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## Geographical Indications of Handicrafts: A Tool to Improve Livelihood and Protect Biodiversity in Remote Communities?

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### Introduction

An increasing number of traditional local products, either agro-food or handicraft worldwide, are registered as Geographical indications (GIs). According to the World Trade Organization's Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, adopted in 1994, Geographical indications (GIs) are "indications which identify a good as originating in the territory [of a member] where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the good are essentially attributable to its geographical origin". The protection and promotion of GI products brings an important differentiation market value to the artisanal products, in order to be able to compete with industrial products. Furthermore, GIs allow to preserve traditional knowledge (knowhow) of goods produced in rural areas and can be used as a tool to protect biodiversity through promoting the sustainable use of natural raw materials. GIs is applied to products that are uniquely derived from local plant varieties or animal that may otherwise be substituted with more productive improved or modern varieties, thus reducing genetic erosion (Thevenod-Mottet et al. 2010).

Nowadays, at the EU level, an unitary system of protection for non-agricultural GI products does not exist yet since GIs are limited to agricultural products and foodstuff only, allowing the member countries the setting up of individual national legal frameworks for the protection of non- agricultural GI products. Currently, the European Commission is evaluating the feasibility of the protection of GIs for non-agricultural goods (Delphine and Bienane 2012). According to the recent study (InSight, oriGIn, REDD 2013) on geographical indications' protection for non-agricultural products in the internal market, there are now more than 80 Countries that have adopted specific registration systems for GIs and there are growing non-agricultural GI products registered in third countries.

In Colombia, approximately 43 Handicrafts have been registered in a GI system, as a result of an increasing number of potential GI products from the recent times. Factors such as sustainable use of natural resources (unique plant varieties –biodiversity- or soil conditions) and maintaining local **traditional knowledge** (producing and processing of handicrafts) bring an opportunity for protecting GI handicraft products. However, the use of the GI certification is limited and the producers are not benefiting yet from an added value to their products

The present study was carried out in the framework of Colombian-Swiss Intellectual Property Project (COLIPRI), a four-year international cooperation project between the Governments of Colombia and Switzerland, funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and implemented by the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (IPI). Direct counterparts of the project in Colombia are the Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio (SIC) and the

Ministry of the Interior. The overall goal of the COLIPRI project is to contribute to higher competitiveness, more value added to Colombian products and therefore a positive impact to Colombia's social and economic development. The present study aimed at contributing to the COLIPRI project through two objectives: i) Analyzing the production system of 8 potential GI handicrafts and ii) Assessing the possible benefits of a GI certification on handicrafts produced in rural communities in Colombia. The study's focus lies on sustainable use and maintenance of natural resources (biodiversity) and the impacts on communities' livelihood.

## Material and Methods

Different methods and approaches were used to collect the necessary data addressing the two main objectives of this research. Data collection was realized between September 2013 and March 2014. Key informant interviews at Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (IPI) and Colombian governmental institutions (Artesanias de Colombia and Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio) were carried out in order to get sufficient initial information of the study area, as well as defining which artisans groups will be involved in the project. The target handicrafts (8) and communities (8) were selected among 55 potential handicrafts in a selection process done by the Colombian-Swiss Intellectual Property Project on the basis of some criteria such as a) clear delimitation of production area, b) origin reputation of product, c) organizational development of producers, d) market potential, e) unity of product, f) unity of raw material, and g) concentration of producers in the area. In order to gather proper information about the production system of GI handicrafts in Colombia (in 8 rural communities), elements of the methodology developed by Belletti et al. (2009) were applied to consider the effects of GI registration on GI systems (GI feasibility, GI potential success: external and internal factor, GI potential impact: socio-economic and environmental dimension), complemented with a "Market map" analysis (Hellin and Meijer 2006). Survey using semi-structured interviews with producers and processors were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data for the study. Focus group discussions were conducted with producer associations, while direct observation were used to investigate on cultivation/collection of raw material and processing plants

## Results and Discussion

### *Impact on Biodiversity*

Despite the fact that every case in the artisanal communities was different from another according to their situation, a set of common weaknesses was identified during the field research. The Fig.1 below show three local plants used as a raw material for producing 3 out of the 8 analyzed handicrafts:



Fig.1: Local plants used in the production of handicraft in Colombia (Aguadeño Hat, Palo sangre wood handicrafts, espiral basket)

The traditional Aguadeño Hat is produced from palm straw extracted from the bud of the Iraca Palm (*Carloduvica palmate*). This species is found in three areas: premontane too wet forest,

premontane too wet forest and wet tropical forest. The Iraca grows from 800 to 1700 m.a.s.l. on temperature between 20 to 24 degrees. It has a temperate climate thanks to the variety of climates ranging from warm to moor. The soils where the Iraca palm grows are stony, poor material organic and with a slope of more than 40 degrees.

