

Protecting geographic indications for promoting sustainable local development of rural areas

Geographic indication (GI), a form of collective intellectual property rights as opposed to a trademark that is a private right, identifies a product as originating in a locale with quality, reputation, or other characteristics attributable to its geographic origin due to unique soil, climate, production method, culture, etc. GIs are increasingly recognized as valuable branding and marketing tools in global markets. Regulation of GIs protects both producers and consumers alike from false claims and misleading labeling. It could also protect traditional knowledge, local culture, and traditions, and promote fair trade.

Developing Asian countries perceive GIs as an opportunity to expand exports of agrifood items to developed markets because their unique physical and cultural attributes and diverse climates are conducive to product differentiation. The GI tool, however, is not easy to apply in developing countries. In some countries, branding of locally produced agrifood products is difficult due to the lack of skills, knowledge, and strategy on the local producers' side. In other cases, marketing of such products may face challenges due to the lack of branding and absence of/insufficient legal system to protect brands. A certain level of legal protection is necessary to recognize the creators of brands as owners of intellectual property rights.

To enhance knowledge and skills of key stakeholders involved in the development and branding of local-specific products with GIs in their countries, the APO in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and National Productivity Secretariat organized the workshop on Branding of Local-specific Agricultural

Products through the Use of Geographic Indications, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 3–7 June. Twenty-one participants from 11 member countries along with four resource persons from India, Switzerland, and Sri Lanka attended.



Briefing at Dassanayake Walauwa Cinnamon Plantation in Kosgoda.

After intensive discussions, participants identified challenges in promoting

GIs in developing Asian countries and formulated recommendations and action plans to address them. They noted that formal protection and development of GIs are new in most Asian countries. Unlike other intellectual property rights such as trademarks, patents, and copyrights, there are several issues inherent in the protection of GIs. Economic, political, and social circumstances add to these. Strategic protection of GIs is essential for increasing producers' income, utilizing natural resources sustainably, and ensuring local development in rural areas. To observe local-specific agricultural products, participants visited the Dassanayake Walauwa Cinnamon Plantation and ISO 22000-certified cinnamon-processing factory in Kosgoda. 🌱