

Marketing Gandhakasala

Local varieties for livelihood options

The rapid loss of agrobiodiversity is one of the factors leading to socioeconomic changes such as impoverishment of agricultural communities and unstable food security worldwide. In the South Indian district Kerala, the diversity of rice landraces has been dramatically diminished during the last decades. The main cause lies in the conversion of rice fields into land for cash crops or construction sites, or other, arguably more profitable land uses.

In the light of rapid changes in environmental conditions, it is nowadays even more important to conserve existing genetic resources for future use. One means for conservation is to add market value to neglected varieties in order to create a market based incentive for their protection.

If local rice varieties from Kerala gain more economical importance, it will offer opportunities to conserve old landraces and their associated ecosystems.

On the example of the endemic landrace named Gandhakasala, the aim of this study was to find out whether there is a demand for this scented rice variety in Germany, and under what conditions and requirements a successful marketing strategy can be pursued.



TOPICS

- Seed markets
- Labelling
- Geographical Indication

BIODIVA

The research project BioDIVA aims to generate knowledge for transformation by examining land use change and agrobiodiversity of the rice farming system in Wayanad, India. The focus lies on sustainability and gender equity, in particular regarding the use of agricultural diversity in indigenous communities. The Indian-German cooperation addresses these issues by conducting inter- and transdisciplinary research accompanied by capacity building and dialogue between local and regional actors.

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Gandakhasala - a scented rice

Gandakhasala is a scented rice variety grown by indigenous groups in a low-input cultivation system in Kerala. Through adaptation, its physiology and agronomical properties make it well-suited to the growing conditions in Wayanad. It is pest and disease tolerant, reducing the need for agrochemicals, which in turn enhances agrobiodiversity, as the fields host various animals that form the basis of an intact ecological web. The by-products are popular as cattle fodder and post-harvest mulch.

Because of its fine taste, nutritional value and cooking properties, Gandakhasala is preferred for traditional ceremonies such as wedding feasts or for special guests and is prepared as a light meal for convalescents.

Although the global market for rice is marked by instability and excess supply, studies suggest that Gandakhasala has some potential on the international rice market owing to its special culinary properties. For this reason and also as an acknowledgement of its cultural value, it is protected through the geographical indication scheme (GI) by the Government of India for the Malabar coast.

The already narrow market for rice in Germany is quite saturated with the scented rice species Basmati and Jasmine. However there is a potential to introduce Gandakhasala as a niche product if it can gain some added value through a holistic marketing concept.

Cultural Marketing for Gandakhasala Rice

The research

The study analyses the marketing potential of Gandakhasala rice in Germany. For this purpose, several key informant interviews were conducted with experts from the food industry, with particular focus on three sub-sectors: Fair trade, organic foods and providers of gourmet foods, all based in Germany.

The interviews concentrate on assessing the marketability of Gandakhasala in terms of culinary properties and production processes. The aim is to understand the criteria and preconditions in order to include Gandakhasala in the products catalogue. In this context, certification schemes, pre- and post harvest processing as well as import regulations are analysed in detail. In addition, the added value or novel properties of Gandakhasala with regards to marketing and success of marketing initiatives, but also the contribution to conservation of biodiversity *in situ* play a role.





Winnowing rice after harvest, Wayanad

From harvest to shipping

The rice market in Germany is highly competitive and consumers are rarely prepared to pay more. However, the study results indicate an interest for Gandhakasala depending on quality, cooking attributes and novel properties such as taste. In order to gain a foothold in the market, marketing has to focus on Gandakhasala as a niche product, adding value through certification as an organic and fair-trade product or both. What aids marketing appeal is the story behind the product. Background information about cultivation methods, farm life and the grains' importance in cultural ceremonies such as weddings can be used to increase the appeal of the product.

An important factor in ensuring market access is certification as an organic product. Furthermore, the fair-trade label would_improve marketing opportunities. In addition to marketing, processing is an important factor for importers. In-country processing of the grain is a requirement, the rice should at least be cleaned and milled to ensure longer durability as well as to reduce shipping weight, because the bran and husk make up to 20% of the weight. Purity of variety and harvest batch has to be strictly ensured – the product should be free from any residues and pests. Before shipment, a sample of the product has to be shipped to Germany, so the rice can be tested on allergens, genetically modified organisms, pesticide residues and mycotoxins.

TERMS

Geographical Indication

A geographical indication is a sign used on goods that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities, reputation or characteristics that are essentially attributable to that place of origin.

