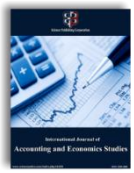
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Research paper



Empowering Local Economies: The Legal Landscape of Geographical Indication in Bangladesh for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The protection of Geographical Indications (GIs) holds transformative potential for fostering sustainable development in Bangladesh by empowering local economies, safeguarding cultural heritage, and promoting market access for indigenous products. This study examines the legal landscape of GIs in Bangladesh, analyzing current legislation, international obligations, and practical challenges in implementing effective GI protection. The research highlights key Bangladeshi products with GI potential, such as Jamdani sarees and Nakshi Kantha, exploring how legal recognition could enhance their market value, prevent unauthorized use, and create economic incentives for rural artisans and producers. By assessing comparative models from other nations, this article identifies opportunities to strengthen Bangladesh's GI framework, including necessary legislative reforms and institutional support. Furthermore, the study examines how a robust GI system can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth in rural communities. Through this analysis, the article argues that strengthening GI protections can offer a path to resilient economic growth, fair trade practices, and a more inclusive economy, where local producers can thrive in both domestic and international markets.

Keywords: *Geographical Indications; Local Economies; Sustainable Development; Bangladesh; Traditional Knowledge; Intellectual Property Rights.*

1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of global trade and intellectual property, Geographical Indication (GI) has emerged as a critical legal tool to protect and promote unique products closely linked to their regions of origin. GI offers a means to preserve traditional knowledge, enhance product value, and sustain local industries by distinguishing goods that hold unique qualities attributed to their geographical location. For countries like Bangladesh, which boasts a rich heritage of products ranging from textiles and handicrafts to agricultural goods, GI holds immense potential to empower local economies and support sustainable development. Scholars have documented GI's socio-economic significance (Coombe & Malik, 2017), alignment with trade agreements (Kohsaka & Uchiyama, 2019), and implementation challenges in developing countries (Das, 2010).

The concept of Geographical Indication (GI) refers to the protection of goods that possess qualities or reputations attributable to their place of origin. In Bangladesh, products such as the Jamdani saree, Hilsa fish, and Nakshi Kantha have achieved recognition for their quality and heritage, reflecting the country's rich cultural landscape. The legal framework for GI protection can play a critical role in safeguarding these products, enhancing their market value, and contributing to the sustainable economic development of local communities.

In recent years, Bangladesh has taken strides to establish a formal GI framework to protect its culturally and economically significant products. Initiatives such as the registration of Jamdani sarees, Hilsa fish, and Nakshi Kantha have underscored the value of GI in securing market differentiation and safeguarding local production. However, challenges remain in fully realizing the potential of GI for economic empowerment. Legal, infrastructural, and regulatory gaps continue to hinder the effective application and enforcement of GI, posing risks to both producers and consumers. As Bangladesh seeks to leverage GI for local economic growth, understanding and addressing these challenges becomes essential to enable sustainable practices that benefit both communities and the national economy.

This article aims to contribute to the discourse on how developing countries can use intellectual property rights to support environmental stewardship goals and reinforce traditional craftsmanship in the face of global competition.

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2. Methodology

This article employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the legal landscape of geographical indications (GIs) in Bangladesh and their implications for sustainable development. The focus is on a systematic review of secondary data, including legal documents, case laws, scholarly articles, reports, and policy frameworks. The methodology is structured around the following elements:

2.1. Documentary analysis

The research extensively relies on documentary analysis, a qualitative method that involves examining textual and visual documents relevant to GI law in Bangladesh. The legal basis for Geographical Indications in Bangladesh is primarily grounded in statutory sources, such as the Geographical Indication (Registration and Protection) Act, as well as relevant international treaties, including the TRIPS Agreement and other supporting instruments. Judicial decisions further shape the legal landscape, as courts in Bangladesh and comparative jurisdictions interpret and apply GI protection principles, setting important precedents. Additionally, policy reports from governmental and non-governmental bodies highlight the socio-economic significance of GIS.

2.2. Analytical approaches

This research adopts an integrated analytical approach combining case study, comparative, and thematic analysis to understand how Geographical Indications (GIs) operate within Bangladesh and contribute to socio-economic development. Case studies of emblematic GI products such as Jamdani sarees, Fazli mangoes, and Hilsa fish provide detailed insights into their historical and cultural significance, the challenges in their protection and marketing, and the resulting socio-economic impacts on local communities. These detailed narratives illustrate how GI recognition enhances livelihoods, strengthens cultural identity, and contributes to regional economic empowerment.

