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**CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND DAIRY FARMERS' MEMBERSHIP IN
COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES: A CASE OF GITHUNGURI DAIRY FARMERS
COOPERATIVE SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT

Globally, cooperative societies are recognized as pivotal in enhancing economic empowerment among smallholder farmers by facilitating resource pooling, knowledge sharing, and market access. In Kenya, dairy cooperatives play a critical role in connecting farmers to formal markets, offering fair pricing, and enabling access to credit and training. Despite these benefits, governance challenges such as weak leadership, limited member oversight, and poor communication often undermine member participation and trust. This study examined the relationship between corporate governance and dairy farmers' membership, focusing on Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society in Kiambu County. Employing a descriptive research design, the study targeted 1,515 management and staff members, with a stratified random sample of 316 participants. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, validated through expert review and pilot testing, and analyzed with SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between corporate governance and membership ($r = 0.612, p < 0.01$), with governance practices explaining 37.5% of membership variance. The study concludes that robust governance structures enhance trust, satisfaction, and sustained membership, and recommends policy, managerial, and technological interventions to strengthen cooperative governance and member engagement

Keywords: *Corporate Governance, Dairy Farmers, Membership, Cooperative Societies, Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, cooperative societies have long been recognized as effective institutions for promoting economic empowerment among smallholder farmers. By pooling resources, sharing knowledge, and creating economies of scale, cooperatives enable farmers to overcome challenges such as limited market access, financial exclusion, and inadequate access to inputs (International Cooperative Alliance [ICA], 2022). Among these, dairy cooperatives play a particularly important role in linking small-scale producers to formal markets, ensuring fair pricing, and facilitating access to training and credit. Successful

cooperative movements in countries such as New Zealand and the Netherlands demonstrate that sound governance systems grounded in transparency, accountability, and democratic participation are essential for sustaining member trust and long-term participation (Smith et al., 2021). Effective corporate governance within cooperatives ensures that leadership decisions align with members' interests and that organizational resources are managed responsibly to generate equitable benefits.

At the regional level, several African countries have incorporated cooperative development into their agricultural modernization strategies. In South Africa and Uganda, governance structures have been shown to directly influence cooperative performance, membership stability, and farmers' confidence in leadership (Mukasa et al., 2022; Nkosi & Dlamini, 2023). However, weak governance practices such as mismanagement of funds, inadequate representation, and lack of accountability have often led to reduced member participation. For instance, cooperatives that fail to conduct regular audits or exclude members from decision-making processes tend to lose credibility and experience declining membership (Cohen & Shani, 2023). This suggests that even when cooperatives offer tangible economic benefits, membership may not be sustained without transparent and participatory leadership practices.

In Kenya, cooperatives remain key contributors to rural development and agricultural growth. Dairy cooperatives, in particular, form an essential part of the dairy value chain, handling a large proportion of milk produced by smallholder farmers (Ngugi et al., 2022). However, governance remains a major challenge. Weak leadership structures, limited member oversight, and poor communication between boards and members have eroded trust and reduced participation in many cooperatives. Studies by Owuor and Shem (2022) and Kibui (2020) show that members are more likely to remain active in cooperatives where decision-making is inclusive, financial reports are transparent, and leaders are accountable to their members. This indicates that corporate governance directly affects farmers' confidence, loyalty, and willingness to remain active participants. Therefore, analyzing governance dynamics offers valuable insights into the sustainability and success of dairy cooperatives in Kenya.

Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society in Kiambu County presents a relevant context for examining how governance influences cooperative membership. Established in 1961, Githunguri has grown into one of Kenya's leading dairy cooperatives with more than 17,000 registered farmers and a strong processing brand, Fresha (Muthoni, 2024). The cooperative's success has been attributed to professional management, democratic leadership, and consistent communication with members. Nevertheless, it continues to face governance-related challenges such as limited member participation in strategic decisions and difficulties in maintaining transparency during expansion. Despite these constraints, Githunguri remains an example of a cooperative where effective governance has supported membership growth, financial stability, and improved farmer welfare.

There is, however, a need to empirically determine how governance practices such as accountability, transparency, and representation influence membership behavior.

The persistence of governance challenges across Kenyan cooperatives suggests a systemic issue that deserves deeper investigation. While government policies and regulatory frameworks exist to guide cooperative operations, their implementation and impact on governance vary considerably. Furthermore, Githunguri operates in a dynamic environment characterized by fluctuating milk prices, growing membership, and evolving market conditions, which makes governance an important determinant of member engagement and satisfaction. The current study therefore examined the relationship between corporate governance and dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies, focusing on Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society.

