

FAO-oriGIn series of webinars on Contributing to SDGs through quality linked to geographical origin

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Introduction

Quality products that are deeply rooted in a given geographical area play a key role in the economy. Natural features – as well as tradition and culture, typical of certain geographical environments – have the potential to confer products unique characteristics and reputation, which are valued on the market. Preserving such resources, traditions and qualities through Geographical Indications (GIs)¹ create value for millions of producers, processors and distributors around the world.

With a growing world population (projected - according to the United Nations - to reach 9.8 billion by 2050²), and its implications in terms of quantity and quality of available food, use of water and impact on the overall environment, the food and agricultural sector including forestry and fisheries, (and quality products linked to their origin within it) faces today the challenges associated with sustainability.

Sustainability – which aims at ensuring present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own³ - has three dimensions: : an economic one, an environmental one and a social one. Agricultural and food value chains need to rethink their business models to be able to continue to generate value, and to provide for the needs of a growing world population, pursuing at the same time social and environmental objectives.

In this debate, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs⁴), which address the major global challenges faced by the international community, are the point of reference for any strategy towards a more sustainable future. **Several SDGs, such as the ones related to poverty, hunger, health, gender equality, decent work, climate and environmental degradation, concern agriculture. In this respect, quality products linked to their origin are also called to contribute to the achievement of SDGs.**

¹ GIs designate products from a certain location, with specific quality or reputation attributable to their geographical origin. GIs recognition can be obtained through sui generis systems, trademarks or other legal tools.

² United Nations Report, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017, available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/world-population-prospects-2017.html>

³ United Nation, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report), 1987. Sustainable development is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

⁴ The complete list of SDGs web is available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>



The need to pursue sustainability objectives cannot be explained exclusively in terms of “moral” pressure on economic actors. Commercial considerations as well play today an important role in the debate. The generational shift represented by “millennials” have tremendously influenced consumers’ behaviour, bringing the attention of big companies and retailers on origin-linked products, whose quality and authenticity can be trusted.

Long before the civil society started to question companies and brands concerning their impact on the environment and the social welfare of their employees and communities, origin-linked products were sensitive to issues as gender equality, decent work, climate and environmental degradation. First of all, with respect to environmental issues, such products cannot switch production elsewhere, as “delocalisation” is not compatible with the GI scheme itself. Resources and natural capital in a given geographical area must be preserved and sustained for GIs to continue to exist and thrive in the long term. This is why several quality products deeply rooted in a given geographical area, while adapting to consumer tastes, have been existing for centuries. Moreover, from a social and economic perspective, origin-linked products form an integral part of their communities. Their capacity to generate and fairly distribute value to all relevant stakeholders along the chain is a key factor contributing to their success. This is achieved through a “local value chain governance” which allows relevant stakeholders to be represented within structures such as “*consejos reguladores*”, “*associations interprofessionnelles*”, “*consorzi*”, etc. In this respect, local stakeholders are uniquely placed to develop alliances in their territories and create an enabling environment for economic actors, regulators and local authorities to collaborate.

From a more general perspective, moreover, independent controls are key to implement any rigorous sustainability policy. In this respect, origin-linked products (especially if recognized as GIs) fit the new mind-set that sustainability requires. Economic actors in these value chains – farmers, producers, processors and distributors – are in fact normally used to independent audits. Such controls are required before products are commercialised, to make sure that the qualities made explicit in products’ specifications are delivered to consumers. Likewise, scaling up “sustainable behaviors” may prove to be difficult because it requires the involvement of individual companies. As GIs-recognised products are, in principle, the result of collective endeavors, they have the potential to reach scale. In other words, working through associations representing several actors within a given value-chain can facilitate wider impact, including in the field of sustainability.

For all these reasons, quality products deeply rooted in a given geographical area, which have obtained GI recognition or are working towards it, are in a strategic position to respond to sustainability challenges and can represent a model for other economic sectors embarking on similar processes. This does not mean that GIs value chains are sustainable by definition. However, the fact that GIs-recognised products require coordination in their territories to preserve and promote local resources is poised to generate sustainability pathways, contributing thereby to achieve SDGs.