Complementing the case studies, a comparative analytical lens evaluates Bangladesh's GI practices against those of jurisdictions with more mature GI regimes, including India and the European Union. Attention is given to best implementation and enforcement practices, highlighting the potential for strengthened GI application to support sustainable growth. As Penca (2019) notes, local empowerment, particularly in fisheries, demonstrates how GIs can produce tangible benefits when effectively supported by law and policy.

Thematic analysis helps identify recurring insights across collected data. Themes include the contribution of GIs to achieving SDGs through poverty reduction, cultural preservation, and inclusive development, as discussed by Hossain (2021) and Begum et al. (2019). Challenges such as limited awareness, enforcement deficits, and resource constraints also emerge consistently.

2.3. Framework evaluation

The legal and policy evaluation examines the effectiveness of Bangladesh's GI framework in promoting and safeguarding GI products. The analysis focuses on the extent to which national laws align with international obligations under the TRIPS Agreement, while also addressing context-specific challenges.

The evaluation further considers institutional roles, particularly those of the Department of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks (DPDT), which is responsible for processing GI registrations, promoting public awareness, and supporting enforcement. The review highlights areas where the current legal framework functions effectively, as well as gaps related to institutional capacity, procedural clarity, and coordination among stakeholders. Ultimately, this analysis provides a basis for policy recommendations aimed at strengthening GI governance and enhancing the economic and cultural value derived from Bangladesh's unique products.

2.4. Methodological considerations

The study relies entirely on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed academic literature, official legal databases, government publications, and reports from international organizations, such as WIPO, to ensure objectivity and credibility. This methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the GI landscape in Bangladesh, eliminating the need for direct stakeholder interaction and enabling a contextual and critical analysis of relevant legal and policy aspects. However, dependence on secondary sources may exclude valuable stakeholder insights, and the absence of real-time market data limits the assessment of current challenges. Overall, the qualitative approach effectively supports the article's objectives by offering detailed and reliable analysis related to GIs and sustainable development.

3. Understanding Geographical Indication and Its Importance

Geographical Indications (GIs) are labels that identify a product as originating from a specific region, where its quality, reputation, or characteristics are closely associated with that location. Recognized under the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), GIs protect products that embody the cultural heritage and skills associated with particular regions. They serve as intellectual property rights, offering producers legal protection against imitation while promoting the unique attributes of locally produced goods. (Coombe, R. J., & Malik, S. A., 2017).

Historically, GIs trace back to traditional products such as Champagne from France or Darjeeling tea from India, where the association with a specific region has significantly influenced product recognition and consumer trust. In Bangladesh, GIs encompass culturally significant items such as Jamdani sarees, Nakshi Kantha, and Hilsa fish (Hossain, M. (2017). These goods not only symbolize local culture but also offer potential economic benefits through increased market demand and brand value, especially when protected by legal frameworks. (Karim, M. A., & Karim, M. E., 2017).

In the context of sustainable development, GIs play a vital role. By linking products to localities, they encourage traditional practices and artisanal methods that support environmental sustainability and enhance community livelihoods. The implementation and enforcement of GI protections in Bangladesh could thus empower local economies, ensuring that local producers benefit from their cultural heritage while also contributing to regional identity and economic stability. (Chowdhury, M. A. A., & Fahim, H. K., 2023).

4. Empowering Local Economies Through GIs

Geographical Indications (GIs) have the potential to significantly empower local economies by providing a legal and economic framework that connects products to their places of origin. (Rangnekar, D. (2010). GIs enable communities to leverage their unique resources, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage, which often results in higher market value, increased demand, and improved livelihoods for local producers. In Bangladesh, where traditional products such as Jamdani sarees, Hilsa fish, and Nakshi Kantha hold significant cultural value, GIs offer a powerful tool to promote these items in both domestic and international markets.

One of the most direct ways GIs benefit local economies is by ensuring product authenticity and quality assurance, which bolsters consumer confidence (Giovannucci et al., 2010). By associating a product with a specific region and heritage, GIs help create a unique brand identity that is difficult to replicate, thereby protecting producers from counterfeit goods and unfair competition (Varnekar & Chutia, 2024). This, in turn, allows for price premiums, which can lead to higher incomes for local producers. Furthermore, GIs can stimulate rural development by encouraging the use of indigenous knowledge and traditional techniques, fostering a sense of pride and ownership within local communities. This retention of traditional knowledge contributes to cultural preservation, while also attracting tourism and promoting regional distinctiveness.