The objective of the study was to assess how corporate governance influences dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies, emphasizing governance principles such as accountability, transparency, representation, and ethical leadership. Specifically, the study sought to determine the relationship between governance practices and member participation, retention, and loyalty. Guided by the principles of cooperative democracy and stakeholder theory, the study hypothesized that better governance practices are associated with increased participation and retention among dairy cooperative members.

This study holds practical and academic significance. For cooperative leaders, the findings will provide guidance on strengthening governance systems to enhance member trust and long-term participation. For policymakers, the results will highlight areas where institutional support can improve accountability and leadership effectiveness within the cooperative sector. For researchers, the study contributes to the limited body of empirical literature on governance and membership behavior in Kenya's dairy industry. By focusing on Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society, the research offers practical lessons on how sound governance can sustain cooperative participation and promote rural economic growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Agency Theory

Agency Theory, developed by Ross (1973) and later advanced by Mitnick (1975), examines the relationship between principals, who delegate authority, and agents, who are expected to act on their behalf. The theory assumes that agents may pursue self-interest at the expense of principals, especially when information asymmetry and weak monitoring exist. In the context of agricultural cooperatives such as Githunguri Dairy, farmers act as principals while cooperative managers serve as agents, entrusted with decisions regarding pricing, profit distribution, and overall management. The theory emphasizes transparent governance structures that align the interests of agents with those of principals. In Githunguri Dairy, for example, poor governance practices such as

lack of accountability or limited transparency can breed mistrust, causing farmers to withdraw their membership. Conversely, governance mechanisms like member elections, regular audits, and participatory meetings help minimize opportunistic behavior and strengthen accountability (Mitnick, 1975). When farmers believe that management acts in their best interest, they are more likely to remain loyal members.

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), introduced by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), explains how organizations depend on external resources and must develop strategies to manage these dependencies. The theory posits that organizational survival depends on acquiring and maintaining critical resources such as capital, markets, and inputs, often controlled by external entities. For dairy cooperatives like Githunguri, these include access to credit, reliable milk markets, and affordable animal feed. RDT underscores the role of governance in managing resource dependencies. Strong leadership and effective board oversight help cooperatives negotiate better prices and partnerships with processors and suppliers. Njiru (2018) found that transparent and participatory governance strengthens bargaining power, enabling cooperatives to secure vital resources and enhance member welfare. Weak governance, on the other hand, can result in poor negotiation outcomes and declining member confidence.

Empirical Literature Review

Kibue and Mang'ana (2022) examined corporate governance practices and their influence on the performance of deposit-taking SACCOs in Kenya's Central Region. The study adopted a descriptive design and analyzed data from 54 respondents through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Regression analysis indicated that board size ($\beta = 0.311, p < 0.05$), board independence ($\beta = 0.327, p < 0.05$), and balanced board composition ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of performance. Transparent information disclosure also enhanced member trust and financial outcomes. The study recommended adoption of governance frameworks that promote transparency, accountability, and effective leadership. These findings provide a basis for examining governance as a determinant of cooperative membership.

In Uganda, Bosco and Moses (2023) conducted a cross-sectional survey on corporate governance and SACCO performance in Rubanda District. Using a sample of 109 respondents, they found a significant positive relationship between governance and SACCO performance ($\beta = 0.532, p < 0.01$). The study emphasized adherence to regulatory standards and effective leadership as critical for sustainability. Building on these findings, the current study investigates the same relationship within Kenya's cooperative context, focusing on member participation and retention.

Wafula and Miroga (2024) explored the relationship between corporate governance and financial performance among SACCOs in Trans Nzoia County. Using both descriptive and inferential statistics, they found that board independence ($r = 0.426, p < 0.05$) and financial disclosure ($r = 0.412, p < 0.05$) significantly influence performance. They

recommended enhancing board accountability, audit independence, and transparent reporting. This aligns with the present study's interest in assessing how governance quality shapes cooperative membership stability.

Similarly, Maingi and Kobuthi (2024) found that board independence ($\beta = 0.312, p < 0.05$), accountability ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.05$), and active audit committees ($\beta = 0.275, p < 0.05$) significantly contribute to SACCO performance in Nairobi County. The study advocated for independent boards, regular reporting, and enhanced oversight. These findings reinforce the role of governance in ensuring institutional trust and participation.

Finally, Musau (2020) examined board characteristics and their impact on SACCO performance in Nairobi County. Using panel data from 41 SACCOs, the study established that board size ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.05$) and board committees ($\beta = 0.276, p < 0.05$) positively affect financial performance, while board diversity and attendance were not significant. The study recommended strengthening board structures and active committees to enhance governance outcomes. The current study extends this discussion by exploring whether similar governance dimensions influence member participation and retention in Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society.

