



Reconstruction of rural territories through labeling projects Case of IG Date Deglet Nour of Tolga in Algeria

Kirat Souhila^{1*}, Louadj Mounir²

1 Research laboratory: The economics of organizations and sustainable development,
FSECSG, souhila.kirat@univ-jjel.dz

Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University of Jijel 18000 Jijel (Algeria).

2 Research laboratory: The economics of organizations and sustainable development,
FSECSG, m.louadj@univ-jjel.dz

Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University of Jijel 18000 Jijel (Algeria).

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Abstract:

This study aims to identify the role of valorization through the labeling of high-quality and origin-specific agricultural products in the revitalization and reconstruction of rural territories, focusing on the case of the Geographical Indication of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga (IG DDNT) in the Biskra Province, Algeria. The study relied on a territorial approach and a case study methodology, emphasizing the economic resources necessary for achieving the project's objectives within a sustainable strategy.

The study's conclusions reveal that it is a project aimed at constructing and recognizing the "IG label" (Geographical Indication). However, efforts are still being made to reach the valorization stage through coordinating and empowering all relevant public and private stakeholders.

Keywords: *Geographical Indication; labeling; quality; strategy; territory; territorial resources.*

* Corresponding Author.

I. INTRODUCTION

Certification through labeling is a tool that enables product differentiation and the organization of their markets. The collective ownership of these products protects them from counterfeiting (Casabianca, 2007). This protection prevents their appropriation by external actors and permits local stakeholders to safeguard the generated income against the potential risk of depletion in the global market. Therefore, the question arises about the relevance of this process in Southern countries, which is essential to protect their cultural income.

Regarding the Plan for the Development of Agriculture in Africa (PDDAA) and the National Medium-Term Investment Plan (PNIMT), the Algerian government has determined strategic priorities sought to valorize local products in pilot areas by the regulatory and legislative framework for standardization, certification, geographical indications (GI), and appellations of origin (AO) that has been established.

The 2004-2006 action plan identified a list of agricultural and agri-food products, including the Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga (DDNT), for "certification procedures" that was later incorporated into the 2014 "rural renewal" program. The project, initiated in 2004 with the collaboration of the European Union (EU), led to obtaining the GI label for DDNT in 2016.

What are the constituent and regulatory elements of the quality project for these Algerian products? What has been its evolution, and through what territorial dynamics? Upon raising this problem statement, the objective is to assess whether the rural territory can develop itself by valorizing its local resources.

This study seeks to demonstrate the effect of the valorization project on territorial dynamics and suggest a strategy that aligns the project's objectives with sustainability through the empowerment of relevant resource actors. The aim is to connect the stages of "construction and recognition" with "valorization" for a three-dimensional quality process of "Deglet Nour Date from Tolga."

The article is divided into a theoretical section on territory-terroir and the construction of quality and a practical section related to the case study of the Geographical Indication (GI) of the Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga.

1. Quality and the return of interest to the territory.

Over time, the concept of quality has evolved to meet the changing needs of consumers, such as their desire for unique products from companies. This trend has resulted in the resurgence of particular agricultural goods, known as "labeled" products, especially in Northern countries like Europe. Increasingly, production methods prioritizing rural territories and the environment are gaining interest. This development marks a renewed focus on rural areas (Canty et Al, 2006), where economic and social connections are essential.

Nowadays, rural territories are not merely geographical spaces to be developed or resources to be exploited but a genuine territorial construction over time, reflecting the image of a common identity.

The competition from agri-food industries over several decades has permitted specific professional classes, such as farmers, artisans, and small industries, to act with institutional strategies, a form of resistance to defend the quality of their products. This has established regulatory mechanisms to distinguish non-compulsory attributes such as "specific" quality. Products are then presented with "quality signs" that differ from the standards (Sylvender et Melet, 2000).

Thus, firms and researchers often use controlled designations of origin (AOC) and protected geographical indications (IGP) to influence policymakers. These designations are considered a "magical" means of valorization that can positively affect the valorization of the original

product, rural actors' incomes, and territories' vitality. However, "Only specific case studies allow for the identification of local development dynamics within the framework of the demand for IGP" (Canty et Al, 2006).