One of the species of Amazon trees is the locally called palo sangre, (*Brosimum rubescens*). Providing red wood the indigenous from the Amazon use this tree to elaborate fine wood craft due to the special characteristics of color, fine texture, toughness and natural brightness. The main issue is that due to the increasing demand of handicraft, the tree becomes scarce what forces the artisans currently to buy it and thus to push the commercialization of the wood tree with any control of harvesting.

The white straw (known as “paramo” and “subparamo”) can be found in the special ecosystem of the high mountains of the Andean region. The plants mainly belong to the family of *Calamagrostis effuse*. The wild growing plants are harvested around the municipality of Guacamayas by the farmers who are living in the high mountains. The straw is used to make baskets with a traditional technique called spiral basketwork (“cesteria en rollo”) with natural fibers. It consists of making rolls of straw and wrapping them with fique threads to form a flat or ascending spiral.

General constraints for producing handicrafts with natural raw material identified are:

- Natural resources remain undervalued in the production system of handicrafts due to lack of knowledge about the wild crops
- The production of handicrafts has an impact on ecosystem degradation due to inadequate harvesting practices
- The increasing demand of handicrafts affects the scarcity of natural resources
- Decreased sustainable conservation and use of underutilised plant species reduces the landscape biodiversity with an impact on future production and market of traditional handicrafts (Giuliani 2007).

### Impacts on Livelihood

The artisanal sector in Colombia is very important for the economy in many rural areas where the agricultural production and marketing as well as other livelihood strategies are limited and offer limited job opportunities (Fig.2).

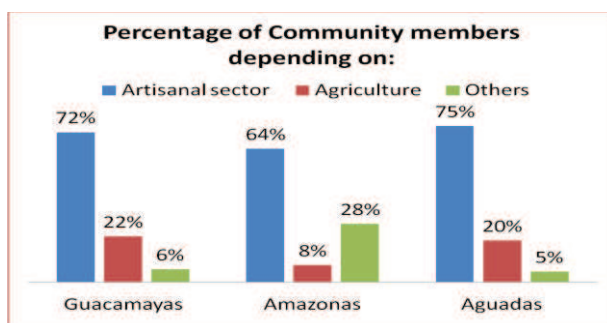


Fig. 2: Income generation opportunities for communities in Guacamayas, Amazonas and Aguadas

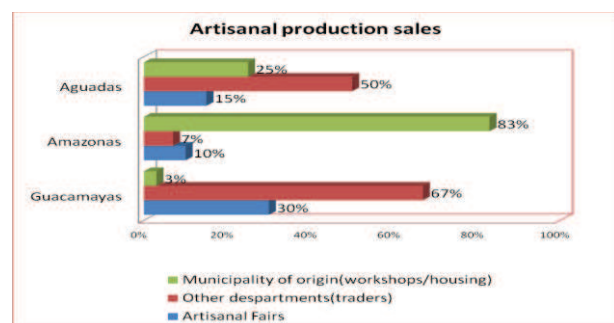


Fig.3 Artisanal production sales

Most of the involved artisans have already heard about GI registration, however as the GI process mostly finished with obtaining the declaration for the product, few contact points exist from the government to the artisans. The lack of knowledge about possible GI benefits, as well as the requirements to use it and the setting up of GI organization from the producers association was

evident in all communities. Further, there is a lack of common rules about quality of the certified product and GI codes of practices (CoPs) are commonly not implemented. The use of a strict CoP would guarantee the quality of the product, standardize the production process and common rules among producers.

General constraints for GI registered handicrafts on benefitting the producers are the following:

- Despite the limited economic benefits, multiple regions strongly depend on the artisanal sector
- The producers are not benefiting from an added value of a GI certification due to missing management of certifications
- There is a lack of government's support to the stakeholders for the management of certifications (GIs)
- There is a lack of market information and weak market power of the GI handicraft producers.
- Lack of sensitization in GI of the producers themselves and their lack of collective organization and management.

### **Conclusions and Outlook**

GIs has the potential to contribute to the viability of agricultural activities in remote regions, and thus the maintenance of the ecosystems and local economy. However, if the GI is considered only as intellectual property right, the interest of producer communities is limited, due to the lack of positive impacts on biodiversity and market benefits. Strengthening national legal framework and the inclusion of environmental sustainability criteria for a sustainable utilisation of raw materials is strongly recommended to reach an improvement of the livelihood of the artisans and protection of biodiversity.

In one hand, the handicraft products in Colombia are certified based on their linkage to their geographical origin through human factor and - in some cases - natural factor. For the case of the addition of a natural factor, it should be important to ensure the protection of the sustainability of the production system. This will allow preserving the use of natural raw materials from the specific geographical area. On the other hand, the artisanal practice is currently undervalued since most of the national consumers are not used and willing to pay high prices for the handicrafts. The current absence of a national demand for GI products is the main limitation for handicraft products. Here, access to new market in niche areas and a reinforcement of the national market is a key to the successful commercialization of the GI products. Today's low average income of the producers, mostly insufficient to maintain a living, has become one of the main reasons for artisans and newer generations to avoid an involvement into the handicraft production. This results in a fragile situation to preserve the local patrimony of the regions.

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