

# Geographical indications to enhance the value chain of agricultural and agri-food products in Benin: Sugar loaf pineapple and Wagashi case

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**Abstract:** *Sugar loaf pineapple and Wagashi are two Beninese products with a strong reputation in the areas where they are produced. These products are foreseen to be part of geographical indication (GI) products in Benin. This study explored the possibilities of recognition and commercialization of these two products as GI. Specifically, this study investigated the link to terroir and analyzed the different value chains of both products. Actors involved in the value chains of these two products were surveyed through individuals interview and focus group discussion. Sugar loaf pineapples and Wagashi have a real link to the terroir and have a strong reputation. Several factors such as natural factors, know-how and historical roots justify the specificity of these products. There is a real motivation of the stakeholders to valorize their products. However, they are very little structured and organized. The value chain analysis of these products showed that sugar loaf pineapples and Wagashi have a strong potential for economic growth, but this potential is under-exploited. The two products have the potential for GI protection, but some challenges need to be addressed beforehand. The advantages associated with GI in the Benin context are numerous. Indeed, they can create local added value, increase production and create jobs, help producers to obtain better price for their products and allow for a better redistribution of value added throughout the production chain. They not only strengthen the value chains but also contribute to sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** *Sugar loaf pineapple, Wagashi, GI, value chain, rural development*

## Introduction

The agricultural sector in Benin is characterized by the predominance of small holder farmers with uncompetitive value chains (CVs). Indeed, farmers have difficulties to position their products in profitable markets because of low productivity and low quality of their products (MAEP, 2011). To meet the challenges of agricultural sector, the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (PSDSA) was designed based on five strategic priorities among which the promotion and fair structuring of the Added Value Chains. One of the components of this strategic thrust is the implementation of geographical indications (GIs).

GIs is a mechanism with the potential to improve incomes of small-scale producers (Tregear et al. 2016). They constitute a form of intellectual property rights protection and are defined in the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement as “indications which identify a good as originating in the territory of a Member, or a region or locality in that territory, where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographical origin” (WTO, 1994).

Given the challenges facing West African countries in having access to international markets, GIs provide an opportunity for market differentiation and control (Bagal Ngo et al., 2012). GIs are actually a rural development tool that can serve both commercial and economic interests while preserving local values (Giovannuci et al., 2009). Besides, GI products have better market access (Bramley et al., 2003). GIs, as an opportunity to distinguish and value agricultural and agri-food products, are seen as tools for agricultural and cultural development in developing countries. According to Bagal Ngo & Vittori (2011), GIs can help strengthen the value of local products.

In Benin, there has been a growing interest in GIs and several products, pineapple Sugar Loaf, Lio, Wagashi, Agonlinmi, gari Sohoui of Savalou, Afitin etc., are in the pipeline to be geographical indication holders. Each of these products has a number of historical, geographical and cultural characteristics that meet GI requirements

The aim of this paper is to analyze how the establishment of a GI could help to develop and strengthen the value chains of the targets products.

This paper is based on two case studies conducted in 2016 through interviews with stakeholders involved in value chains (CVs) of sugar loaf pineapple and Wagashi cheese. In this article, we examine and analyze the effects that the implementation of a GI can have on products through the following questions:

- What are the dynamics within value chains?
- Who are the actors involved? Are they motivated to set up a GI?
- Is there a potential market at the local level? regional? national?
- What will be the implications of setting up a GI for these products?

## **GI in Africa and Benin: legal framework and benefits**

Legal provisions for the protection of GIs in Africa have existed since 1977 and there is an institution in French-speaking Africa which deals with the registration and protection of GIs. This is the African Intellectual Property Organization (OAPI). Following the agreements on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of 1994, the Bangui Agreement of 2 March 1977 establishing the OAPI was revised in 1999. It defines the GI as follows: *Geographical indications are indications used to identify a product as originating in the territory, or a region or locality of that territory, in cases where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the product can be attributed primarily to that geographical origin* (definition of OAPI). In other words, these are names used to identify and market natural agricultural products and foodstuffs as well as other traditionally made products such as handicrafts (Bagal Ngo & Vittori, 2011). GI serve to designate goods with a quality, characteristics, or reputation attributed to its geographical origin. Thus, to be recognized as a GI, the product must have a specific quality. According to Vandecandelaere et al. (2010), a product of specific quality is a product that has characteristics that may be related to its composition, its methods of production or processing or its marketing to differentiate it.