2. Territorial Economy and Delimitation of Terroirs

Quality products are now part of territorial economy practices through the "differentiation of supply" using labeling (Pecqueur et Al, 2003).

For agri-food products, the "designation of origin," whose differentiation refers to well-defined terroirs, seems more suitable. The product's specification carries the cultural and historical characteristics of the territory, making it more appropriate than differentiation.

Therefore, the concept of "terroir" characterizes elements of a territory, such as landscape, soil, local practices, or accumulated experiences, added to the appropriation of quality productions by the territory's population (Berard et Al, 2004). Hence, producing specific goods and services depends on trust and logic related to the notion of "origin," the weight of geographical proximity, and a composite offer from the site (Pecqueur et al., 2003).

3. From Terroir Management to Territory Management

In this context, rural development is defined as a process with national objectives related to a sustainable rural development strategy. However, this strategy is based on local solutions managed by specific local actors in the concerned areas, and it involves participatory management, bringing together public actors (institutional and local elected officials) and private actors (including associations). This requires decentralization with a local monitoring and evaluation system. The focus now shifts towards managing territories instead of terroirs (Ben Bekhti et AL, 2006).

The concept of territory is now viewed as an organization of actors connected by active socio-economic ties and evolving through their interactions. It is a socio-economic construct resulting from the interactions of local actors—economic, technical, social, and institutional—coming together to address a production problem or to conduct a collective development project specific to the territory, considering macroeconomic variables.

The analysis is based on "territory," which has two pillars: coordinating actions by local actors and activating territorial resources. It involves territorial and "resources with a case study" approach.

The territory is defined by the mobilization of various actors coordinating their actions, leading to a non-market governance system considered a traditional regulation method (Hadjou, 2009). Without this system, the territory would remain a passive space dependent on external changes. Thus, the activation-valorization of resources will result in the emergence of territories. These resources are specific to cultural, environmental, and heritage aspects of a cultural tradition or collective work.

The "territorial resource" results from the actors' actions. It is a constructive feature of a territory (Samson Samaganova, 2007). However, territorial economics has reformulated the question of resources through a constructivist approach where the resource in a territory is regarded as a factor of collective local production or a common good of general interest. Its construction involves a "project approach." (Peyrache-Gadeau et Al, 2016).

4. The process of "a quality product valorization."

The strategies for valorizing amenities aim to differentiate quality products by labeling them and increasing their value as "resources" or "rents." (Couzinet et Frayssignes, 2002). This process is achieved differently, relying on the involved actors (farmers, artisans, industrialists, distributors, and others) and requiring a "construction-recognition-valorization of amenities" approach, especially for agro-food products.

Construction is a lengthy process based on three types of support: support with natural features, support with positive externalities, and support with cultural factors. According to certain authors, creating particular resources or qualifications involves a collective effort or an institutional and technical framework that enables people to identify a group of resources with their unique properties, features, and values, turning them into specific goods, and ultimately establishing a suitable protection system (Couzinet et Frayssignes, 2002).

Hence, the institutional and economic construction of territorially specific quality requires strict cooperation among actors and conformity between local agreements and general requirements (Allaire et Sylvander, 1997).

The recognition of quality products by a society or part of society is shorter than the "construction" process. However, it is essential before starting the valorization process. Internal and external recognition of these products, resulting from a social construction linked to the interaction between the overall society and the local society, permits the emergence of the territory's attractiveness.

Thus, the valorization of quality products is conducted, including individual actors such as landowners, farmers, and institutional actors who share common interests. Since the features of these products can be integrated into certain goods and services as elements of differentiation, they transition from their status as local characteristics to that of "economic resources" (Couzinet et Frayssignes, 2002).

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The theoretical framework is that of economic geography, also known as the economics of territories. It is based on the theory of collective action and rent. The economics of territories has its theoretical and methodological roots in economic geography and institutional economics.

The current study will be conducted using a territorial approach. It will rely on a case study to provide an inventory of existing resources, diagnose resources, and reveal coordination through the "Deglet Nour of Tolga 2004" project.

