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GI AS STRATEGIC INSTRUMENT TOWARDS RESILIENCE

Dirk Troskie¹

Abstract – *The Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) is of the opinion that farming, as we know it, will fundamentally be disrupted within the foreseeable future (30 years). For this reason three reports (one general and the other two focussing on specific areas) were commissioned to investigate the drivers of disruption, develop a range of future scenarios and to identify plausible interventions to reach private and public objectives. Although none of the research teams came from Geographical Indication (GI) background, all reached the same conclusion: the principles underpinning a GI, and therefore the geographical and historical context, should be used as a marketing and product differentiation mechanism to be sustainable in this new environment.*

Keywords – Rural development, Re-imagining farming, futures thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Very few will dispute that the Covid-19 Pandemic was one of the most disruptive events in the memory of most people. Other would argue that, in addition to its own disruptive characteristics, the Pandemic was also the catalyst accelerating and amplifying the emergence and impact of a range of other disruptors. These include events such as Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, Food Insecurity, Fourth Industrial Revolution (4th IR) as well as global demographic and economic changes.

In this paper the process followed towards analysing the forces shaping the long term disruptors will be described following by main findings and conclusions. In the final part a brief discussion on the way forward will be provided.

PROCESS

In order to identify the vestiges of a long-term (up to 2050) post Covid-19 Strategy for the Agricultural and Agri Processing Sector of the Province, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) engaged on three futures projects. The first was a generalised approach encompassing the whole (Hichert, 2020), whilst the second focussed specifically on the arid areas of the Province (Farrell, 2021). The third project focussed on a high-rainfall and agricultural homogenous coastal area well known as a semigration destination attracting knowledge workers and retirees (Louw, 2022).

The reason for a separate project focussing on arid areas is that the particular circumstances of sparsely inhabited marginal arid areas often disappear at the prospects of the higher populated and more prosperous farming regions. In the case of the third report the economy of the Greater Keurbooms region is one of only two rural areas in the Province where tourism and services, rather than farming, are the dominant economic activities. Furthermore, a process of 're-wilding' through which a conservancy is foreseen where farming and conservation areas are interlinked through a system of corridors.

Although these projects were conducted by three different research teams, the teams used similar approaches. These included an analysis to identify the driving forces which will shape the future of farming, the interactive development of future scenarios, the use of the three horizons framework (in the case of Farrel, 2021 and Hichert, 2020) and the development of a causality argument(s) to underpin positive interventions. The three horizons framework is a conceptual model to assist individual's thinking about current assumptions, emerging changes as well as possible and desired futures. More important, it allows for the identification of the current seeds of the future which should be stimulated as part of causal relationships.

FINDING AND CONCLUSION

The main findings from these three reports were complementary and, although none of the research teams was familiar with the principles of Geographical Indications (GI), some relevant recommendations emerged spontaneously. These include:

- a) Collectively harness local identities by drawing out the attributes of the geographical areas which are most compelling to the different target markets. These elements should include geological, cultural, ecological significance and sense of space. Specific reference was made to strengthening the development of the 'Karoo Lamb' GI.
- b) Anticipatory and enabling governance leading to ethical, sustainable and resilient farming practices. This is not only relevant for institutions, but also in terms of assurance and regulatory systems. Specific reference to the use of 4th IR technologies, including blockchains, were made.
- c) Engage on the continental (Africa) level as part of the strategy to harmonise the regulatory environment and for market placement of export focussed products. In the case of GI, the chal-

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allenges associated with cross border GI, institutional arrangements regarding mutual recognition and labelling should receive priority.

THE WAY FORWARD

In response to these recommendations, the WCDoA is currently in the process of supporting a range of local groups to develop and register their own GI. These include 'Karoo Granate', 'Matzikamma Rosyne', 'Buchu Tea' and 'Aloe Ferox'. On 31 May 2021 'Rooibos' / 'Red Bush' received the honour to be the first product from Africa awarded the coveted status of 'PDO' in the European Union's (EU) Register of Geographical Indications (GI). This was the culmination of a long and complicated process driven by multiple role players.

In addition to focussing on harnessing various GI, these reports will also be fed into the 'Joint District and Metro Approach' (JDMA). South Africa's Constitution makes provision for three spheres of government (National, Provincial and Local) and coordination between these remains a major challenge. For this reason the JDMA process envisages greater coordination and the WCDoA commissioned these reports to provide strategic direction in the rural areas of the Province.

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