In the revised Bangui Agreement, it should be noted that there are two quality protection options linked to origin:

- the right of marks which protect quality linked to origin through collective marks;
- the *sui generis* system that protects GIs through registration of the denomination and the exclusive right to use the denomination for commercial purposes.

The registration of a GI through the *sui generis* system is a means of protecting and claiming identity, promoting and adding value to a product (Hughes 2009).

Four main concepts are to be retained from the definition of a GI:

- a geographical production area;
- specific production methods;
- a specific quality and
- a name and a reputation that differentiate the product from others.

From an economic point of view, GIs first offer the ability to differentiate the GI product from other products and to add value, especially when there is the GI label on the final product, and that consumers can recognize it and use it for their consumption choices; this is the case, for example, with Penja pepper (Bagal et al., 2013; Barjolle et al., 2013). In these niche markets, GI products are less dependent on international prices, and can better withstand the market crisis (El Benni & Reviron, 2009; Blakeney et al., 2013). In addition, the intellectual property right confers protection that prevents the use of the name by non-legitimate users (African Union, 2016).

## Methodology

The methodology used is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. It is a purely participatory approach and is based on individual interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. The respondents were selected randomly and cover all the socio-economic diversity of each value chain. A total of 54 people was surveyed for the sugar loaf pineapple and 122 people for the Wagashi. Respondents are direct stakeholders of CVs, consumers and representatives of support services. Also, we have collected secondary data from reports, papers and theses.

The surveys took into account the perception of the actors of the link at the origin of their products, the functional analysis and the governance within the CVs and what they expect from the GI recognition of their products.

## Results

### Sugar loaf pineapple

#### *Product, socio-economic context and markets*

"Sugar loaf" pineapple is a rare variety on the international market and some morphotypes have the distinction of remaining green at maturity. The fruit has an elongated or conical shape. The flesh is white, very sweet and juicy, with a good sugar-acidity ratio. It has a fruity aroma very strong and very pleasant.

The pineapple industry is a source of employment for farmers and especially for women engaged in the trade and processing of fresh fruit (Sodjinou et al., 2011). The markets for "Sugar Loaf" pineapple is multiple and diversified (local, national, sub-regional and international). This study focused on the Fresh "Sugar loaf" market for export to Europe. This market represents 2% of national production (AgCLIR Bénin? 2014). The price of pineapple for export does not fluctuate in contrast to the price on local markets. All the producers surveyed pointed out that the product is sold below its value. In other words, they are not satisfied with the selling price to the exporters.

#### *Link to the terroir and specificity of the product*

Benin "Sugar loaf" pineapple has a certain specificity owed to its growing area. This specificity is also attributable to variety. Thus, the sugarloaf pineapple is easily differentiated from other popular varieties such as Smooth Cayenne and MDD. Its specificity materializes through its physical appearance, its organoleptic qualities and its particular aroma. Three

descriptors are used by the respondents to describe the specificity of the “sugar loaf” pineapple: the sweet taste, the water content and the aroma.

