
Traditional Rice Varieties in India: Do GI Tagging in help protect agro-biodiversity?

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Résumé

This paper examines the role of GI tagging for rice varieties in protecting agrobiodiversity in India. Asia is home to more than three-fourths (85%) of rice production in the world. India stands second to China producing 205 million tonnes spread across an area of 47 million hectares in 2023-24. It is noted by various studies that prior to the Green Revolution, India was home to more than a lakh varieties of rice most of which are now extinct. The genetic and abiotic factors of such varieties are rich – low glyceimic value, disease/pest resistant, saline and alkaline tolerant, flood and drought resistant and could grow in deep water or inland areas. Convention on Biodiversity recognises socio-economic and cultural factors along with genetic and abiotic factors as cornerstone of agrobiodiversity. In this sense, the loss of such varieties due to the demands of a growing population (that led to adoption of high yielding varieties), urbanisation and industrialisation is alarming along with the ‘cultural erosion’ that occurs due to loss of traditional knowledge associated with cultivation of such varieties. In this context, we locate the GI tagging of these varieties in India. There are 643 GI registered products in India, of which 201 are classified as agricultural products. Of these, 27 are rice varieties spread across more than 12 states from different parts of India. The state of Kerala (6) located in the South of India leads in the number of registrations followed by Assam (3), West Bengal (3), Bihar (2) and Chhattisgarh (2) in the East; Maharashtra (3) in the West and Uttar Pradesh (2) in the North. One variety each is registered in the states of Madhya Pradesh (Central), Arunachal Pradesh (North-East), Odisha (East) Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttarakhand (North) while one rice variety is registered by multiple states (Basmati rice). Through a review of literature on the four factors of agrobiodiversity, we delve into the importance of these rice varieties in India. This would cover the genetic resources that help ecosystems of these varieties, and the abiotic factors such as climatic, geographical and other functional services that promote the cultivation. In addition, the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of the cultivation are covered. These include the networking and cohesion among communities that support the ecosystem services, the traditional and local

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knowledge involved with regard to management of practices and human activities that foster agrobiodiversity, creation of sustainable livelihoods and income generation along the value chain as well as the cultural dimensions – the use of these varieties by the community at large beyond the stakeholders and its cultural significance. The paper specifically focuses on innovations that foster sustainable ecosystems of production in agricultural sector. The actual and potential use of block chain technology in mapping and managing the supply chain of GI products and its benefits in ensuring traceability and thereby authenticity are explored through a case study of a registered agricultural GI product, a pulse variety – Tandur Red Gram Dal, registered from Telangana state in the Southern part of India.

Mots-Clés: Rice Varieties, Geographical Indications tagging, Agro, Biodiversity, Innovations