Summary of Research Gaps

Empirical studies reveal that corporate governance practices significantly influence cooperative performance and membership. Studies by Kibue and Mang'ana (2022) and Maingi and Kobuthi (2024) found that board accountability, transparency, and independent oversight enhance member confidence and institutional growth. Similarly, Bosco and Moses (2023) and Wafula and Miroga (2024) established that effective leadership and compliance with governance regulations promote trust and sustained participation among members. However, most of these studies concentrated on Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) rather than agricultural cooperatives, creating a contextual gap regarding governance within producer-based organizations such as Githunguri Dairy.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A set of principles derived from the subject under study to show the pictorial relationship between study variables constitutes a conceptual framework (Kombo & Tromp, 2009). The conceptual framework shows the relationship between corporate governance and cooperative membership.

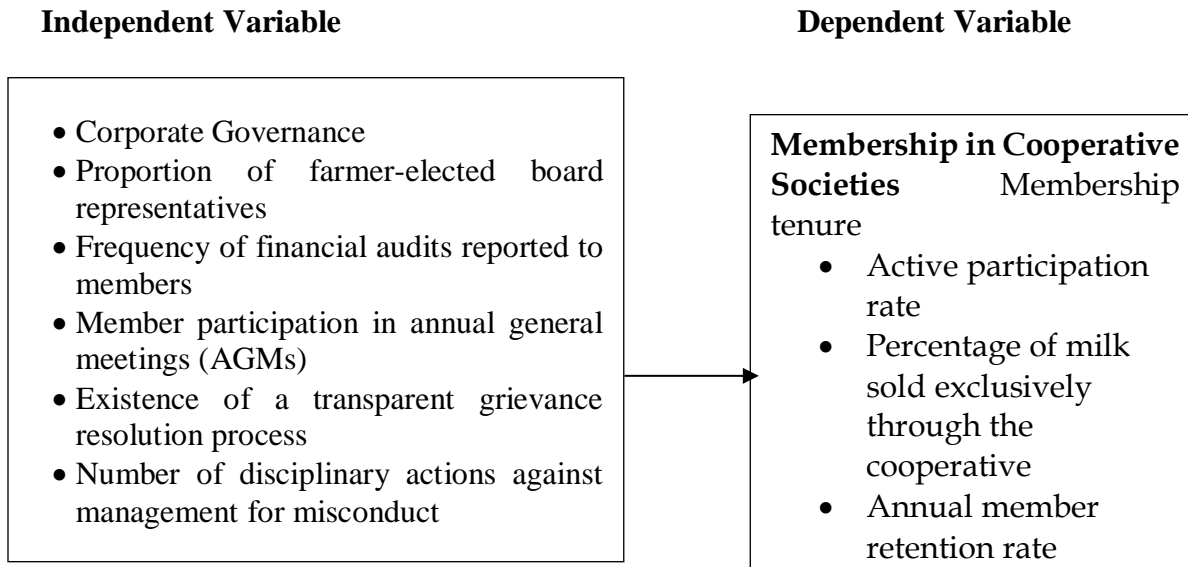


Figure 23 : Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between corporate governance and dairy farmers’ membership in cooperative societies, using Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society as a case study. The study adopted a descriptive research design, which is suitable for investigating current conditions and relationships between variables without manipulating them. Descriptive designs are commonly used in social and management sciences because they provide a clear understanding of “what,” “how,” and “why” relationships exist among observed phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). This approach enabled the researcher to capture views and attitudes of members and staff toward governance practices and their influence on membership trends.

The study was conducted at Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society in Kiambu County, one of Kenya’s most successful dairy cooperatives with over 17,000 registered members. The target population comprised 1,515 individuals drawn from the cooperative’s management and staff, as they are directly involved in decision-making, member coordination, and implementation of governance policies. The population was categorized into top management, middle management, and operational staff to ensure representation of perspectives across organizational levels. Stratified random sampling was used to select respondents proportionately from each category. The sample size of 316 participants was determined using Yamane’s formula for finite populations, assuming a 5 percent margin of error, ensuring a balance between accuracy and practicality.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting mainly of closed-ended questions. The instrument was designed to capture measurable perceptions related to corporate governance, regulatory framework, access to credit, income levels, and membership dynamics. Questionnaires were preferred due to their ability to gather standardized data efficiently and to promote anonymity, thereby encouraging honest responses (Kumar, 2010; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Management University of Africa (MUA) and a research license from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). With authorization from Githunguri Dairy's Human Resource Department, the questionnaires were distributed and collected using the drop-and-pick-later method over a two-week period.