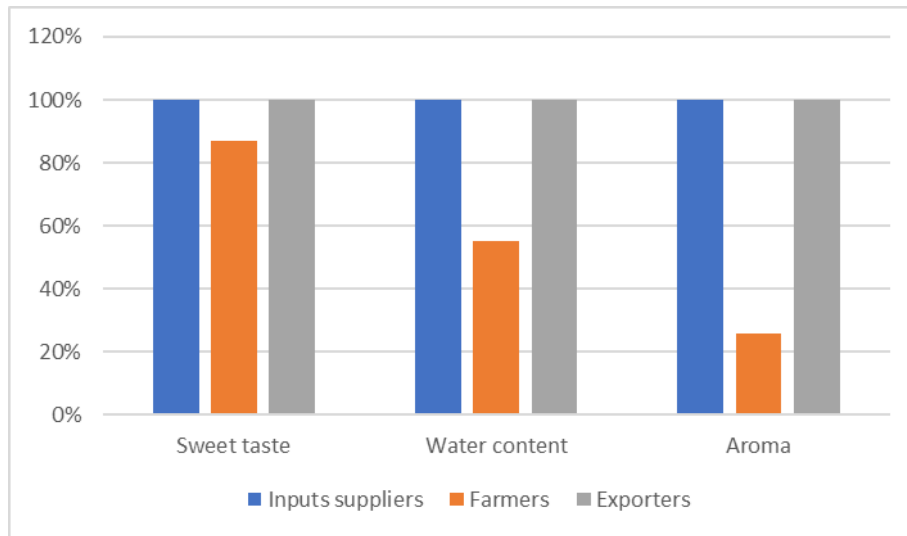


Figure 1: Descriptors used for sugar loaf pineapple

The specificity of the sugar loaf has enabled it to have a very good reputation on the local, national and international market. On the local and national market, the “Sugar loaf” is much more demanded than the smooth Cayenne.

The typicality of the variety (green at maturity, high water content), combined with climatic factors (temperature, sunshine, humidity, soil type, etc.), gives it its specific quality. According to the agronomists, the Atlantic Department is very suitable for pineapple growing. In other words, climatic conditions found in Atlantic department are particular to this region and determine the quality of sugar loaf pineapple grown there.

*Value Chain Mapping, Governance and Dynamics within the Value Chain*

The diagram below shows the mapping of the value chain of fresh export sugarloaf pineapple with the stakeholder groups involved.

