

# **Sustainable agriculture and value added creation through the development of Geographical Indications (GI)**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

A geographical indication (GI) is a name or sign used on certain products which corresponds to a specific geographical location or origin (e.g. a town, region, or country). The use of a GI may act as a certification that the product possesses certain qualities, is made according to traditional methods, or enjoys a certain reputation, due to its geographical origin. Champagne from France, Thung Kula Rong-Hai Hom Mali rice or Lamphun Brocade silk from Thailand, Kampot Pepper from Cambodia, Darjeeling Tea from India, Van Yen Cinnamon from Vietnam, or Kobe Beef from Japan are few examples of protected GIs.

The GI legal protection aims to protect both producers against unfair competition and misappropriation on one hand, and consumers against misleading on the other hand.

The strong and often complex links between the local environment and human know-how from which GI results, provide a quality guarantee for consumers seeking high quality, traceable and traditional products. GIs are also important for local producers, helping them to make the switch from quantitative to qualitative strategies and increase opportunities in existing and new markets.

GIs encourage diverse agricultural, food and handicraft production, and, being anchored to the particular region from which they come from, contribute to the socio-economic dynamics in this region, enable producers and manufacturers to dedicate themselves to the commercialisation of traditional products in response to the demand of more quality-conscious consumers as well as support for the promotion of the region of origin development.

Therefore, GIs also contribute to the conservation of natural resources and the preservation of native traditions and cultural heritage often reaching back to distant ancestors, representing an important instrument for local wisdom preservation and tourism development which should be considered in relevant public policies.

In view of the above, the interest for Geographical Indications (GIs) has grown worldwide and particularly in Asia at large, with over 150 GI already registered in ASEAN countries and over 500 in Asia, making this region one of the most dynamic world-wide.

As part of its Food & Quality initiative, FAO has long emphasized the importance of origin-linked products and supports the development of procedures that focus on qualities that contribute to rural development.

FAO considers geographically differentiated products a vital niche market and a good way of ensuring food security and sustainable agricultural development. Indeed, marketing such value-added products contributes to food security by generating increased income for producers and providing money for food, education, healthcare and other basic needs.

However, certain challenges have undermined an ever faster development of GI in Brand Agriculture Development in some countries such as difficulties faced for a producer associations to be created and to find, at an affordable way, the necessary support to set up its control systems and develop efficient promotion tools.

By nature, a GI is collectively owned and managed. Both the structure and efficiency of a "GI management group" (which is often organized as an association or an interprofessional organization) and its value-chain are a key element for the GI existence and success starting from the drafting of the GI specifications/Book of requirements as it allows a transparent dialogue and agreement on the key elements to be inserted in the GI specifications. GI Management group/organizations also have key roles to play during the life of the GI such as through the organization of traceability and control procedures for the GI stakeholders and also considering collective training and marketing strategy for the GI development. Promotion strategies (i.e. development of national GI label, promotion campaigns), communication tools and distribution partnerships are also key steps to connect GI products with local, regional and international markets.

Understanding these challenges, FAO has partner with France, through the French Agency of Development (AFD) in launching in 2013 the regional “Project on the Promotion of Rural Development through Development of Geographical Indications at Regional Level in Asia” with as overall objective “to increase incomes of smallholder farmers through the development of GI value chains, improved market access and increased recognition of GI by consumers”. Since 2013 this project with primary focus on Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, has increased the momentum of GI development in the region reinforcing emergent GI national systems but also building on regional GI’s experiences through the facilitation of exchange of information, network creation regarding GI protection and promotion both on private and public levels. The outputs delivered allow now to share success stories on GI development and promotion both at public and private levels and to further disseminate GI awareness. They also emphasize important issues to be considered for sustainable agriculture, such as a more inclusive approach to be considered through the strengthening of interprofessionnal organisation and value-chains and innovative marketing approach for agricultural and food products including through public-private cooperation which could materialised through a GI approach with great successes.