To ensure validity and reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using 31 respondents drawn from Gatundu South Dairy Cooperative, which shares similar operational characteristics with Githunguri Dairy. Content validity was confirmed through expert review by cooperative specialists and the research supervisor, ensuring each item reflected the study objectives. Construct validity was achieved by refining questions for clarity, while criterion validity was confirmed through comparison of self-reported data with cooperative records such as membership lists and loan registers. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with values above 0.75 considered acceptable for internal consistency (Best & Kahn, 2006; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2020).

After data collection, the questionnaires were edited, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and standard deviations were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics were employed to establish relationships between variables. Specifically, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength and direction of association between corporate governance and membership, whereas multiple regression analysis was applied to test the predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The regression model adopted was expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

where Y represents membership in cooperative societies, X_1 is corporate governance, X_2 is regulatory framework, X_3 is access to credit, X_4 is income levels, β_0 is the constant, β_1 - β_4 are the regression coefficients, and ε is the error term. The results were presented using tables for clarity and ease of interpretation.

The analysis provided a statistical basis for hypothesis testing, where the null hypothesis stated that corporate governance has no significant influence on dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies. Significance levels were evaluated at $p < 0.05$. Findings were used to determine the strength of the relationship between governance and membership, as well as to provide recommendations for enhancing cooperative management and member engagement in Kenya's dairy sector.

FINDINGS.

Descriptive Statistics on Corporate Governance

This section examines how corporate governance influences dairy farmers' Membership in Cooperative Societies. Table 1 presents the respondents' level of agreement with statements related to corporate governance and its impact on cooperative membership. The responses were measured on a scale where 1 indicates strongly disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 denotes neutral, 4 signifies agree, and 5 reflects strongly agree.

Table 67: Descriptive Statistics on Corporate Governance

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
More than 50% of the cooperative's board members are elected directly by registered farmers	270	1	5	4.21	0.81
Audit reports are distributed or made accessible to members on a scheduled and recurring basis (e.g., quarterly or annually).	270	1	5	4.05	0.94
Member mobilization records confirm that cooperative representatives routinely encourage member attendance.	270	1	5	3.97	0.89
The cooperative has a documented and publicly accessible procedure for handling member complaints.	270	1	5	4.1	0.87
Member complaints are formally resolved within an average timeframe of 30 days from the date of submission.	270	1	5	3.89	0.95
Disciplinary measures are applied when cooperative leaders are found to have committed misconduct.	270	1	5	3.76	0.9

The descriptive results presented in Table 1 show that respondents strongly agreed that more than half of cooperative board members are elected directly by registered farmers ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.81$). This finding underscores the value of democratic representation in cooperative governance, where active member participation strengthens accountability and trust. According to Bosco and Moses (2023), farmer-elected boards in Uganda significantly improved SACCO performance by promoting inclusivity and responsiveness to member needs. Similarly, Kibue and Mang'ana (2022) found that democratic governance structures in Kenya fostered confidence in cooperative leadership, enhancing membership retention. Audit transparency also scored highly ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.94$), suggesting that regular audit report dissemination promotes accountability and trust. Macharia and Njogu (2022) emphasized that transparent financial reporting reinforces governance credibility, attracting member participation. Wafula and Miroga (2024) further reported that regular audit disclosures in Nairobi

SACCOs curtailed mismanagement and improved performance, demonstrating that transparency is a cornerstone of sustainable cooperatives.

The study also established that member mobilization, measured through representatives' encouragement of attendance, had a mean of 3.97 (SD = 0.89), implying that while participation is frequent, improvement is possible. Rao and Singh (2023) found that continuous mobilization in Indian dairy cooperatives fostered collective responsibility and loyalty among farmers. Similarly, Desai, Sharma, and Gupta (2022) attributed Amul's success to robust member engagement and mobilization strategies. Another vital indicator was the existence of publicly accessible procedures for resolving member complaints (M = 4.10, SD = 0.87), which enhances fairness and cohesion. Mukasa, Njuguna, and Kalama (2022) noted that grievance-handling frameworks in East African cooperatives minimized disputes and strengthened unity. Likewise, Cohen and Shani (2023) observed that effective complaints-handling in Israel's kibbutz system enhanced farmers' loyalty. The findings also showed that timely resolution of complaints within 30 days (M = 3.89, SD = 0.95) and enforcement of disciplinary actions (M = 3.76, SD = 0.90) were moderately practiced. Maingi and Kobuthi (2024) found that accountability mechanisms and sanctions for misconduct improved SACCO governance in Nairobi, while Musau (2020) warned that weak enforcement practices undermine member trust and cooperative integrity.