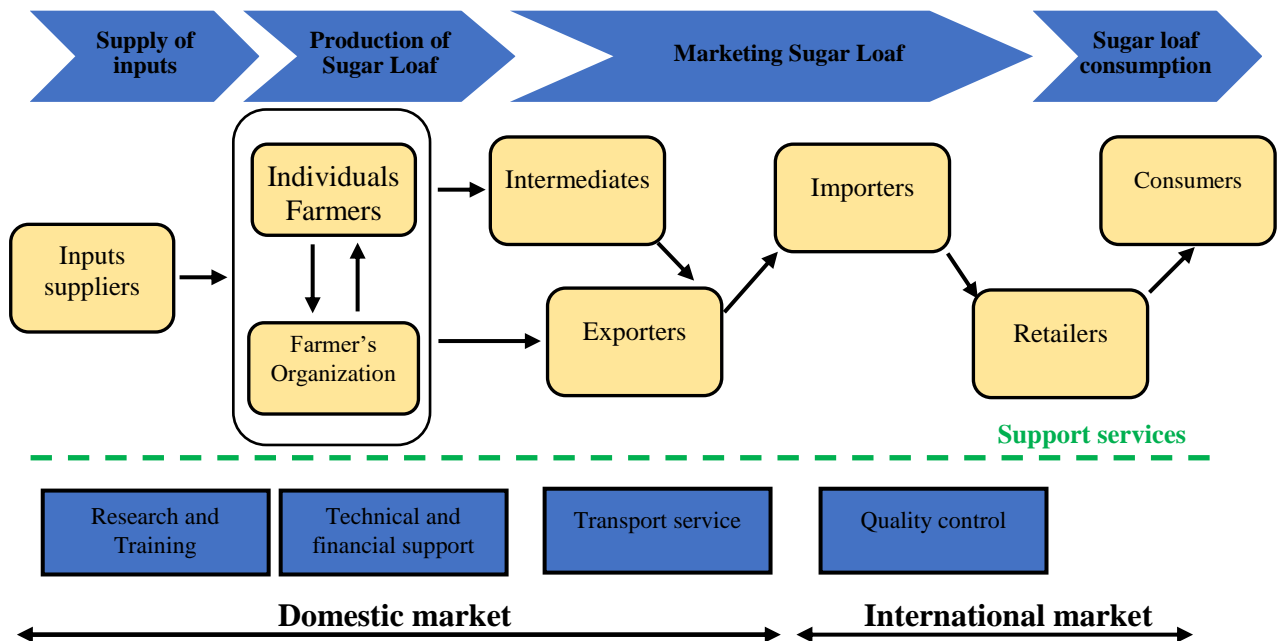


Figure 2: Cartography of the value chain sugar loaf pineapple export

Until 2016, in the pineapple sector in Benin, there was no inter-professional group that could bring together all stakeholders in the sector. This made coordination difficult within the various VCs of the sector and in particular in that of fresh pineapple for export. But since the end of 2016, the stakeholders involved in pineapple sector have set up the Inter-professional Association of Pineapple of Benin (AIAB). This inter-professional association intends to federate all the groups of stakeholders of the sector and to decide on the main strategic orientations for the development of the sector.

Producers have very weak bargaining power in the VC. As proof, the purchase price of pineapple from the producer is fixed by the exporters without possibility of negotiation.

Also, some exporters have vertically integrated the CV. Thus, they are both producers, exporters and even processors. This can undermine governance within the VC.

In the dynamics to recognize sugar loaf pineapple as a GI, the actors began to organize themselves. Thus, communal committees and the defense group are set up. However, it should be noted that this defense group is composed mainly of farmers. It would be interesting for other actors (exporters, local traders, input suppliers) to be involved. Exporters and local traders already control the marketing and export circuits and can therefore facilitate the trade of labeled product. It is therefore necessary to reorganize and structure the defense group.

## **Wagashi cheese**

### *Product, socio-economic context and markets*

*Wagashi* is a fresh cheese made with whole cow's milk. It is a semi-hard paste of homogeneous white color, obtained by coagulation of milk with a vegetable coagulant extracted from *Calotropis procera*. The dough contains some cells and its crust is very thin. It can be colored in red. Its aroma is undiversified and characteristic of fresh milk. On the palate, it has good persistence with a slightly salty and acidic taste.

Due to its reputation, *Wagashi* has become a cross-border product because the technology has been disseminated in neighboring countries such as Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger. The practice of transhumance by Fulani breeders could explain the diffusion of technology in these different countries. Although the product is cross-border, the technology remained within the Fulani ethnic groups of these different countries. The production technology of *Wagashi* is reserved for Fulani women. The transmission of know-how is from mother to daughter and sometimes to daughter-in-law; but it does not constitute a barrier to entry into production. The real barrier to entry into production is the supply of milk. In fact, the tradition is that the milk comes back to the women of the breeders. Therefore, a woman whose husband is not a breeder will have difficulty collecting a large quantity of milk to make cheese. Moreover, the Fulani communities are very supportive, they do not allow milk to be processed outside the community. Thus, the owner of the milk would prefer to sell his product to a Fulani woman. As result, women from other ethnic communities are rarely seen producing cow's milk cheese.

*Wagashi* production is highly dependent on the availability of local milk. It is seasonal and follows the rhythm of transhumance. The cheese is destined for local markets and those of the big cities of the country. Two main counterfeits have been identified. The first is to sell instead of *Wagashi*, soy cheese presented in the same form. The second is to use imported milk powder, which they mix with local cow's milk. These counterfeits mislead unsuspecting consumers and may tarnish the image of the product.

*Link to the terroir and specificity of the product*

The production of *Wagashi* is a vector of the cultural identity of Fulani. The product has a strong territorial identity and represents a symbolic value in the eyes of consumers. The specificity of the product is related to several objective and subjective characteristics. The production area of *Wagashi* is characterized by various elements that justify the link to the environment. For example, we can mention the anchoring of cattle farming dominated by local breeds "Borgou" and "Lagunaire", the richness of the vegetation characterized by a multitude of typical plants and grass of the area, and therefore of aromas. Feeding based mainly on pasture, allows to benefit the animals the plant wealth of the region.