1. Territorial Approach

For the existence of a territory, it requires a project founded on a diagnosis of its resources (Samson, 2003), covering three dimensions of the local context: economic, institutional, and community. Two complementary tools are employed for this purpose: an inventory of statistical data and a local audit diagnosis with qualitative information from semi-structured interviews (Samson I., 2004). The territorial approach includes the following steps: inventory, diagnosis, analysis of results, and recommendations concerning the strategy to be adopted in terms of "product," "technology," and "market" (Crevoisier, 2009).

1. Case Study

The case study includes the descriptive method and analytical tools. The descriptive method provides information about the passive territory of the IG Deglet Nour de Tolga (DDNT) labeling project and will enable to assess the situation. Special attention will be given to oral interviews with involved stakeholders.

The case study will provide an analysis of previous studies, employing the content of interviews and email correspondence conducted with stakeholders in the territory concerned by the project. This includes project leaders (ITDAS executives), the director of ITDAS (the institution overseeing the IG DDNT project and designated as the certification and control body by MADR), and the president and vice-president of the professional group benefiting from the DDNT label (IG).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. New Agricultural Policy, Revitalization of Territories, and GI in Algeria

Despite development constraints, Algeria's rural environment is rich in heritage and quality products. This justifies the government's choice of a rural development strategy for the 2004-2013 period, which facilitated a specific revitalization of rural areas through valorizing natural and human heritage and revealing territories as new interaction spaces between public and private actors.

Through the Agricultural and Rural Renewal Policy (PRAR) in 2008, the Algerian government reaffirms the significance of revitalizing rural territories and ensuring food security while emphasizing the empowerment of local actors to implement decentralization and lead good governance in rural territories. This development policy is essential to valorizing agricultural products or those of agricultural origin, targeting what Algerian lands produce best.

The study considered two important indicators, "Geographical Identification (GI)" and "Designation of Origin (DO)," as labeling tools based on product quality recognition and typical features. Thus, the state supports the processes and local structures (Directorates of Agricultural Services at the provincial level, Chambers of Agriculture, and Technical Institutes) (MADR, 2016).

The Geographical Indication (GI) of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga is one of the three GIs awarded in 2016. A labeling project through which the territorial dynamics are described and analyzed, identifying the revealed or potential territorial resources essential for the success of its initiatives and the achievement of its objectives.

2. Inventory of Affairs of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga, Biskra Province

The study highlighted a passive territory consisting of public, private, and associative actors, including 3 companies, packaging/distribution/export units, the Provincial Chamber of Agriculture (CAW), 4 associations, the Provincial Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIW) of Biskra, 4 branches of research institutes, and the university, 4 government offices, the Municipal People's Assembly (APC), and the Vocational Training Center (CFPA) of Tolga. This constitutes the immediate environment of producers and the territorial resources in a passive state, which can be summarized as follows:

Table (1): Actors in the Territory of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga

Institutional actors	10	The actors in the territory of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga include the Directorate of Agricultural Services (DSA), the Forest Conservation (CF), the Chamber of Agriculture of the Province (CAW), and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIW). Additionally, there are the Saharan Agriculture Development Technical Institute (ITDAS), the National Institute for Plant Protection (INPV), the branch of the National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRAA), the Communal People's Assembly (APC), the Forest District (DF), and the Vocational Training Center (CFPA) of Tolga.
Economic actors	05	The actors in the territory of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga also include the SPA Sodapal, formerly the private office of dates (OND) in Tolga, SUDACO, a unit of the former state-owned OND in Biskra, EL BESKRIA Company in Biskra, cold storage facilities, representing units and export companies, and finally, the unit EL and EDAOUIA AGROTERROIR at the airport of the Province of Bejaia, as an example of sales points.
Social actors	05	The actors in the territory of Deglet Nour Dates from Tolga also include the Date Producers Association of Biskra, the interbranch association of the date sector of Biskra, the Deglet Nour Dates Producers Association of Tolga, and the Association of Date Packers, Exporters, and Distributors of Biskra (ACED).