In addition to direct economic benefits, GIs can catalyze investment in infrastructure and skills development, as governments and organizations recognize the importance of preserving and promoting these products. For example, local producers may receive training to enhance product quality or receive assistance in meeting international standards, thereby increasing their competitiveness in global markets. (Calboli, I., 2017). These initiatives, coupled with the legal protection offered by GIs, can create a sustainable economic ecosystem in rural and semi-urban regions of Bangladesh.

Empowering local economies through GIs aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development by fostering economic inclusivity and promoting environmental sustainability (Zhang, J. et. al., 2023). Traditional production methods often use eco-friendly practices, reducing reliance on industrial processes and aligning with environmental goals. This sustainable approach not only attracts ethically-conscious consumers but also ensures that these practices are preserved for future generations, creating long-term resilience for local economies.

In summary, GIs are a strategic asset for Bangladesh, enhancing local economic growth by capitalizing on unique cultural and natural resources. For GIs to achieve their full potential, however, a supportive legal and policy framework is essential. Strengthening GI protections and providing necessary support to local producers can pave the way for more prosperous, resilient, and culturally vibrant local economies in Bangladesh (Hyder, N. A., 2016).

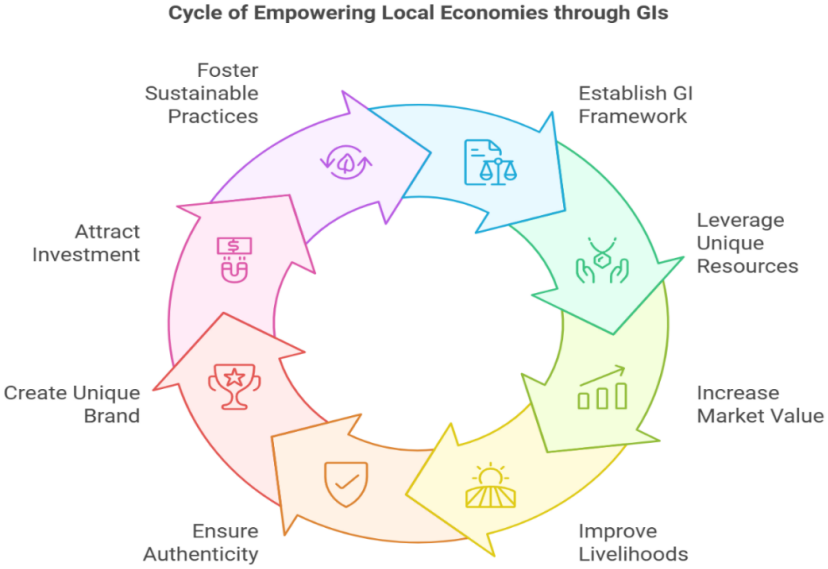


Fig. 1: Illustrates the Cyclical Relationship between GI Protection and Economic Empowerment.

Source: Authors' Own.

This cycle demonstrates how GI registration creates a reinforcing loop of authenticity, premium pricing, and reinvestment in traditional production methods.

5. Current Scenario of GI Products of Bangladesh

The Bangladeshi government has identified 494 products for potential Geographical Indication (GI) recognition to safeguard their origins, enhance their economic value, and benefit producers financially. The Department of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks (DPDT) has urged local officials to register products as GI-certified, aiming to increase their commercial value and bolster the country's image in international trade (Halder, S. (2024).

Guided by the Prime Minister's directive to register at least one GI product per district, the DPDT, in collaboration with the NGO e-Commerce Development Center, has compiled a list based on field-level data. Currently, 31 products hold GI status, with three more finalized and applications underway for 15 others. The DPDT aims to register 100 GI products by December 2024.

The initiative gained momentum after India granted GI status to products like Tangail's sari and Sundarbans' honey, sparking criticism in Bangladesh. These cases highlighted the urgency to secure recognition for culturally significant products. For instance, Thakurgaon plans to seek GI status for its unique Surjapuri mango, while Bagerhat has renewed efforts to claim GI recognition for Sundarbans' honey. Between 2016 and 2022, Bangladesh secured GI status for 17 products, with an additional 14 gaining recognition in the last eight months (Halder, S. (2024).

