSh. 2085779610 between years 2019 and 2020, then KSh. 23335940859 between the years 2020 and 2021, and KSh. 36319100731

between the years 2021 and 2022, before a decrease in KSh. 61569227882 between years 2022 and 2023. In total operational costs, the cooperatives showed a growth of KSh. 120550354 between the years 2019 and 2020, then KSh. 215125101 between the years 2020 and 2021. In addition, the total operational costs increased by KSh. 1779616874 between years 2021 and 2022 before decreasing by KSh. 1988350248 between the years 2022 and 2023.

The surplus reported by cooperatives filing audits grew by KSh. 1965229256 between years 2019 and 2020, followed by another growth of KSh. 23120815758 between years 2020 and 2021, and a further growth of KSh. 34539483856 between years 2021 and 2022, and culminated in a decrease of KSh. 59580877633 between the years 2022 and 2023. It is evident that the agricultural cooperatives have experienced turbulence in their operations, as shown by fluctuations in net income, total assets, ROA, total income (revenue), total operational costs, and surplus between 2019 and 2023.

Table 1: Performance of Agricultural Cooperatives Societies between 2019 to 2023

Years	Net Income (KSh.000)	Total assets (KSh.000)	ROA (%)	Total Income or Revenue (KSh.000)	Total operational costs (KSh.000)	Net Profit= Surplus (KSh.000)
2019	1857987	4243243448	2.5	217668062	17413443	200254619
2020	72395457	4699646432	1.3	2303447672	137963797	2165483875
2021	118707430	4918784504	1.76	25639388531	353088898	25286299633
2022	14063554	2687281100	0.97	61958489262	2132705772	59825783489
2023	105159509	6194988642	2.07	389261380	144355524	244905856

Firm size

The study further gathered secondary data on the size of agricultural cooperative societies. Table 2 shows the size of the agricultural cooperatives in terms of total assets and the log of total assets between the years 2019 and 2023.

Table 2: Total Assets and Log. of Total Assets

Year	Total Assets	Log. of Total Assets
2019	4243243448	9.6277
2020	4699646432	9.6721
2021	4918784504	9.6919
2022	2687281100	9.7251
2023	6194988642	9.7920
Mean	4548788825	9.7018
SD	1267694526	0.0615
Min	2687281100	9.6277
Max	6194988642	9.7920

The total assets for 2019-2023 were converted to logarithms of assets, which were used as the measure of firm size. The total assets also grew over the five years. According to Figure 4.1, the mean Log. of total assets was 9.6277 in 2019, 9.6721 in 2020, 9.6919 in 2021, 9.7251 in 2022, and 9.7920 in 2023. This was a gradual rise over the five years, indicating that the size of the cooperatives grew steadily as they invested in assets.