This inventory lists the institutions and activities within the territory, along with different stakeholders, and permits the identification of all existing active or passive resources. This work has been refined through the monitoring of the DDN GI project in Tolga, enabling the distinction between existing resources and coordination and those activated by the project and the created project territory.

3. Results of the DDN Date Deglet Nour from Tolga Project Territory

Based on the collected data and received documents, including the sub-committee report, the product specifications (CdC), and the 2018 results from ITDAS, it was possible to diagnose the mobilized coordinations and revealed resources through the DDNT labeling project, to assess the degree of collective learning, quality construction, and territorial development of the project. Additionally, it allowed noting the resource revelations necessary to integrate this collective action into a long-term strategy, considering the project's time limitations.

3.1. National Construction: Mixed Governance:

For the project organization, the geographical identification system is represented by a National Labeling Committee (CNL), according to Executive Decree No. 13-260 (July 7, 2013).

This committee brings together public and associative actors who meet periodically to prepare and control the labeling process (representatives from various ministries and the Ministry of Agriculture carry out the project). It is a mixed governance. The committee prepares the specifications (CdC) and oversees all stages of the product's construction and other products concerned by labeling.

3.2. Local Construction / a Space for Reflection and Coordination:

At the local level, support is provided by an animation committee composed of members from ITDAS, representatives from the university, CAW, DSA, and other actors from the territory and

the industry. It prepares the "request for recognition" file and ensures interaction between central actors, notably national and European experts and local actors, to communicate quality processes to date palm growers. It organizes meetings and different actions necessary to reach joint decisions. This represents local governance and collective learning.

A three-day mixed workshop was organized at ITDAS in February 2014 to bring together economic operators in the date palm sector (producers, exporters, CAW, ITDAS, and DSA). This aimed to connect all the necessary professional structures for a smoother construction-recognition process for the product's quality. It was a trust-building construction that allowed the analysis of opportunities and threats, strengths and weaknesses of the sector and organizations involved in the project.

3.3. Geographical Delimitation: Local Agreement:

During the same workshop, European expertise, following field visits to several packaging units of the Algerian Deglet Nour Dates, recognized the quality of the DDNT and its differentiation and typicity due to the natural and human features of the area, including the gypsum soil and the waters of Ziban (Biskra rivers) in addition to the specific cultivation practices of date palm growers in the region (grooming, choice of regimes, etc.).

The packaging area for the product involves actors from the entire Biskra province. The origin of the DDNT is limited by the agreement of date palm growers to the area of the municipalities in the Daira named Tolga, namely Tolga, Lichana, Foughala, Bordj Benazzouz, Leghrous, Sidi Khaled, Bouchagroun, Lioua, Ouled Djellal, and Doucen.

In 2018, the production of Deglet Nour dates for these ten municipalities was estimated at 1,654,004 quintals, accounting for 56% of the province's total production, which is around 2,975,400 quintals. The initial number of applicants for the IG, in the form of a group, is about 284 (ITDAS, 2018).

3.4. Establishment of a New Association/Organizational Resource:

Indeed, producers-exporters and packers decided to create a new association to monitor the DDNT (IG) project despite the significant number of date producers' associations. This new organizational resource should play the role of the group applying for the label, cooperating with other actors to continue the project after obtaining the label. Thus, the professional group for valorizing and protecting the designation "Datte Deglet Nour de Tolga" (AVPDDDNT) was established in 2015.

Their membership in this group is summarized in the following tables and graphs:

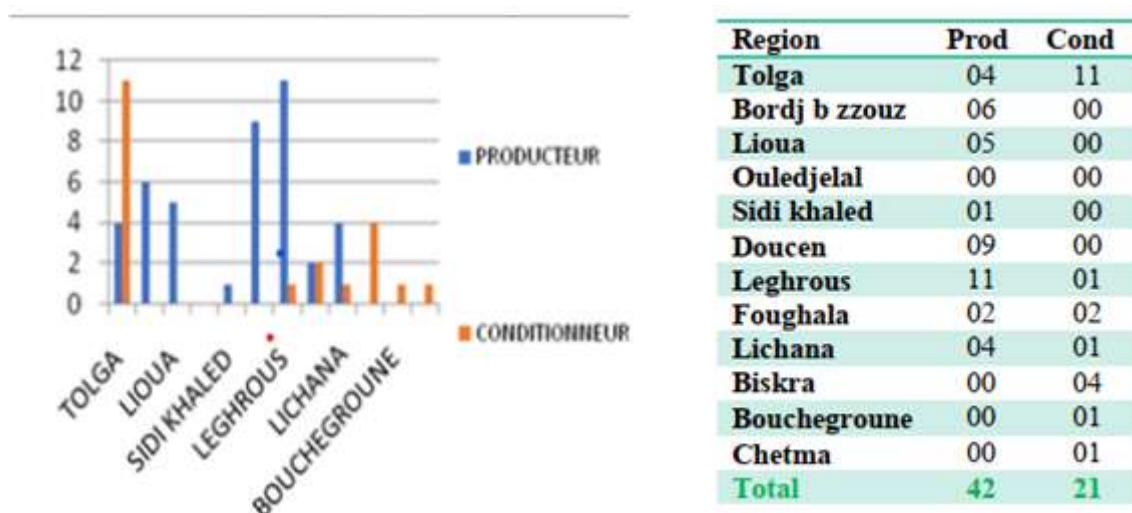
Table (2): Membership in AVPDDDNT

Year	Conditioner	Producer	Total
2016	06	15	21
2017	14	23	37
2018	1	4	5
2019	0	0	0
Total	21	42	63

Source: ITDAS 2018

Membership in the association was significant after obtaining the label in 2016-2017 but became more reserved afterward. This is because the obtained label is an internal one, while the majority of members are exporters who anticipate an export label in the future, according to officials from ITDAS and the association.

Figure (1): Sorting of members by region



Source: ITDAS 2018

3.5. Recognition File: Revelation of Specific Resources

The recognition process started with a visit to the library of the Zawia of Tolga to exploit the documents available on the history of dates. Then, the components of the CdC were established, namely, the specificity of the product and the current reputation of local resources related to Deglet Nour of Tolga.

Other meetings were organized to assist representatives from CAW, DSA, and the Technical Institute in drafting the CdC, governed by Articles 21 to 23 of Executive Decree No. 13-260 of July 7, 2013. They prepared the product recognition file for based on collected specificity data, regulations, and international standards. This resulted in a Local Subcommittee Report sent to the CNL. This is, in a way, a recognized reputation and history for the Deglet Nour product.

3.6. Tasting Meetings and Control Methods/Collective Action:

In 2016, a tasting panel was appointed to ensure compliance with the criteria and testing procedures of the CdC for DDNT. The procedures for constituting this panel and its role were defined in terms of presentations and workshops. The tasting involved Mech Degla, DeglaBeidha, and Tinicine, aiming to approve the specific characteristics of DDNT. This represents local recognition and collective learning.

The ITDAS was chosen to monitor and ensure compliance with the CDC (Article 35 of Executive Decree No. 13-260 of July 7, 2013) after preparing manuals for self-control, internal control, and external control.

4. Recognition and Obtaining the "DDNT" Logo:

The recognition of the IG label underwent two surveys, one in Algiers and the other in Biskra. The first survey targeted consumers in the Algiers region to approve (or disapprove) the notoriety of the "Tolga" appellation, while the second survey targeted date merchants in Biskra to determine if the Deglet Nour dates from Tolga are more preferred by their buyers compared to other varieties.

Based on the results of these two surveys and by the provisions of Article 30 of Executive Decree No. 13-260, which establishes the production systems for agricultural products and agricultural origin, a decree dated September 22, 2016, granted the recognition label of quality as a geographical indication (GI) for the Deglet Nour Date of Tolga "DDNT" to the association (AVPDDDNT).



Thus, the production of dates under the IG label now represents several productive Deglet Nour dates palm trees in 10 municipalities (1,260,489 palm trees), with an estimated annual production of 1,654,004 quintals. However, the quantity of Deglet Nour dates under the (IG) designation for the 42 producers initially involved in the process (later joined by 63 more) is approximately 21,600 quintals (about 1.7%). The number of declared Deglet Nour palms under IG is 27,673, accounting for 2.19%. This number remains relatively low and requires effective dissemination of information to raise awareness among producers about the labeling significance.