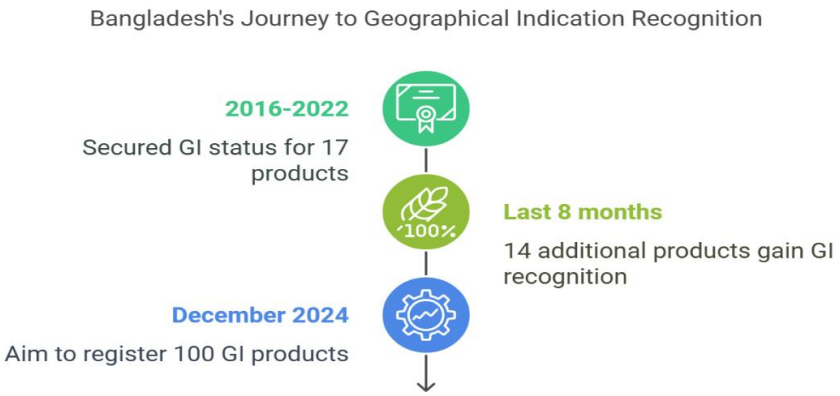


Fig. 2: Growth of GI Registrations in Bangladesh (2016-2024).

Source: Authors' OWN.

6. Legal Framework of Geographical Indication in Bangladesh

The legal framework for Geographical Indications (GI) in Bangladesh has seen significant progress in recent years, particularly with the enactment of the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 2013. This legislation provides a structured mechanism for the registration, protection, and enforcement of GIs in the country, aiming to safeguard Bangladesh's unique regional products and strengthen the local economy.

6.1. Structure and key provisions of the GI Act 2013

The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 2013, establishes the legal parameters for identifying, registering, and protecting geographical products originating from specific regions in Bangladesh. The act defines a GI as a mark indicating that a product originates from a specific geographical area, with its qualities or reputation significantly attributed to that origin. The registration of a GI under this act grants exclusive rights to its holders and ensures legal protection against misuse or unauthorized use of Islam (M. T., & Habib, A. (2013), Jahed, J. I. (2019).

The law outlines a straightforward registration process, whereby producers or organizations representing local communities can apply for a GI registration with the Department of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks (DPDT). This registration is crucial in verifying the product's origin and attributes, thereby distinguishing it in both domestic and international markets.

6.2. Protection and enforcement mechanisms

Once registered, GIs in Bangladesh enjoy exclusive rights that enable their holders to prevent others from using the GI designation without permission. The act includes provisions for legal action against infringement, which covers unauthorized use, imitation, and any misleading indications of origin. This protection is particularly vital in preserving the reputation of local products such as Jamdani, Hilsa fish, and Nakshi Kantha, which are central to Bangladesh's cultural and economic identity (Mahmud, K. U., 2024).

6.3. Compliance with international standards

Bangladesh's GI framework aligns with the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which sets minimum standards for GI protection among member states. TRIPS compliance strengthens Bangladesh's ability to protect its GIs on a global scale, aiding local producers in claiming international recognition and market access for their products. (Rangnekar, D. (2002).

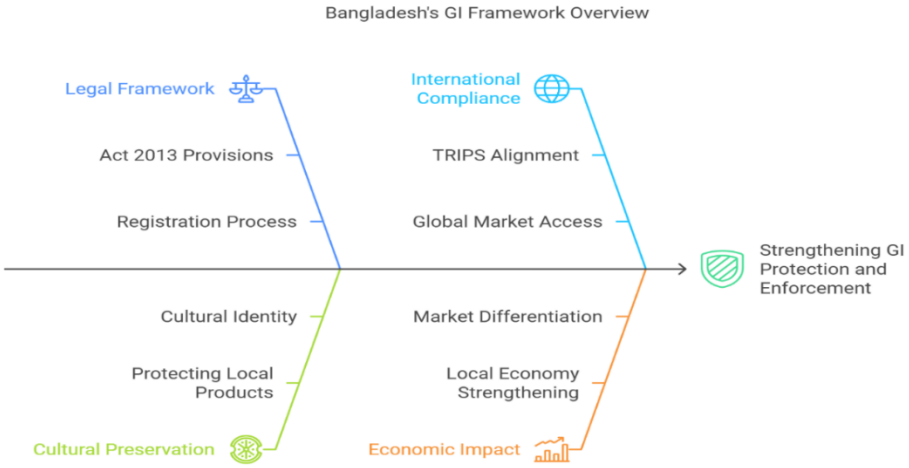


Fig. 3: Bangladesh GI Registration and Enforcement Framework.

Source: Authors' Own.

6.4. Challenges and areas for improvement

Despite these advancements, the GI legal framework in Bangladesh faces several challenges. Limited awareness among local producers and inadequate enforcement capacity have hindered the full potential of GIs in promoting economic development. Moreover, procedural complexities in registration and a lack of coordinated policy support pose additional barriers.
The legal framework for GIs in Bangladesh offers a robust foundation for protecting the country's distinctive regional goods. By enhancing awareness, streamlining registration processes, and improving enforcement mechanisms, Bangladesh can unlock the economic benefits of GIs, fostering sustainable development through empowered local economies.