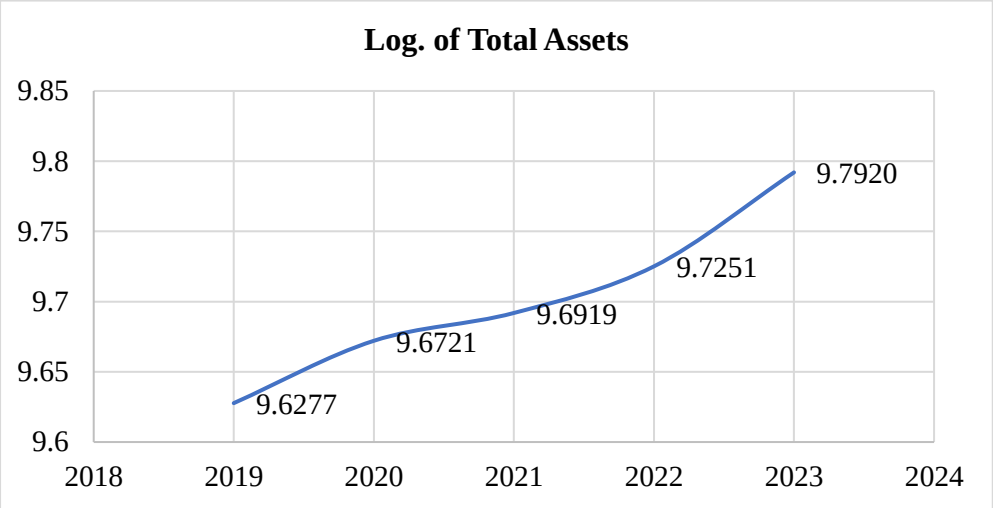

Figure 2: Total Assets

Correlation Analysis

Strategic controls (SC) exhibit the strongest correlation with the performance of agricultural cooperative societies ($r = 0.828$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a powerful and statistically significant relationship. This suggests that cooperatives with robust control mechanisms, such as premises control, special alert systems, and implementation monitoring, are more likely to achieve

superior outcomes. The strength of this correlation indicates that cooperative performance is closely tied to leaders' ability to monitor, evaluate, and adjust strategies effectively. Thus, the evidence affirms that strategic control is not merely a compliance mechanism but a performance-enhancing capability central to cooperative governance, strengthening resilience, adaptability, and long-term sustainability. Empirical literature strongly supports this finding. Sundstrom and Svardsten (2025) describe strategic control as a dynamic capability that enables leaders to identify deviations early and realign organizational activities to maintain competitiveness. Iradukunda and Irechukwu (2023) further argue that balanced strategic controls build credibility, foster accountability, and support strategic change by ensuring that organizational actions remain consistent with long-term goals.

Regression Analysis

The regression model summary tested the effect of strategic controls on cooperative performance, with a correlation coefficient (R = 0.828) indicating a very strong positive relationship. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.686) indicates that strategic controls explain 68.6% of the variance in performance.

Table 3: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.828	0.686	0.624	0.5774

ANOVA

Table 4 presents the ANOVA results evaluating the effect of strategic controls on the performance of agricultural cooperative societies. The data established an F statistic of 576.55 and $p < .001$, confirming that the regression model is statistically significant and that strategic controls are a valid predictor of organizational performance.

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	161.579	1	161.579	576.55	.000
	Residual	72.594	259	0.280		
	Total	234.173	260			

Regression of Coefficients

The regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of strategic controls on the performance of agricultural cooperative societies in Kenya. Results are presented in Table 5. The unstandardized coefficient for strategic controls ($B = 0.794$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in strategic controls, cooperative performance increases by approximately 0.794 units. The relatively small standard error (0.038) confirms the precision of this estimate, while the large t-value (20.895) and significance level ($p < 0.001$) demonstrate that the effect is both strong and statistically significant.

The regression equation is expressed as:

$$Y = 0.811 + 0.794X + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y= Performance of agricultural cooperative societies
- X= Strategic controls
- ε= Error term

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.794$) confirms that strategic controls exert a substantial effect on cooperative performance. The findings of this study are consistent with earlier theoretical and empirical work. Empirical evidence from Kenya also reinforces these findings. Gaturu et al. (2015) reported a positive relationship between strategic control and performance in mission hospitals, underscoring its importance in enhancing organizational outcomes.

This study extends that evidence to agricultural cooperatives, showing that strategic controls are equally critical in improving performance within the cooperative sector. Sundström and Svardsten (2025) highlighted that strategic controls serve as a bridge between planning and execution, particularly in dynamic environments. Iradukunda and Irechukwu (2023) further emphasized that balanced controls enhance credibility and support organizational change, which aligns with the finding that cooperatives that embed control practices achieve greater adaptability and sustainability.

Table 5: Regression of Coefficients for Strategic Controls

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.811	0.129		6.285	0.000
Strategic Controls	0.794	0.038	0.558	20.895	0.000

Moderating Effect of Firm Size on the Relationship between Ethical Practices and Performance of Cooperative Societies in Kenya

Model 1 explained 78.9% of performance variance, while Model 2 explained 84.3%. The increase in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.054$) was statistically significant (F Change = 23.5, $p < .001$). This confirms that firm size moderates the relationship between strategic control and performance of agricultural cooperative societies. Larger agricultural cooperative societies are better positioned to leverage these controls effectively, confirming firm size as a key contextual factor in cooperative governance.

