

INDIA AT WTO MC14: CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

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it's time

to tackle the problems

ABSTRACT

India proposes advancing cultural entrepreneurship via Geographical Indications (GIs) at WTO MC14 to tackle global challenges from geopolitical tensions, supply chain issues, and AI-driven job displacement in developing economies. While AI boosts productivity in manufacturing and trade, it exacerbates unemployment; GIs counter this by protecting traditional products, empowering rural producers with sustainable livelihoods in resilient sectors like handicrafts. India's achievements include Dahanu Gholvad Sapota exports to the UK (2021), Jalgaon Banana to Dubai (export growth: 1.34 to 1.95 lakh MT, 2018-20), and Puneri Pagdi's domestic adoption. GIs ensure authenticity and global market access sans heavy infrastructure. India urges WTO to integrate GIs for inclusive, equitable trade.

Global Context and Emerging Challenges

The global economy today is undergoing a phase of significant uncertainty, driven by geopolitical conflicts, trade disruptions, and broader socio-economic instability. These developments have affected global supply chains, increased volatility in markets, and slowed economic recovery across both developed and developing economies.

At the same time, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, machine learning, augmented reality, and virtual reality is reshaping industries at an unprecedented pace. This transformation raises an important and timely question for global policymakers: **Artificial Intelligence - boon or bane?**

On one hand, artificial intelligence acts as a powerful enabler of growth. It enhances efficiency, reduces operational costs, improves decision-making, and drives innovation across sectors such as manufacturing, services, healthcare, and trade logistics. From this perspective, AI represents a significant opportunity for economic expansion and competitiveness.

However, on the other hand, the widespread deployment of AI and automation is increasingly displacing human labour, particularly in routine and semi-skilled sectors. This has led to concerns regarding rising unemployment, job polarization, and the marginalization of traditional skills. In many economies, especially developing countries, this disruption risks widening income inequality and weakening socio-economic stability.

The dual nature of artificial intelligence thus presents a structural challenge. While it contributes to productivity and growth, it simultaneously creates pressures on employment and income distribution. If these trends continue without adequate policy intervention, they may result in inflationary pressures, reduced purchasing power, and long-term economic imbalance.

In this context, the global trading system must respond not only to technological change but also to its social consequences. There is therefore an urgent need to identify sustainable, inclusive, and employment-generating models of growth that can coexist with technological advancement and ensure that the benefits of globalization are equitably distributed.

Cultural Entrepreneurship as a Solution

India proposes that culture can serve not merely as a matter of identity, but as a **structured economic solution** to contemporary global challenges. In an era where technological disruption is redefining labour markets, there is a need to recognize alternative models of development that are rooted in tradition, inclusivity, and sustainability.

One such model is **cultural entrepreneurship through Geographical Indications**. Geographical Indications provide a legal framework through which traditional knowledge, indigenous practices, and region-specific products are recognized, protected, and commercialized. This transforms cultural heritage from a passive asset into an active driver of economic growth.

Over the past two decades, India has undertaken sustained efforts in building awareness, facilitating registration, and promoting Geographical Indications across sectors such as handicrafts, agriculture, and traditional goods. These efforts have demonstrated that when communities are provided with intellectual property protection and market recognition, their traditional skills can generate consistent and dignified livelihoods.

The core principle underlying this approach is clear: **while technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence and automation, may reduce certain forms of employment, Geographical Indications create new, decentralized, and community-based economic opportunities.**

Unlike technology-driven industries, which are often capital-intensive and geographically concentrated, GI-based development is inherently inclusive. It empowers rural and local communities, preserves traditional skills, and ensures that economic benefits are distributed across regions rather than concentrated in limited sectors.

Further, Geographical Indications strengthen the link between **identity, quality, and market value**. By assuring authenticity and origin, GI products gain premium positioning in both domestic and international markets. This not only enhances income for producers but also enables participation in global trade without requiring large-scale industrial infrastructure.

Importantly, this model aligns with broader developmental objectives, including employment generation, rural development, preservation of cultural heritage, and sustainable trade practices. It offers a pathway where economic growth does not come at the cost of cultural erosion but instead builds upon it.

In this context, cultural entrepreneurship through Geographical Indications represents a **balanced response to the question of artificial intelligence as a boon or bane**. While AI drives efficiency and innovation, GI ensures inclusivity and livelihood security. Together, they can form complementary pillars of a resilient and equitable global economic framework.

Need for Inclusion in WTO Framework

India proposes that culture should be viewed as a **strategic economic resource** capable of addressing challenges such as unemployment and unequal growth. Through Geographical Indications, traditional knowledge and local products can be protected, commercialized, and integrated into global trade.