7. Comparative Analysis: Bangladesh's GI law vs. International Standards

Geographical Indication (GI) laws play a crucial role in protecting the unique characteristics of products associated with specific geographical origins, thereby promoting local economies and heritage. This section examines Bangladesh's GI law in relation to international standards, specifically the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) guidelines, the TRIPS Agreement, and practices in other GI-advanced jurisdictions, such as the European Union.

7.1. Legal scope and definitions

Bangladesh's Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 2013, outlines GIs primarily for agricultural, natural, and manufactured products. However, the scope remains relatively narrow compared to the European Union's regulations, which extend protection to a broader range of products, including handicrafts and industrial goods, under two categories: Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). International standards advocate for inclusivity to enhance economic benefits for various local industries; thus, Bangladesh could benefit from expanding its definition to include additional categories of products that align with international best practices.

7.2. Registration process and enforcement mechanisms

The TRIPS Agreement emphasizes accessible registration processes and effective enforcement to ensure that GIs are safeguarded. While Bangladesh's GI law establishes a framework for registration, the procedural clarity and enforcement mechanisms remain limited, often hindered by bureaucratic delays. In contrast, the EU and other jurisdictions offer streamlined registration procedures with clear timelines and robust enforcement through designated regulatory bodies. Bangladesh may need to focus on improving administrative efficiency and strengthening enforcement capacity to effectively uphold GI protections, which would better align with TRIPS requirements (Karim, M. A., 2018).

7.3. Protection duration and renewal policies

In compliance with TRIPS, most international standards provide indefinite GI protection, subject to periodic renewal. Bangladesh's GI law, however, lacks comprehensive renewal provisions, which may impact the long-term sustainability of GI registrations. Adopting clearer renewal guidelines and ensuring that renewal processes are affordable and accessible could support local producers in maintaining their rights over time, thus fostering sustainable economic growth for GI-recognized products (Karim, M. A., 2018).

7.4. Safeguarding against misuse and infringement

International GI frameworks prioritize strong safeguards against misuse, counterfeiting, and deceptive labeling (Jovine, R. (2024). Bangladesh's law includes provisions to address infringement, but it lacks the resources and regulatory oversight necessary to enforce these provisions effectively. Improved collaboration with customs and local regulatory authorities, as seen in countries with strong GI enforcement, could enhance Bangladesh's ability to prevent GI misuse both domestically and in export markets.

7.5. Linking GI protection to sustainable development goals (SDGs)

Globally, GI laws are increasingly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on economic growth, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation (Barrera, A. G., 2020). Bangladesh's GI framework could be more explicitly tied to SDG targets by encouraging eco-friendly production methods, fair trade practices, and community-based governance. The EU's policies, for instance, incentivize sustainable practices for GI holders, creating a model Bangladesh could adopt to promote sustainable development while empowering local economies.
A comparative analysis highlights several gaps between Bangladesh's GI law and international standards. By adopting broader definitions, improving enforcement, establishing clear renewal policies, and integrating sustainable development goals, Bangladesh could elevate its GI framework to better serve its local economies and align with global best practices. Such enhancements would not only protect the uniqueness of Bangladeshi goods but also position them competitively in international markets, driving sustainable economic growth and preserving cultural heritage.

8. Some Case Studies

8.1. Jamdani saree

Jamdani saree received Geographical Indication (GI) registration in Bangladesh in 2016, becoming the country's first-ever GI product. The Department of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (DPDT) officially handed over the certificate in November 2016 (Star Online Report, 2016). The Jamdani saree is a notable example of a geographical indication (GI) in Bangladesh. Known for its intricate weaving technique and cultural heritage, Jamdani is recognized globally as a symbol of Bangladesh's rich textile history. The GI status of Jamdani has provided

local artisans with stronger protection against imitation products, reinforcing the authenticity of traditional weaving practices. This case demonstrates the positive economic impact of GI registration, as artisans benefit from enhanced market demand, higher product prices, and a reputation for quality that can compete on international platforms (Zahur, M. (2017). The Geographical Indication Act 2013: Protection of Traditional Knowledge in Bangladesh with Special Reference to Jamdani.)

8.2. Nakshi kantha

Bangladesh's Nakshi Kantha (specifically from Jamalpur) received its GI registration in February 2024, while India registered its version (West Bengal) earlier, around 2007/2008. The Department of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks (DPDT) recognizes and certifies GI products in accordance with the norms of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) under the Ministry of Industry (The BSS news, 2024).