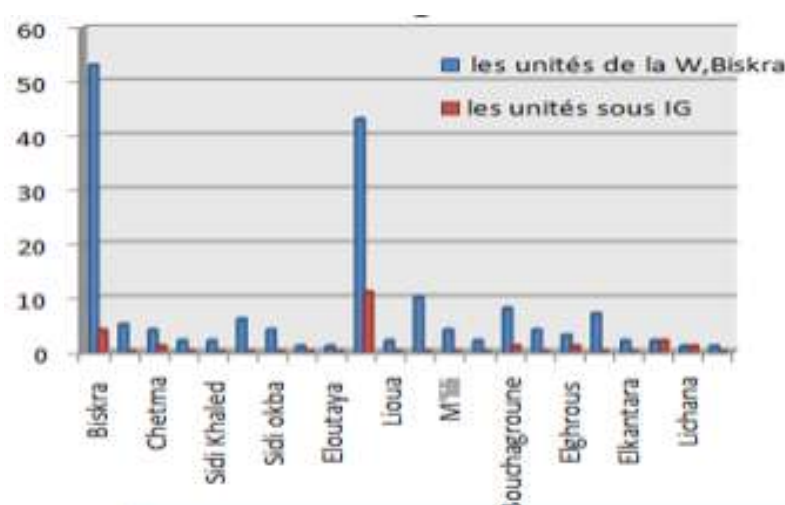
Table (3) : Distribution by municipality of farms identified under GI

Region	Number of farms identified under GI
Tolga	06
Bordj Ben Azzouz	08
Lioua	05
Ouled Djellal	00
Sidi Khaled	02
Doucen	13
Lekhrouss	16
Foughala	02
Lichana	04
Bouchagroune	03
Total	59

Source: ITDAS 2008

The table above shows many farms in the Lekhrouss region (27% of the total) whose product is recognized with the IG designation. Indeed, the area has a large market for distributing the Deglet Nour Dates. Sales areas can significantly facilitate the dissemination of the importance of the label among both producers and buyers of this product.

Figure (2): Distribution of identified packaging units under IG



Source: ITDAS 2018

The number of packaging units in the Biskra province is 167, with 27 packaging units identified under IG (approximately 16%), notably in Biskra, Loutaya, and Leghrous.

This number can be considered relatively significant for a project startup; however, it must evolve positively through regular and continuous awareness campaigns for these units, considering the significance of storage to ensure coverage of the annual product supply.

However, it is important to note the absence of data regarding the coordination of other public actors which necessary for market placement and subsequent controls, including the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Culture, the National Institute of Intellectual Property, ALGERAC, and the contribution of many other actors identified in the inventory.

The membership in the group was important after obtaining the label but did not develop sufficiently afterwards, likely due to the "local" nature of the obtained IG label. Moreover, all members, being product exporters, are working towards an export label, which requires accreditation of a laboratory (ITDAS or another) by ALGERAC. Such actions must be part of a long-term strategic vision seeking to move beyond the "recognition-construction" stage towards the "valorization" stage, given that the project has a limited timeframe.

IV. CONCLUSION

The policies of valorization through labeling and the revitalization of old territories have led to the establishment of "quality territories." which are built according to a development dynamic known as a "project." This type of strategy best enables the development of production and the resolution of its problems, as well as those of its sector. It permits a geographical territory to have an identity, a history, and a sense of belonging.

The stage of "construction-recognition" is best appreciated by the producers and local communities of the products in question, as they are the only ones authorized to perceive its adequacy according to the type of territory. Regarding the Deglet Nour dates from Tolga, a territory whose actors are somewhat dispersed but still in an active sector, the strategy would be to recover, revalorize, and support the specific ancient resources that should constitute a reference base for future projects, both for the dates and for other local agricultural products.