Table 6: Model Summary for Combined Moderation

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	R^2 Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig.
1	0.888	0.789	0.788	0.501	0.789	697.6	4	255	.000
2	0.918	0.843	0.840	0.452	0.054	23.5	4	251	.000

The ANOVA results for the combined moderation test offer insight into how well the regression models explain variance in cooperative performance. In Model 1, the regression sum of squares (176.0) is substantially larger than the residual sum of squares (47.1); strategic controls account for most of the variability in agricultural cooperative societies' performance. The mean square regression value of 44.0, compared to the residual mean square of 0.185, yields an F statistic of 697.6, which is highly significant at $p < .001$. This confirms that the model is statistically robust and that the predictors jointly contribute meaningfully to explaining performance outcomes. The results demonstrate that leadership practices alone provide a strong explanatory framework for cooperative success.

Table 7: ANOVA

Model	Regression SS	Residual SS	Total SS	df (Reg)	df (Res)	Mean Square (Reg)	Mean Square (Res)	F	Sig.
1	176.0	47.1	223.1	4	255	44.0	0.185	697.6	.000
2	188.2	34.9	223.1	8	251	23.5	0.139	461.2	.000

The results in Table 8 show that firm size significantly moderates the effect of strategic controls on cooperative performance. The positive coefficient (B = 0.457) and strong standardized beta (β = 0.533) indicate that as cooperatives grow larger, the impact of strategic controls becomes more pronounced. The very high t-value (9.93) and $p < .001$ confirm that this effect is statistically robust and unlikely to occur by chance.

This means larger cooperatives benefit more from structured control systems—such as premises control, special alert control, and implementation control—because their scale requires stronger accountability frameworks to manage complexity, reduce inefficiencies, and maintain alignment with strategic goals. Smaller cooperatives still gain from strategic controls, but the moderating effect of size amplifies their importance in larger organizations. Thus, firm size enhances the explanatory power of strategic controls, making them a critical governance tool for sustaining efficiency, transparency, and competitiveness in agricultural cooperatives.

Table 8: Regression Coefficient

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.050	0.046	—	9.93	.000
SC × M	0.457	0.053	0.533	9.93	.000

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that strategic controls play a central role in shaping the performance of agricultural cooperative societies in Kenya. By embedding mechanisms such as premises monitoring, special alert systems, and oversight of implementation, cooperatives strengthen accountability, improve efficiency, and enhance adaptability. These controls are not merely administrative routines but leadership practices that bridge planning and execution, ensuring that strategies are properly monitored and adjusted. Their influence underscores the importance of structured governance frameworks in sustaining growth, maintaining competitiveness, and fostering long-term resilience within the cooperative sector.

Additionally, the findings confirm that firm size moderates the relationship between strategic controls and the performance of agricultural cooperative societies. Larger cooperatives derive greater benefits from these controls because their scale demands stronger accountability frameworks to manage complexity and reduce inefficiencies. While smaller cooperatives still gain from strategic controls, the moderating effect of size amplifies their impact in larger organizations. This highlights firm size as a key contextual factor, enhancing the explanatory strength of strategic controls and positioning them as critical governance tools for efficiency, transparency, and sustainable success in Kenya's agricultural cooperative societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic controls emerged as a strong predictor of cooperative success, highlighting the need for cooperatives to adopt adaptive monitoring and evaluation systems. Managers should establish clear performance benchmarks, feedback mechanisms, and accountability structures that align with organizational goals. These controls will enable leaders to track progress, identify deviations, and implement corrective measures promptly. Embedding strategic controls into daily operations ensures transparency, strengthens governance, and enhances decision-making effectiveness. This practice improves efficiency and builds trust among members, regulators, and stakeholders. Ultimately, strategic controls provide the discipline and structure necessary for sustained cooperative performance and growth, though their relative strength varies with firm size.

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