Nakshi Kantha, a traditional form of embroidered quilt-making, embodies the rich art and culture of rural Bengal. GI registration has provided artisans in rural areas with an avenue to preserve and promote this unique craftsmanship. As a case study, Nakshi Kantha highlights the challenges and successes associated with GI designation for products rooted in rural, artisanal traditions. Increased demand from both domestic and international buyers has led to improved livelihoods for artisans. However, issues such as limited resources for scaling production and the threat of low-cost reproductions highlight areas where additional support is necessary. (Haji, L., Valizadeh, N., & Hayati, D., 2020). The role of local communities in sustainable land and forest management.)

8.3. Rajshahi silk

Rajshahi Silk was registered as a Geographical Indication (GI) product of Bangladesh on September 24, 2017. The official certificate was issued later, on June 17, 2021 (Bangladesh Branding, 2023). Rajshahi silk has been historically valued for its quality and has held a unique place in the local textile market. The GI recognition of Rajshahi silk underscores its value in both local and international markets and has enhanced its visibility among consumers (Kibria, A., 2021). GI status has helped combat counterfeit goods, strengthening local producers' ability to maintain quality standards and support sustainable production methods. The case of Rajshahi silk demonstrates how GI can not only protect a regional product but also ensure fair competition and empower local communities.

8.4. Khirsapat mango

The Khirsapat (Himsagar) mango received its Geographical Indication (GI) registration in Bangladesh in January 2019, following the application by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) in February 2017. It became the third GI product for Bangladesh (Star Business Report, 2019). Khirsapat (or Khirshapati) mango has a significant positive economic impact in Bangladesh, characterized by high profitability (20% Internal Rate of Return), strong financial feasibility (Benefit-Cost Ratio ~1.16), job creation across the value chain, and substantial income generation for farmers in key cultivation regions like Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi (Rahman M. S. & M. Khatun, 2019). This recognition highlights the mango's quality as farmers expand cultivation to meet the rising demand for both domestic and export markets. In fiscal 2016-17, mango cultivation increased to 103,000 acres, up from 93,000 acres the previous year, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (Star Business Report, 2019).

Table 1: Economic Impact and Key Challenges of GI Products in Bangladesh

Product	Registration Year	Economic Impact	Key Challenge
Jamdani	2016	Price increase 30%	Counterfeiting
Nakshi Kantha	2024	Business owners earning BDT 25,000-30,000+ monthly.	Cross-border claims
Rajshahi Silk	2017	Poverty reduction (especially for women)	Maintain quality standards
Khirsapat Mango	2019	High profitability (20% Internal Rate of Return)	Scaling production

Source: Star Business Report, 2019.

These case studies illustrate the broader impacts of GI on various sectors within Bangladesh, showcasing its potential to empower local economies by protecting unique cultural assets, enhancing market access, and fostering sustainable development practices.

9. GI and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Geographical Indication (GI) protections have become integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in fostering local economic empowerment, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting environmental sustainability. (Aylwin, N., & Coombe, R. J., 2013). In Bangladesh, the use of GI has the potential to advance several SDGs, enhancing not only the visibility but also the marketability of traditional Bangladeshi products. This recognition can increase income for rural and indigenous communities, contributing to poverty reduction (SDG 1) by providing them with a unique competitive advantage in both domestic and international markets.

GI protections advance Bangladesh's SDG commitments through three primary pathways: poverty reduction (SDG 1) by providing competitive advantages to rural producers; decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) through job creation in traditional industries; and responsible consumption (SDG 12) via eco-friendly production methods. For instance, Jamdani saree production empowers female artisans (SDG 5) while preserving traditional weaving techniques.

Thus, strengthening Bangladesh's GI framework aligns with the country's broader commitments to the SDGs, fostering economic inclusion, environmental stewardship, and social equity. Effective GI policies in Bangladesh can transform local products into engines of sustainable development, positioning GI as a pivotal legal and economic tool for achieving the SDGs.

10. Challenges in Implementing GI Protections

Implementing Geographical Indication (GI) protections in Bangladesh presents several challenges, which can impact the potential benefits for local economies and sustainable development. These challenges include legal, administrative, economic, and cultural dimensions, making GI protections a multifaceted issue to address effectively.