In addition to natural factors, there is the know-how of Fulani women who is determining in the specificity of *Wagashi*. According to the respondents, four factors could explain the specificity of *Wagashi* (see Figure 3).

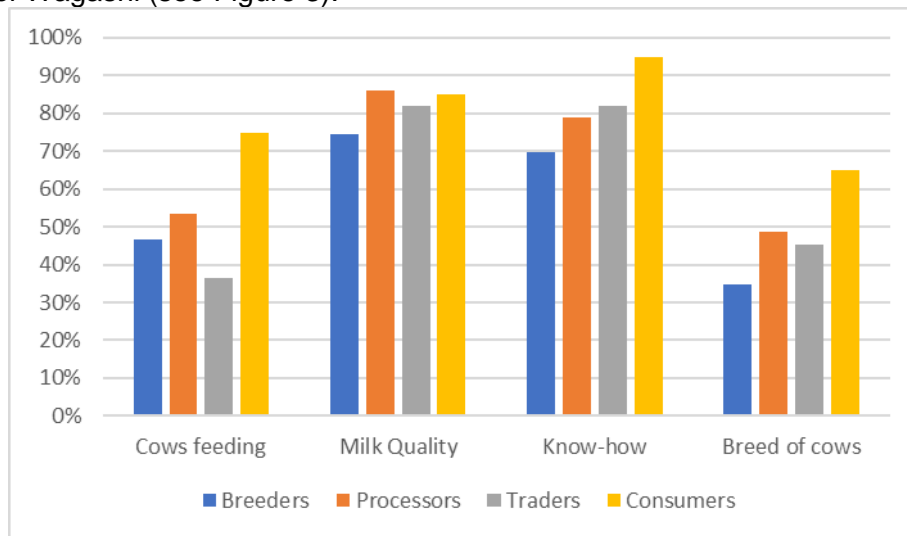
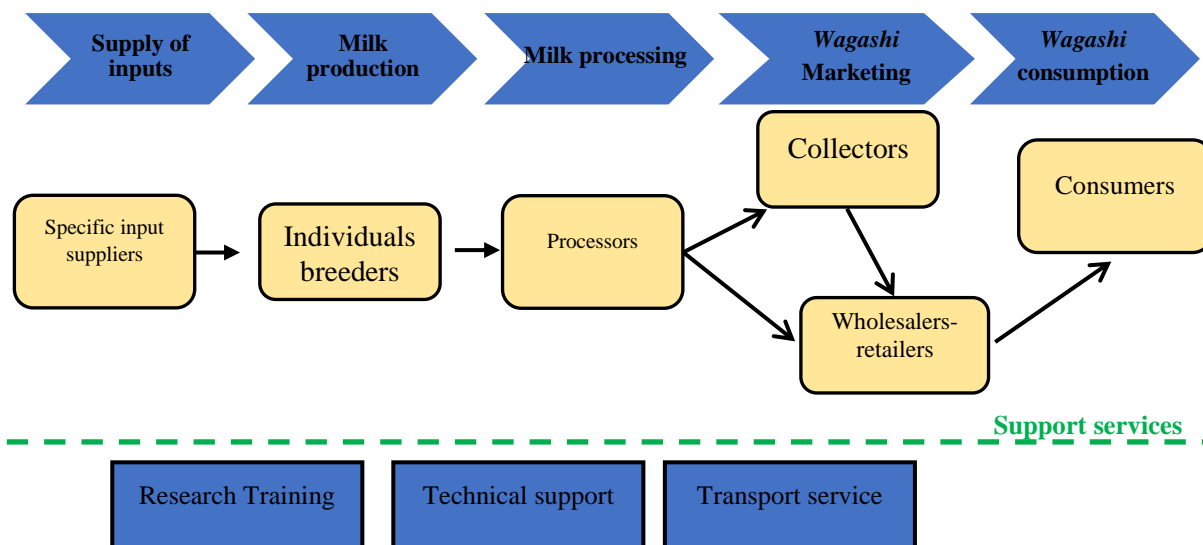


Figure 3: Factors determining the specificity of *Wagashi*

On average, there are two different breeds in the herds and the milks of the different breeds are not separated during milking. The mixture could also explain the specificity.