Scented Rice

Agricultural products have qualities that derive from their place of production and are influenced by specific local factors, such as climate and soil.

Agrobiodiversity

is the result of natural selection processes and the careful selection and inventive developments of farmers, herders and fishers over millennia. Agrobiodiversity is a vital sub-set of biodiversity.

Traceability

is a feature to ensure batch quality and to take effective measures in case of contamination. Detailed documentation with corresponding certification about the farmers, cultivation methods, storage and packaging facilities is imperative.

KEY RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Fair trade

Traders of speciality rices highlight consumers high esteem for fair trade labelling. Working conditions and social standards are of concern.

2. Organic production

Organic agriculture uses ecological relations to support plant growth, thus avoiding agrochemicals with negative sideeffects on agrobiodiversity.

3. Farmer's organisation

Farmers need to organise in a cooperative form to guarantee quality, quantity and a reliable flow of information. This also strengthens their negotiation power locally and globally.

4. Local Indian market

Though German traders express an interest in Gandakhasala, the development of a local market for speciality rice in Kerala and India appeals as promising to curb local demand and knowledge.

Putting Gandakhasala on the shelf

Concerning delivery quantity and timing diverging preference were noted: Some traders prefer 25 kg bags, others larger units of one ton, whereas the delicatessen dealers prefer smaller units (250 -1000g).

While vacuum packed rice for longer shelf life (4-5 years) may be requested, rapid packaging after processing to prevent contamination by foreign substances, odors or storage preservatives was a central concern. Most traders wished the final packaging to take place in Germany, only two preferred packaging in India because of quality reasons or in order to create more income in the producing country.

Less attention is drawn to the significance of the Geographical Indication, the added value through the GI label is considered insignificant. This is because the geographical location of Wayanad is relatively unknown in Germany. However this may change as the GI becomes better known. In this case, the GI would function as a protection of the name Gandakhasala and against unfair competition.

Product identity and the consumer

The impact of marketing incentives on the biodiversity of landraces depends on the product itself and the amount of genetic resources: In the case of Gandhakasala, the product consists of one species, which in itself has a limited effect on biodiversity conservation. However, more rice field associated species are protected, if paddy fields can be conserved.

In the case of Gandhakasala, the large number of small producers conveys a positive image. Small scale farms employ a greater diversity of species and varieties and cultivate at a subsistence level, ensuring higher agrobiodiversity and sustainability than large-scale, commercial farms.

Also important is the market power of buyers. The market for rice in Germany is a niche market, where only few buyers exist and producers often bow to the buyers' demands. Therefore the openness of the buyers for new ideas and interest in sustainability and fair trade could contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. In particular with regards to agrobiodiversity in combination with gender issues, fair-trade or organic production have a positive impact.

Negative effects could occur, if Gandhakasala develops such a high market value that it becomes the dominant crop and displaces other varieties. Because paddy fields have to compete with cash crop plantations or land conversion to real estates, the retention of rice fields with traditional varieties has a positive impact.

Conclusion

The results show, that there is an existing demand for Gandhakasala in Germany and the traders were basically optimistic. They uttered concerns, however, related to the rice market itself, which is saturated with Basmati and Jasmine rice, and regarding the German consumers, who in general do not buy specialty rice.

The success of marketing Gandhakasala depends on other factors – both the rice itself as well as the marketing strategy or the price. Chances for the successful introduction of Gandhakasala lie with value addition and marketing as a niche product with special attributes such as certifications as an organic or a fair-trade product or as a delicatessen.

Background information about the cultivation through indigenous people, cultural significance and the importance of Gandhakasala for traditional wedding parties should be also used as a merchandise appeal and be communicated on the packaging or additional websites.



Recommendations

In order to launch Gandakhasala as a viable product on the German markets, the traders had concrete recommendations:

- Elaborate the unique features of Gandakhasala in terms of its role in the biodiversity, agro-ecology, culture and tradition of smallholder economies in Wayanad and use them as selling points.
- Certify organic production standards as mandatory to add to the marketing potential. Additional in-depth studies are needed to assess all steps in the production, harvest, storage and post-harvest processing practices in light of the certifying agencies' criteria.
- Ensure fair production standards, because these are also high up in the requirements, comprising of sustained growth and benefits for producers. Most traders pay close attention to the working conditions and co-operative organisation of farmers and offer capacity building in these areas.
- Provide support for local development and growth in rice farming communities of Kerala by including GI rice in the local and regional rice market in India. This requires in-depth studies on the current status of Gandakhasala production in terms of yield, input and labour market, infrastructure and marketing.



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