10.1. Legal and regulatory gaps

Although Bangladesh has established some legal frameworks for GIs, they remain limited in scope and enforcement. The absence of a comprehensive legal structure for GI protections restricts the ability to manage conflicts, handle infringements, and provide effective remedies for violations. Additionally, overlapping jurisdiction among various governmental agencies can create confusion, limiting the efficiency of enforcing GI protections (Marie-Vivien, D., 2020). The DPDT's limited staff of four examiners must process 494 identified products, creating an estimated six-year registration backlog.

10.2. Lack of awareness and understanding

Many producers, artisans, and stakeholders in local economies lack awareness of GI protections and their benefits. Without adequate understanding, communities may not pursue GI registration, missing out on the potential advantages. This lack of awareness is particularly pronounced in rural and under-resourced areas, where fewer educational programs and resources are available on intellectual property rights (Marie-Vivien, D., 2020).

10.3. Insufficient infrastructure and resources

Implementing GI protections requires proper infrastructure, including digital systems for registration, legal support, and inspection frameworks to monitor compliance. In Bangladesh, the scarcity of resources dedicated to GI oversight makes the system vulnerable to counterfeiting and misuse, which can erode the value of registered GIs. Limited budgets and inadequate staffing further exacerbate these constraints (Raju, K. D., & Tiwari, S., 2015).

10.4. Global competition and counterfeiting

Bangladeshi GI products often face competition from cheaper, lower-quality imitations produced domestically or imported. Counterfeiting undermines the authenticity and market appeal of genuine GI products, reducing revenue for original producers and diluting brand identity. With limited enforcement at borders and in marketplaces, genuine GI products struggle to maintain a competitive edge. (Askari, M. M. U. R., 2018). Protection of geographical indications: Legal conflict between trademark law and sui generis system.)

10.5. Cultural and political barriers

In some cases, GIs are linked to cultural heritage or traditional practices, which may involve multiple communities or regions. Political tensions, local disputes, or varying perceptions of ownership can complicate efforts to register a GI under a unified identity. Resolving these conflicts often requires sensitive handling to ensure that GI protections represent the interests of all stakeholders (Raju, K. D., & Tiwari, S., 2015).

10.6. Economic constraints and cost of registration

For small-scale producers, the cost associated with GI registration, maintenance, and legal protection can be prohibitively high. Without financial assistance or incentives, producers may lack the motivation or means to pursue GI registration, thus reducing the number of registered products.

10.7. Transnational GI disputes

The Sundarbans honey dispute exemplifies enforcement gaps when geographic regions span multiple jurisdictions. Without bilateral GI recognition agreements, Bangladeshi producers lose market share to Indian competitors who use identical geographical claims, thereby undermining the core purpose of GI protection.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach, including strengthening legal frameworks, increasing awareness through targeted campaigns, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering cooperation among stakeholders. A well-established GI system could empower local economies, support sustainable development, and create a foundation for long-term economic growth in Bangladesh.

11. Policy Recommendations for Enhancing GI Protection

Geographical Indication (GI) protection is crucial for preserving the cultural heritage and economic value of distinctive local products. Strengthening the GI framework in Bangladesh can significantly empower local communities, promote sustainable development, and enhance the competitiveness of Bangladeshi products in the global market. To achieve these goals, several policy recommendations are necessary to enhance the legal and operational framework for GI protection in Bangladesh.

11.1. Strengthening the legal framework

Bangladesh's GI law requires amendments to align with international best practices and address specific local challenges. The current legal framework could be expanded to encompass a broader range of products, including crafts, textiles, and food items, which have a strong connection to regional identities. Harmonizing national regulations with international GI standards, such as the TRIPS Agreement, would also support international recognition and protect Bangladeshi GIs from potential infringements abroad.

11.2. Improving registration processes

The process for GI registration in Bangladesh should be streamlined and made more accessible. Simplifying the application process, providing online resources, and offering language support could encourage more local producers to register their products. Establishing

regional offices dedicated to GI registration could further decentralize the process, enabling producers in rural areas to easily access the necessary services and information.

11.3. Enhancing public awareness and capacity building

Local producers and stakeholders may lack awareness of the benefits and requirements of GI protection. Implementing educational campaigns, workshops, and training programs can enhance the capacity of producers, traders, and relevant government agencies. These initiatives should focus on informing stakeholders about the value of GI protection, the legal requirements for registration, and how to effectively use GIs in branding and marketing (Das, K. 2010).

11.4. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms

Effective enforcement is crucial for protecting GIs, deterring counterfeit products, and upholding the reputation of Bangladeshi GIs. Enhancing enforcement mechanisms includes establishing dedicated monitoring bodies and collaborating with law enforcement agencies to prevent and penalize infringements. Additionally, raising awareness among consumers and retailers about authentic GI products would help discourage the sale of counterfeit goods.

