

SUPPORTING A GI SYSTEM THROUGH PUBLIC POLICIES

C6.2

Due to the potential of GI products to contribute to economic, social and environmental goals, public stakeholders in charge of rural and agricultural development may be keen to support the use of a GI as a tool for sustainable development. The involvement of public stakeholders is necessary to ensure the effective regulation of such tools, but also to support the process at the various levels and thus improve the likelihood of the success of GI systems.

Objectives

Public policies can provide an important contribution to the creation of favourable conditions for harnessing the potential of GI products. Public stakeholders at various levels have a range of policy tools at their disposal. Many of these tools are not specific to GI products but can be used and coordinated into a comprehensive, proactive “origin-linked quality” policy approach.

Key concepts

The concerned public stakeholders may be any institution involved in the administration and management of public goods in relation with local and sustainable development, heritage, education, research etc. at the local level (local communities, but also decentralized government services, such as those for agricultural extension and research), the national level (universities, public-interest NGOs etc.) and even the international level (international organizations, bilateral cooperation etc.).

The role of support for rural development, which can be played by many public stakeholders, must be clearly distinguished and separated from the role of evaluation of applications for recognition and thereafter protection, presented in the previous chapter, which must be endorsed by the state.

Possible roles for public actors along the origin-linked quality circle are the following:

- **identification:** information and awareness-raising for stakeholders on the nature of GI products and their potential for rural development; support for the identification of this potential; and the provision of legal tools and an institutional framework to protect the reputation of these products;
- **qualification:** support for conducting the necessary studies, establishing a participatory process and ensuring a sustainable approach in developing rules and codes of practice; and information on national procedures for the official recognition/protection of GIs;
- **remuneration:** enforcement of legal protection, nationally and worldwide; and information to consumers on the nature of GIs and support for communication tools (see chapter 5.1);
- **reproduction:** support for assessing the impact of GI systems and ensuring the sustainable evolution of rules.

Due to their proximity to the GI supply chain, local public stakeholders can play the main following roles:

- ensuring a balanced representation of the actors in the IG system and also ensuring that small producers can be heard;
- managing the process of defining the rules of the IG, managing potential conflicts in the light of the general objectives and, where appropriate, orienting collective choices;
- encouraging producers to take account of preservation of the environment and specific resources;
- supporting the operation of the GI system via skill-building measures to support development of the market for the GI product.

Process

It is also essential to ensure that there is an appropriate mix of public and private initiatives for the GI system to function efficiently, inasmuch as the economic promotion of the product must remain in the hands of the private

sector. In any case, when benefiting from public support, it is important that producers' organizations really represent the various categories and interests of the GI system and act within transparent and balanced rules that allow the participation of all interested parties in decisions.

In some cases, public stakeholders can intervene directly in the implementation of GIs by participating, for example, with producers and other private parties involved in the development of rules (the code of practice) and in the control of product compliance. The direct involvement of public actors should not include replacement of the functions specific to private economic actors. In other situations, an indirect intervention may be considered more effective, for example through support to producers' organizations for carrying out the activities necessary to the process.

Local policy instruments, based on identified needs and developed in consultation with local stakeholders, can provide specific ways of encouraging each stage in the development of the virtuous circle. It is therefore important for local stakeholders to identify the various instruments available by establishing the means of consultation and discussion with local authorities and studying all the modalities of implementation to meet needs.

Summary

Public policies can support private initiatives aiming at activating the quality virtuous circle. This support can be supplied in all the phases of the circle, either directly through financial support, or indirectly by boosting the capacity of the stakeholders or by establishing efficient rules.

The stakeholders who may benefit from such support should organize themselves in such a way that all potential beneficiaries will be included in this public support.