Inferential Analysis

The analysis focused on testing the hypothesis that:

H₀: Corporate governance has no significant effect on dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies.

H₁: Corporate governance has a significant effect on dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies.

Correlation Analysis

The relationship between corporate governance and dairy farmers' membership was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Dairy Farmers' Membership	Corporate Governance
Dairy Farmers' Membership	1	
Corporate Governance	0.612**	1

Note: **p < 0.01 (2-tailed)**

The correlation results show a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between corporate governance and dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies

($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that improvements in governance – such as democratic board elections, transparent reporting, and member accountability – correspond with higher membership retention and participation. The results align with Bosco and Moses (2023), Kibue and Mang’ana (2022), and Wafula and Miroga (2024), who emphasized that cooperative transparency and fair governance promote sustained membership.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.612	0.375	0.373	0.624

The model summary indicates that corporate governance explains 37.5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.375$) in dairy farmers’ membership. The adjusted R^2 value (0.373) confirms model stability, suggesting that governance explains a substantial portion of membership differences. These findings agree with Owuor and Shem (2022) who found that effective governance structures enhanced member trust and loyalty in Kenyan cooperatives. Likewise, Mukasa et al. (2022) reported that accountability mechanisms in Ugandan SACCOs explained about one third of membership variation, which supports the present results. In addition, Macharia and Njogu (2022) observed that transparent financial reporting and democratic representation improved member retention in Nairobi dairy cooperatives. The implication is that governance quality is a major determinant of cooperative participation, as strong systems promote confidence, fairness, and continued engagement among dairy farmers (Bosco & Moses, 2023).

Table 4: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	79.691	1	79.691	204.45	0.000**
Residual	132.832	268	0.495		
Total	212.523	269			

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)**

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 204.45$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that corporate governance significantly influences dairy farmers’ membership in cooperative societies. This significance implies that variations in membership can be explained by differences in governance practices, such as accountability, transparency, and participation. These results are consistent with the findings of Maingi and Kobuthi (2024), who established that strong governance frameworks positively affected cooperative participation in Nairobi. Similarly, Wafula and Miroga (2024) found that transparent audit reporting and responsive leadership significantly enhanced member commitment in Kenyan SACCOs. In Uganda, Bosco and Moses (2023) also observed that effective governance mechanisms reduced leadership conflicts and promoted long-term member retention. Therefore, the ANOVA findings

reinforce the conclusion that good governance remains a central factor in sustaining and growing cooperative membership among dairy farmers.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.857	0.219	—	8.482	0.000
Corporate Governance (X ₁)	0.612	0.043	0.612	14.297	0.000**

The regression results show that corporate governance has a positive and statistically significant influence on dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies ($\beta = 0.612$, $t = 14.297$, $p < 0.01$). The fitted regression model is

$$Y = 1.857 + 0.612X_1 + \varepsilon$$

This confirms that governance structures such as transparency, accountability, and democratic management drive cooperative participation.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING AND INTERPRETATION

Based on the regression and correlation findings, the null hypothesis (H_0) stating that corporate governance has no significant effect on dairy farmers' membership in cooperative societies is rejected. The study concludes that corporate governance has a significant positive effect on cooperative membership, implying that stronger governance structures enhance farmers' engagement and retention.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that strong governance structures are essential for the stability and sustainability of dairy cooperatives. Democratic participation, transparency, and accountability foster trust and satisfaction among members, ensuring continuity and resilience. When farmers are allowed to elect leaders, access financial reports, and have fair grievance resolution systems, cooperatives become more inclusive and responsive. This strengthens member retention and overall institutional performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings support stakeholder theory by showing that participatory governance enhances trust among members, which is crucial for cooperative success. Future theoretical models should include governance factors as central elements of cooperative performance. The study recommends that cooperative managers should put in place transparent governance systems that include regular elections, publication of audit results, and efficient grievance resolution mechanisms. Leadership training programs should also focus on accountability and responsiveness. Government agencies and the Cooperative Alliance of Kenya should strengthen governance regulations by ensuring periodic external audits and monitoring compliance with democratic and ethical

standards. These measures would enhance governance quality and promote growth that is driven by members' needs.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future studies should explore how digital governance tools such as online voting systems, digital audits, and mobile communication platforms affect transparency and member participation in cooperatives. Another area for further investigation is the role of social networks and peer interactions in influencing farmers' decisions to join or stay in cooperatives. This would provide valuable insights into the social factors that complement governance in promoting cooperative membership

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