*Value Chain Mapping, Governance and Dynamics within the Value Chain*

Three major groups of stakeholders are directly involved in the *Wagashi* VC. The diagram below shows the mapping of the *Wagashi* value chain. This mapping highlights the cheese marketing circuit.

Figure 4: Cartography of the *Wagashi* value chain

*Wagashi* VC is part of the milk and meat sector. This sector is governed today by National Association of Professional Ruminant Breeders Organizations of Benin (ANOPER). This organization works at the grassroots level with the processors through Communal Union of Professional Organizations of Ruminant Breeder (UCOPER). Transformers themselves are very little organized in groups. Every woman produces according to her abilities. However, there are some women, organized in cooperative. The absence of a group or cooperative would not facilitate the coordination of *Wagashi* valorization actions. In addition, the practice of transhumance greatly affects the availability of *Wagashi*.

In parallel with artisanal processing, there has been the development of mini-dairies in recent years. There are currently three mini-dairies in the production area: one in Nikki, the second in Gogounou and the third in Ouassa-Pehunco. But only Nikki's is currently active. The main reason for stopping the production activity is due to the difficulties of collecting milk from Peulh women.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Comparison of the two products

Setting up GIs is an opportunity for promoting local products, increasing added value and improving producers' incomes (Videgla et al., 2015). But all potential GI products identified in Benin, and particularly the two that were the subject of this study do not have the same profile and therefore, cannot be approached in the same way. Although the two products have different profiles, they face practically the same problems, namely poor organization or weak structuring of the actors, no adequate equipment of work and difficulty of conservation of the products. These conditions undermine the competitiveness of these CVs. The table 1 presents a cross-sectional reading of the two cases studied.

**Table 1:** Comparison of the two products studies

Potential GI products Comparative elements	Sugar loaf pineapple	Wagashi
<b>Geographical area</b>	The geographical area is well defined. Close to major cities	The geographical area is delimited but it will be necessary to confirm with the stakeholders on the possibilities of enlargement or reduction
<b>Natural factors</b>	Natural factors such as climate, soil ... play a very important role in the specificity of Sugarloaf	Natural factors play an important role but not very well perceived by actors
<b>Human factors (Know-how)</b>	The contribution of know-how in the specificity of the product is not very important.	The reputation of Wagashi is due in large part to the know-how of Fulani women
<b>Origin of the raw material</b>		The raw material comes from the Wagashi production area
<b>Historical justification</b>	Sugarloaf has a long history in the production area	The production of Wagashi is rooted in the history of Fulani ethnic group and therefore in the region
<b>Typicality of the product</b>	The typicality of the product is related to the sweet taste, the water content and the aroma	The taste, the texture and the persistence in the mouth make the typicality of Wagashi
<b>Barrier of entry in the production</b>	No entry barrier in production	No perceptible entry barriers, but there are constraints that prevent other ethnic groups from producing Wagashi
<b>Collective organization</b>	Structuring of the producers in grouping and setting up of a group of defense of the IG	Some groups exist but the majority of the processors are not members of a group or processors' organization
<b>Gender approach</b>	Women are not very involved in fresh pineapple CV export	Women are heavily involved in the Wagashi CV. They mainly deal with processing and marketing
<b>Market</b>	Export market	Local, regional and national market
<b>Counterfeiting and spoofing of the name</b>	No counterfeiting or usurpation of the name	Counterfeit (use of milk powder) and usurpation of the name (soy cheese called Wagashi)
<b>Economic Importance</b>	The Sugar Loaf is of great economic interest because of the added value created and the number of jobs generated	The economic interest is not negligible and the impact on the area would be important if the product was well valued
<b>Governance of the value chain</b>	Producers have weak bargaining power. The chain is dominated by exporters.	In times of scarcity, processors have some control over the VC. On the other hand, in times of abundance, women traders govern the VC
<b>Purpose of recognition in GI</b>	Differentiation of the product on the export market	Improve the exploitation or valorization of the product