Building on its experience and evidence from the field, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) acknowledges the capacity of GIs processes to contribute to

sustainable food systems for healthy diets⁵. To this purpose, the appropriate definition and formalization of the link to origin into specifications, developed in a participative way by local producers who also consider an appropriate market strategy, and the system supported by a sound legal and institutional framework are key success factors. In this regard, FAO has developed a number of methodologies and guidance tools. Still developing a global strategy to enhance producer's empowerment is deemed of paramount importance.

In this context, the FAO and oriGIn⁶ have been collaborating since 2016 and developed a Sustainability Strategy for GIs (SSGIs). It aims to encourage producers of quality products deeply rooted in a given geographical area to address sustainability challenges and engage with local stakeholders, with the objective to raise awareness on the issue and/or improve their sustainability performance⁷. A pilot project on "café de Marcala" (Honduras) demonstrated the importance of awareness-raising among local stakeholders. Developing knowledge, guidelines and tools adapted for each concerned sector resulted also as a key feature to highlight in the implementation of the SSGIs.

Objectives

With the above in mind, FAO and oriGIn will organize **a series of webinars to discuss how to maximize the sustainability impact of preserving and promoting origin-linked products**. The webinars will target public and private stakeholders (producers' representatives, traders, retailers, consumers, public authorities at local and national level, national policymakers, international organisations and experts). The key objectives are:

1. Raise awareness among associations and value chain players on sustainability challenges and provide tools to identify and address them;
2. Promote the exchange of best practices around initiatives undertaken by individual value chains and/or by economic sectors at the national/regional level to promote quality/origin-linked products and their sustainability, so to promote dialogue and convergence;
3. Discuss existing tools to evaluate the sustainability performance of agricultural value chains;
4. Identify technical assistance needs, in particular in developing countries, and raise funds for relevant projects or programmes to be implemented along with the Forum editions;
5. Develop tailored recommendations for public and private stakeholders, and in particular for the implementation of the SSGIs.

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/in-action/quality-and-origin-program/resources/publications/linking-people-places-products/en/>, more info at : www.fao.org/in-action/quality-and-origin-program/en/

⁶ www.origin-gi.com

⁷ Find more information on the FAO/oriGIn strategy on GIs & sustainability at <https://www.origin-gi.com/184-uk/activities/policy-and-advocacy/11286-sustainability.html>

Webinars

Topic 1: Indigenous peoples, local communities (IPLCs) and traditional knowledge

SDGs concerned: 1. No poverty; 5. Gender equality; 10. Reduce inequality; 15. Life on Land.

Chair: WIPO. Co-chair: FAO

Topic 2: Sustainable food systems for healthy diets

SDGs concerned: 3. Global Health and Well-being; 12. Responsible consumption and production.

Chair: FAO. Co-chair oriGIn-France

Topic 3: Conservation of resources and climate change

SDGs concerned: 6. Clean water and sanitation; 7. Affordable and clean energy; 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth; 12. Responsible consumption and production; 13. Climate Action; 15. Life on Land.

Chair: oriGIn. Co-chair: LIFE TTGG – The Tough Get Going

Topic 4: How differentiation strategies based on geographical origin can help developing countries pursue sustainability objectives

SDGs concerned: 1. No poverty; 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth; 10. Reduce inequality; 15. Life on Land.

Chair: IPI Switzerland. Co-chair: oriGIn

Topic 5: Trends in the beverage sector

SDGs concerned: 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth; 12. Responsible Consumption and Production; 13. Climate Action; 15. Life on Land.

Chair: oriGIn. Co-chair: Equalitas

Topic 6: Sustainable management of wild collected products

SDGs concerned: 1. No poverty; 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth; 10. Reduce inequality; 12. Responsible consumption and production; 15. Life on Land.

Chair: FAO. Co-chair: European Forest Institute/Incredible network

A final session will conclude the series, to wrap-up and present the different conclusions and roadmap defined during the thematic sessions.

Thematic partners⁸

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), oriGIn France, LIFE TTGG – The Tough Get Going, IPI Switzerland, Equalitas, European Forest Institute/Incredible Network.

⁸ Contribution in the organization of topics (structure, speakers and objectives). Logo appearing in the event material.