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Fostering Indian foodstuffs GIs for sustainable development

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Abstract –In a country like India which is unique for its culinary diversity, food has several functions beyond nutritional value. It represents core cultural, region-climatic, beliefs and has taken centre stage in the tradition in various communities. As such unique foodstuffs have given places their identity and vice-versa. In order to protect the vast bio-resources as well as traditional and cultural aspects, Geographical Indications (GI) protection is the most effective form of protection to protect both the product and the interests of the communities. Since the implementation of the GI Act 1999, only seventeen foodstuffs had acquired GI registration in India. The registration of the products as GI is a first step of the protection process, but post registration fostering GIs is equally important to conserve and preserve the GIs. GI is an important tool for the developing countries, the origin – linked products are intensely associated with the specific local resources as well as the community. GI protection not only adds values to the production system, rather also creates a synergic relationship between the economic and social pillars of sustainable development. In view of the policy and law context, the present study aims to provide an analysis of the foodstuffs GI in India, their socio-economic impacts and suggestive framework to foster the products and develop the community. Further, the relevance of foodstuff GIs in the overall sustainable development with respect to economic, social, environmental, cultural and other impacts in India are discussed by case studies of selected foodstuff GIs. The producers of selected foodstuff GIs were interviewed and analysed to understand the impact of the GI registration on the food products. Then we explore the potential impacts of GI registration on the sustainable development through the data collected through observing and interviewing the producers and the communities attached with the production practices and livelihood dependence on food GIs. Registered foodstuff GIs have been considered for the purpose of the study. The analysis revealed interesting insights into the registration, post registration challenges associated with these GI and certain key aspects that need to be considered from a policy perspective to foster the GI. The authors in this study finally summarises the sustainability impact and proposes some measures to promote the sustainable development of foodstuffs GI in India.

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of food diversity which has religio-cultural basis. Food has not only gastronomic values, but also signifies traditions and community identity. Foods share a unique symbiotic relationship with its people and place of origin. The qualities and the

characteristic features of a geographical place of origin are inherent to the foodstuffs. Local agro-ecological and cultural characteristics of the products are valued and protected in many countries throughout the world in the form of the Geographical Indications (GIs) also. Under TRIPS obligation India enacted the Geographical Indications (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, where foodstuffs expressly come under the definition of goods under section 2(f) of the Act. A total of only 17 Indian foodstuffs have been registered as GI in India. The UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) cover all three dimensions of sustainable development i.e. social, economic and ecological.

International studies (by FAO, UNCTAD) indicate that GI protection can be implemented as a tool for sustainable food systems and rural development. GI protection is expected to improve the market value of the product through premium pricing, enhance competitiveness and improve economic development (Jena & Grote, 2010). The economic impact, 'quality' factor of GI and marketability has been studied (Rangnekar, 2004; Jena & Grote, 2010; Calboli & Gervais, 2016; Vandecastelaere et.al, 2018). There are no studies Indian foodstuff GIs and their relation with sustainable development. Fostering GIs is very essential for their sustainable development. The objective of this study is to analyse the registration, post registration impact and to suggest the measures for achieving the SDGs for foodstuff GIs.

METHODOLOGY:

Four Indian foodstuff GIs Banglar Rasogolla (GI 533), Hyderabad Haleem (GI 193), Dharwad Pedha (GI 80) and Ratlam Sev (GI 434) are selected for the study. Processed foodstuff GIs, availability of authorised users registration and unique characteristics features are the aspects considered for the study. Prosecution details of foodstuff GIs were accessed from the GI registry website. Field visits related to the four foodstuff GI were undertaken in a span of 18 months (including pandemic time) through interviews with different stakeholders (producers/ authorized users, facilitators). SDG 3 (Good Health and Well- being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) factors were utilised to develop a Likert scale approach to analyse the impact for 4 GIs.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Food GIs registration in India started in 2007. Dharwad Pedha was the first foodstuff to be recognized as a GI. The analysis of the four foodstuff GI revealed certain interesting aspects. The unique attributes of these GIs are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Unique attributes of selected food GIs in India

Food stuffs	Origin	Characteristics					
		Religious importance	Human skill	TK	Climatic factors	Cultural factors	Natural resource
GI 434	Ratlam						
GI 533	West Bengal except Darjeeling						
GI 80	Dharwad						
GI 193	Hyderabad						

Source: Compiled by the author from registered GI documentation and from personal interviews

With regard to marketability, Hyderabad Haleem, Dharwad Pedha, and Banglar Roshogolla has demand both in the domestic and international markets. Authorised users registration has been done for two GIs i.e. Hyderabad Haleem and Banglar Rasogolla. While Dharwad Pedha has only one authorised user which is the family itself, Ratlami Sev Part B registration is ongoing. Inspection Body representatives vary among all these GIs and Hyderabad Haleem is the first foodstuff GIs for which standards have been developed. The major problem with these foodstuffs is perishability, lack of technical support as well as other aspects which limit their export value (Banglar Rasogolla and Dharwad pedha have a shelf life of not more than 72 hours and 20 days respectively).

Preliminary study of sustainability aspects of these GIs included 1) Decent work and economic growth 2) Education and awareness 3) Good health and Well being of the community 4) Sustainable communities. The Likert scale analysis of the same is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Impact of GI registration on the selected GIs.

Impact of GI registration on SDGs	Registered GI			
	GI 434	GI 533	GI 80	GI 193
Decent work and economic growth	4	3	5	3
Education and awareness	3	2	4	2
Good health and Well being of the community	3	4	4	4
Sustainable communities.	3	3	3	2

Source: compiled by the author from the interviews

Likert scale: 1: Strongly Effective, 2: Effective, 3: Neither effective nor ineffective, 4: No effect, 5: Strongly having no effect

The analysis reveals that if GIs have to sustain, sustenance of the communities is imperative. While there is a natural resilience in these communities, their socio-economic development is severely affected due to distress migration of the producers from rural to urban cities, lack of incentives for practice of GI by the younger community members,

bio-resource and raw material depletion. Producers of GI opined that GI registration needs to provide significant benefit with respect to the market potential, or wellbeing of the community.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Enhancing Part B registration is vital for quality maintenance and sustenance of foodstuff GI in the communities. Further, strengthening local governance mechanism by introducing quality control measures and incentivising continuity of GI needs to be considered. This would help in addressing the issues of dwindling community population, migration, lack of successors and loss of regio-cultural aspects. Establishing the linkages between the GI Act and the Biological Diversity Act 2002 is necessary for the conservation of GIs due to the absence of such mechanism under the GI Act. Protection is necessary but fostering of GIs is equally necessary for the conservation of GIs. The interview analysis reveals that the GI protection and community development are complimentary to each other.

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