## Recognition in GI: what will change?

In its simple form, GIs are a sign that recognizes the link between a product's reputation, quality or other characteristic, and its geographical origin (Bramley, 2011). According to OAPI (2011), the recognition process in GI only makes sense if there is something to protect: the name has a certain reputation, the product has a certain quality, the market is demanding, and so it there is a risk of usurpation.

The GI approach is a voluntary approach and requires the setting up of a collective organization. This allows to structure the VC. The collective nature of the GI process allows individual strategies to converge towards a common project, which leads to synergies and thus economies of scale, limits competition and ensures benefits for all (African Union, 2016). Recognition of the GI can have effects on the structuring and strengthening of the local value chain (Barjolle et al., 2011; Bramley, 2011; Marie-Vivien & Biénabe, 2017), as in the case of potatoes Belle of Guinea where local producers coordinate themselves to promote their products through a collective brand. Chabrol et al. (2015) argue that the level of collective action can be seen as an indicator of the success of the GI building process. However, the author emphasized the importance of state policies that can enhance or hinder the development of collective action. It is then questionable to what level the state can get involved in setting up a GI. According to Chabrol et al. (2015), in Central and West Africa context, the state have a role of guarantor of both consumer and producer rights. This role is central and irreplaceable. This was also noted by Barjolle et al. (2016) who emphasized that the state may enforce the protection of GI including the surveillance of possible misuses at national and international levels. The state remains the only authority in the matter of market clampdowns and its involvement is increasingly necessary as origin food gains in reputation (Chabrol et al. 2015).

From an economic point of view, the GI approach corresponds to a "marketing of origin", which aims to give more value to the product by recognizing its specificity and uniqueness. Thus, the GI approach will facilitate access to the market through differentiation and the creation of added value (Barjolle & Sylvander, 2000; Moschini et al., 2008). The marketing of origin is one of the possible strategies to escape the market of standard goods, and therefore at low prices and strong competition (Lence et al., 2006; Bramley, 2011). In addition, the creation of added value through the GI approach allows producers to have premium prices for their products. Reviron et al. (2009) revealed that GI products in developing countries are widely sold at premium prices in European supermarkets. This is particularly interesting in the case of the sugar loaf pineapple where the players wish to position the GI product on the European market. As in the case of coffee and cocoa, the GI process can enhance the reputation of the "sugar loaf" pineapple and set a quality standard according to the needs of the market. However, there are legal aspects to unravel very early. In fact, "sugar loaf pineapple" from Benin has a very good reputation on the European markets; and the name used on these markets is: "Benin's sugar loaf pineapple". But in reality, it is produced in a very specific and delimited region of Benin, known as Allada. So should we opt for the GI country by keeping the name "Benin's Sugar loaf Pineapple" or create a new name "Allada's Sugar loaf pineapple" or "Sugar loaf pineapple from Allada"? This issue should be discussed with the collective organization that will be set up as part of the registration of the GI. The name "Benin's Sugar loaf pineapple" is reminiscent of an indication of source (originating country) and less to a GI with a specific territory. But this name is already recognized internationally. Thus, it would be wiser to keep this name for commercial (good reputation, less communication) and political (the authorities will want to export the image of Benin and actions are already conducted in this direction) reasons. Changing the name now, will require a lot more communication and therefore a high financial investment.

In addition, since the name "sugarloaf" is a variety, if it is already registered in the plant varieties catalog, registration will be problematic because a name cannot be registered as a GI when it conflicts with another name (OAPI, 2011).