Over the past two decades, India has promoted Geographical Indications through awareness, registration, and market linkage. This has enabled communities to convert cultural heritage into sustainable livelihoods. By providing intellectual property protection and market recognition, GI products gain value, competitiveness, and access to international markets.

This model becomes particularly important in the context of technological disruption. As artificial intelligence and automation reshape industries, they are also displacing labour, especially in routine and semi-skilled sectors. This raises the question of artificial intelligence as a boon or bane. While it enhances efficiency and innovation, it also creates employment challenges and inequality.

Geographical Indications offer a **counterbalance** to this disruption. They generate employment in sectors that are inherently human-centric, such as handicrafts and traditional agriculture, which are less susceptible to automation. They also promote inclusive growth by empowering rural, tribal, and local communities.

At the same time, GI strengthens the link between origin, quality, and market value, enabling even small producers to participate in global trade. This aligns with broader goals of sustainable development, cultural preservation, and equitable economic growth.

In this context, artificial intelligence and Geographical Indications should be seen as **complementary forces**. While AI drives innovation and efficiency, GI ensures inclusivity and livelihood security, together contributing to a more balanced and resilient global economy.

Indian Case Studies and Way Forward

India's experience demonstrates that Geographical Indications are not merely tools of intellectual property protection, but **powerful instruments of trade, rural development, and export promotion**. The following Indian case studies illustrate how GI has transformed local products into globally competitive assets.

A significant case is the export of GI-certified Dahanu Gholvad Sapota from Maharashtra to the United Kingdom in May 2021. This marked a major milestone in linking GI products with international markets. The GI certification, held by the Maharashtra Rajya Chikoo Utpadak Sangh, recognizes the unique sweetness and quality of the fruit, attributed to the calcium-rich soil of the Gholvad region. In Palghar district, around 5000 hectares are under sapota cultivation involving nearly 5000 farmers, of which 147 are authorized GI users. The produce was sourced from these registered users, processed at an APEDA-assisted packhouse, and exported to the United Kingdom, demonstrating traceability, quality control, and global market integration.

Another important case is the export of GI-certified Jalgaon Banana to Dubai. The consignment of 22 metric tonnes was sourced from farmers in Tandalwadi village, part of a banana cluster identified under India's Agri Export Policy. Since receiving GI certification in 2016, Jalgaon Banana has benefited from improved agricultural practices aligned with global standards. India's banana exports have shown substantial growth, increasing from 1.34 lakh metric tonnes valued at Rs 413 crore in 2018-19 to approximately 1.95 lakh metric tonnes valued at Rs 660 crore in 2019-20, reflecting the export potential of GI-based agricultural products.

Institutional support has played a critical role in these successes. APEDA has facilitated GI exports through infrastructure development, quality assurance, and market promotion initiatives, including buyer-seller meets and international trade platforms. Additional support from the Department of Commerce through schemes such as Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme and Market Access Initiative has further strengthened export ecosystems.

Beyond exports, GI has also created strong domestic economic impact. The Puneri Pagdi, a cultural symbol of Pune, has gained institutional recognition through its adoption by Savitribai Phule Pune University in place of the traditional black convocation cap. This has generated sustained demand for the product, creating livelihood opportunities for artisans while reinforcing cultural identity.

These Indian case studies clearly demonstrate that Geographical Indications:

- Enable direct linkage between producers and global markets
- Ensure authenticity, traceability, and premium pricing
- Generate employment across agriculture, handicrafts, and allied sectors
- Promote rural and tribal development
- Strengthen cultural identity while enhancing trade value

India's experience shows that GI-based development is scalable and replicable, particularly for developing countries with rich cultural and agricultural diversity. It is therefore proposed that Geographical Indications be formally integrated into WTO discussions and Ministerial Conference agendas, enabling their evolution into a mainstream instrument of inclusive global trade.

In conclusion, Geographical Indications must no longer be confined to a limited intellectual property discourse but should be recognized as a **strategic instrument of trade, development, and livelihood generation** within the WTO framework. In the present global context of economic instability, conflict, and technological disruption, the question of artificial intelligence as a boon or bane becomes central. While artificial intelligence undoubtedly drives efficiency and innovation, it also risks displacing labour and widening inequality. Geographical Indications provide a necessary counterbalance by generating employment in human-centric sectors, preserving traditional knowledge, and enabling community-based economic participation. As demonstrated through Indian case studies, GI not only strengthens cultural identity but also enhances export competitiveness, ensures market differentiation, and integrates small producers into global trade. Therefore, it is proposed that the WTO formally recognize the developmental and trade potential of Geographical Indications and initiate structured discussions at the Ministerial level. Bringing GI into the mainstream of WTO discourse will contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient global trading system, where technological progress is complemented by cultural and livelihood security.