11.5. Facilitating international recognition

For Bangladeshi GIs to gain a competitive edge in global markets, international recognition is essential. Collaborating with other countries and organizations to secure reciprocal protection agreements would enable Bangladeshi GI products to be recognized and protected abroad. This strategy is particularly important for high-value products with substantial export potential, such as Jamdani sarees and Hilsa fish.

11.6. Enhancing collaboration with international bodies

Bangladesh should strengthen its engagement with international organizations such as the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and explore partnerships with countries that have established GI frameworks. These collaborations can facilitate knowledge sharing and potentially provide technical assistance to enhance GI enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, alignment with international standards can help Bangladeshi GI products access global markets, enhancing their economic impact.

11.7. Promoting public-private partnerships

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can play a pivotal role in enhancing GI protection and promotion. The government can collaborate with private sector stakeholders, including industry associations and trade bodies, to invest in infrastructure, branding, and marketing strategies. PPPs can also help fund research initiatives that validate the authenticity and uniqueness of GI products, which strengthens their market appeal and facilitates GI registration (Das, K. (2010).

11.8. Investing in market development and export promotion

To realize the full economic benefits of GIs, Bangladesh must support the development of its market and the export of GI products. Policy initiatives could include financial incentives, subsidies, or low-interest loans to help small producers enhance their production capabilities and maintain high-quality standards. Additionally, the government could facilitate the participation of Bangladeshi GI producers in international trade fairs and exhibitions, boosting the visibility of GI products on the global stage. (Patil, P. G., et al. (2018)).

11.9. Integrating sustainable development goals (SDGs) into GI policy

GIs have the potential to support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fostering inclusive economic growth, reducing inequalities, and promoting responsible consumption. Policymakers should recognize the potential of GIs to contribute to achieving the SDGs by designing policies that prioritize sustainable production practices and equitable benefit-sharing among local communities. For example, promoting organic certification and eco-friendly packaging for GI products can enhance their appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, aligning with SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production. (Kohsaka, R., & Rogel, M., 2021). Traditional and local knowledge for sustainable development: Empowering the indigenous and local communities of the world.)

11.10. Establishing a national GI registry and database

A comprehensive national database for GI products would serve as an official reference, facilitating monitoring, enforcement, and public awareness efforts. This registry could include detailed information about each GI, including product specifications, area of origin, and unique qualities. Such a database would also simplify the verification process for producers, traders, and enforcement agencies, contributing to a more robust GI protection system.

11.11. Encouraging regional cooperation and knowledge exchange

Bangladesh can benefit from regional cooperation by sharing knowledge and best practices with neighboring countries that have experience with GI protection. Collaborative efforts through organizations like SAARC could help Bangladesh build capacity, enhance legal frameworks, and develop effective marketing strategies. Additionally, regional cooperation could support the development of a unified South Asian GI certification mark, enhancing the reputation of GI products from the region.

These policy recommendations provide a roadmap for Bangladesh to strengthen its GI protection framework, promoting sustainable development and empowering local economies. By addressing legal, operational, and enforcement challenges, Bangladesh can unlock the full potential of its unique products, fostering economic resilience and preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

12. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Bangladesh's GI framework, although legally compliant with TRIPS, suffers from a critical implementation gap that prevents products from realizing their full economic potential. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on legal provisions (Karim, 2018) or economic theory (Das, 2010), this research makes three distinct contributions to GI scholarship.

First, it provides the most comprehensive mapping to date of Bangladesh's GI product landscape, documenting 494 identified products and analyzing registration patterns across districts, data that have not been previously synthesized in the academic literature. Second, it highlights the gendered dimensions of GI implementation challenges, illustrating how registration costs and bureaucratic processes disproportionately exclude female artisans in sectors such as Nakshi Kantha production, a perspective that is absent from existing Bangladesh-focused studies. Third, it offers the first systematic analysis of cross-border GI conflicts facing Bangladesh, particularly the India-Bangladesh disputes over Tangail saris and Sundarbans honey, identifying urgent gaps in bilateral recognition mechanisms.

Moving forward, Bangladesh must prioritize three immediate reforms: [a] establishing a GI subsidy program for small producers, [b] negotiating bilateral recognition agreements with India to resolve territorial disputes, and [c] creating fast-track registration pathways for women-led producer cooperatives. Without these interventions, Bangladesh risks losing both cultural heritage and market share to competitors. Future research should examine, particularly through the use of primary data from producer communities, to complement the legal-institutional analysis presented in this article.

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