GIs can have several positive effects if the specifications are balanced and respected and a good marketing strategy and active marketing is conducted (Bramley & Kirsten, 2007;

Vandecastelaere et al., 2009; Bramley, 2011; Bagal Ngo et al., 2012). As an effect and / or impact, GIs can:

- create added value locally;
- increase production and create jobs;
- help producers get a good price for their products;
- allow a better redistribution of added value along the value chain: from the producer of the raw material to the manufacturer.

The GI system makes it possible to valorize territories thanks to a criterion of authenticity of the productions thus delimited and reserved for the actors concerned operating in the zone. The promotion of local products through GIs touches all dimensions: economic, social, environmental, which are the three pillars of sustainable development. Thus, the promotion of GIs can contribute to sustainable development.

### **The multiple functions of GIs in the African context**

In developing countries in general, GIs are used for many purposes. According to Fournier et al., (2008), the legal protection of the name does not seem to be the first motivation of the actors. A growing number of GIs are registered to distinguish a product, improve its valuation or defend a property to which it is attached. This is confirmed by the two case studies carried out. The case of the pineapple Sugar Loaf for example aims at a differentiation of the product on an export market and the reinforcement of its reputation. This will allow the stakeholders to have a competitive advantage over the products of the same family.

With regard to *Wagashi*, its registration as a GI will have a dual purpose, namely economic growth and preservation of socio-cultural heritage. Consumers are willing to pay more for the product if some improvements are made (packaging, hygienic conditions, etc). Along with price increase, it is possible to work on cost reduction in order to have greater added value. GI will help structure and organize the VC, then improve the product's value.

In addition to these functions directly associated with GIs, it could be assigned other functions or rather benefits that until now are often not mentioned. In the African context in general and in the case of Benin in particular, the development of GIs could contribute to the emancipation of rural women. In the case of *Wagashi*, women are very present in the VC. They will be the first beneficiaries of the valuation of this product. If the GI process is achieved, it will enable these women to improve their incomes and to have more decent living conditions. It should be noted that VC *Wagashi* is not the only VC with high female participation. In Africa, and in Benin in particular, most of the artisanal processing of agricultural products is done by women. Thus, promoting these products empower women and improve their living conditions.

Implementation of the GI process for *Wagashi* and many other local agro-food products could stimulate the construction of basic infrastructures in the target regions. For example, the problem of access to drinking water could be addressed through this process. In the elaboration of the specifications, the rules of production would require the use of drinking water. This will probably lead the authorities to work for access to water in these regions in order to involve small producers in the GI. This GI advantage has been demonstrated in the case of Penja pepper in Cameroon where GI certification has prompted public authorities to set up funds to allow small producers to dig wells in the production area (African Union, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

In Benin, Sugar loaf and *Wagashi* have strong reputation and distinctive characteristics with a strong link to the terroir. The historical anchoring of these products in their regions of production has contributed to strengthening the link to the terroir and delimiting the

production zones. The two products are considered as local products that can benefit from the GI appellation.

Analysis of the value chain of these products revealed that there is economic potential, but that is poorly exploited. However, it is possible to have economic growth by working on VCs. Moreover, we note a good dynamic in these different VCs. As the IG is only a tool, the success of the GI recognition project depends heavily on the actors involved at different levels. Producers need to create added value, consumers must be willing to pay the price and good governance within the VC will ensure a better redistribution of added value. Bowen (2010) have identified three key factors that contribute to more embedded GI systems, and therefore to a more sustainable and equitable distribution of resources and benefits. First, quality standards must stress the interplay of tradition, authenticity, and terroir in the creation of GIs. Second, the link between the terroir and the taste and quality of the goods produced is central to the embeddedness of GIs. Third, the collective organization that governs the GI plays a strong role in maintaining cohesion within the supply chain. The collective organization ensures the representation of all supply-chain stakeholders, and frames actors' interests in ways that are mutually beneficial, as opposed to competitive and contradictory.

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