The results of "Deglet Nour" project indicate the emergence of "quality" in Algeria, becoming more decisive since the establishment of the CNL and the resumption of implementation work. This project has boosted the collective action of communities and actors, leading to local governance of actors, that is, territorial dynamics (Gille Allaire, 1994) and collaborative learning, according to (Sylvain Allemand, 2004).

However, for the continuation of the project's activities completed in 2016 and to prevent the latency of revealed resources, many efforts need to be made that ITDAS and the new professional association cannot handle alone. The revitalization of the territory through additional actions is necessary to move beyond the "construction-recognition" stage towards the "valorization" stage.

The "Deglet Nour" project should be a starting point for learning collective action. It should go beyond the "territory project" concept towards a sustainable territorial framework for anchoring the IG in a long-term strategy.

Labeling implies an annual positioning of a typical product in terms of quality and quantity. The project is limited in time, and its objectives should be part of lasting missions through the empowerment and participation of all stakeholders, mobilizing all necessary resources revealed by the state of affairs to successfully position this product sustainably in the local and international market, meeting the criteria defined by the specifications.

Recommendations :

As recommendations, the success and sustainability of actions similar to the "Deglet Nour" project require extensive coordination involving actors such as the professional group (AVPDDNT) and local associations, especially the former managers of OND (playing an essential role through local associations and SPA Sodapal). It would be helpful to establish a three-dimensional strategy: "products," "technology," and "market."

The "product" dimension should bring together forestry services, the APC, and the agricultural subdivision for palm grove extension and renewal programs (PNDAR, PPDR) and for raising awareness among other date palm growers about the significance of the label in coordination. ENMPV should ensure protection against diseases. Irrigation of the plantations (the Ziban region being a source of specific quality in addition to gypsum soils) will be the responsibility of hydraulic services. CFP and associations will train (on the job or otherwise) specific "territory" workforce. Finally, ACED will be responsible for organizing cold storage facilities for sufficient annual storage in the face of high demand.

The "technology" dimension targets generic quality through improved preparation of cold storage facilities (HCCP process or other more efficient processes) through actions coordinated by the Ministry of Commerce and ACED and public companies SPA Sodapal and Sudaco. It also involves the widespread use of smoking to cope with the insufficient storage capacity of products.

The "market" dimension involves actions aimed at ensuring traceability. These actions will be coordinated by the group, all associations, and distribution intermediaries to modernize Souk Leghrous and create a special "Deglet Nour" area. The Ministry of Commerce will facilitate export and control structures, while the Ministry of Finance will provide necessary financial support (RFIG).

Consider registering the IG label with IONOR and establishing an accredited laboratory under the auspices of ALGERAC, as well as setting up date palm nurseries in Biskra to protect the Deglet Nour variety.

The possession of the IG label should not be an end in itself but a collective learning process for local strengths to have a better impact on the dynamics of the sector and the territory.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IG: Geographic Identification

AO: Designation of Origin

AOC: Controlled Designation of Origin
IGP: Protected Geographic Indication
DDNT: Deglet Nour Date of Tolga
AVPDDNT: Association for the Valorization and Protection of the Denomination of Deglet Nour Date of Tolga
CNL: National Labeling Committee
CLA: Local Animation Committee
PDDAA: Plan for the Development of African Agriculture
PNIMT: National Medium-Term Investment Plan
MADR: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
ITDAS: Technical Institute for the Development of Saharan Agriculture
PRAR: Agricultural and Rural Renewal Policy
CAW: Wilaya Chamber of Agriculture
CCIW: Wilaya Chamber of Commerce and Industry
APC: Communal People's Assembly
CFPA: Vocational Training and Apprenticeship Center
CF: Forest Conservation
DSA: Directorate of Agricultural Services
INRAA: National Institute of Agronomic Research of Algeria (Biskra Branch)
INPV: National Institute of Plant Protection (Biskra Station)
OND: National Date Office
ACED: Association of Exporters and Packers of Dates
CdC: Specifications
ALGERAC: Algerian Accreditation Laboratory
PNDAR: National Agricultural and Rural Development Plan
PPDRI: Integrated Rural Development Proximity Plan
IONOR: National Institute of Standardization
RFIG: Farmer Support Credit