



Empowerment of rural women through sericulture

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Abstract

The reduction of rural poverty is a continuous paramount goal of the developing countries like India, so far various strategies (sericulture is most appropriate out of them) have been pursued to address this concern and rural empowerment creation is one of the major aspects. We ought to learn from the past experiences that suggest devising a frame work of equitable and sustainable development of her participation on a consistent basis. Keeping in view the involvement of rural women in sericulture and silk industry, their present status in society and need for their empowerment, strategies to be incorporated in the various developmental initiatives are suggested. The global scenario clearly indicates the enormous opportunities for the Indian silk industry, because India is the second largest producer of silk in the world. Sericulture provides many opportunities to rural women.

Key Words: Sericulture, Rural poverty, Sustainable development, women empowerment, integrated approaches.

Introduction

In India, agriculture and agro-based industries play a vital role in the improvement of the rural economy. Limited availability of land, limited cash returns and agriculture being confined to one or two seasons in the year have made villages to look for supporting rural industries such as sericulture (Rai, 2006). The word "Sericulture" has been derived from the word "Su" (Si) which means silk. Sericulture is basically an agro industry. It is divided in two sectors namely farm and industry (Shrivastav, 2005). Sericulture broadly comprises inter-linked activities such as food plant cultivation, maintenance to feed the silkworms, silkworm rearing to produce the silk cocoons, reeling the cocoons for unwinding the silk filament, yarn making, weaving and processing of fabric (Ahmed and Rajan, 2011). There are 10 million silkworm rearers and 0.5 million related industrial workers in the world (Seidaviet *et al.*, 2005). Asia is the top producer of silk in the world contributing 95% of the total global output. There are 58 countries on the world map of silk; bulk of it is produced in China and India, followed by Japan, Brazil and Korea (Nagaraju, 2008). Sericulture in India is a fairly organized activity and is largely rural based and labor intensive. Cultivation is spread over 22

States, covering 172000 hect. Across 54000 villages operating 258000 handlooms and 29340 power looms (Dewanganet *et al.*, 2011) Sericulture play very effective role in the utilization of the natural resources in a most effective manner for socio-economic upliftment with livelihood, employment and income generation (Malik *et al.*, 2008) Sericulture is a potential sector of the agriculture to raise economic status of the farming community and also earning foreign revenue (Thapa and Shrestha, 1999). Sericulture is an integral part of tribal life, practiced by about 1.5 lakh tribal populace in the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh (Shetty *et al.*, 2007). Fairly good numbers of references are on record about livelihood opportunities and employment generation. Tropical tasar sericulture is the rearing of wild silkworms for production of tasar silk and it provides livelihood to tribal's in India (Suryanarayana and Shrivastava, 2005). Silk industry has lot of socio-cultural and traditional linkages in India and plays a vital role on rural economy and hence, the aboriginals are practicing sericulture simultaneously with agriculture for base livelihood (Thangavelu, 2002; Mahapatra, 2009).

Opportunities for rural women in Sericulture

Women in India have been generally considered as 'Home makers' but not as those who also work for

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a livelihood to support their families. Women also from more than half of all agriculture labor in India. But, different Women studies have proved beyond doubt that women's contribution towards sericulture is quite significant. Women contribute to the family income generation in rural through sericulture to a great deal. If the rural households are to be made economically viable self sustaining units the employment and income generation by rural women need to be given utmost priority (PrabhaSekhar and Ravi Kumar 1988). Here, women play a major role in various activities of sericulture right from egg production to weaving. Income generating employment opportunities in sericulture where woman are actively participating in:-

- I. Mulberry Cultivation.
- II. Silkworm Rearing.
- III. Silk Reeling.
- IV. Weaving.

Efforts done so far in the important areas

According to Central Silk Board and major silk producing states of the country addressed several issues of women in sericulture. With major projects which focused mainly on overall development of women through sericulture. Several science and technology organizations were engaged to study the techno-economic empowerment of women under the plethora of social constraints. Some of the main issues addressed were;

- Access to land, credit and family assets through formation of women groups
- Technical awareness and silk development
- Access to marketing and marketing awareness
- Malady Remedy approach to address occupational hazards

According to the XI plan sub group report on sericulture, the important areas to be tackled are:

- Change of perception while planning, researching, implementing or evaluating Programmes.
- Providing exclusive marketing services for the women, both in on-farm and non- farm sectors.
- More women to be brought into extension services.
- Methodologies, time duration, locations and other factors of training programmers design have to be designed to the needs of the women.

- The micro finance for the women in silk industry needs serious revamping with new set of terms and conditions and the role of the intermediaries and subsidized interest rate.
- Create a mechanism to access land, decision making opportunities, and entrepreneurship.
- Sensitization of policy planners, grassroots level workers, scientists on women empowerment.
- Special care for physically challenged women, SC/STs and Widows.
- Improvement in machineries suited to women workers and greater incentive for women beneficiaries.

The National Sericulture Development Strategy for the 21st Century

Government has formulated a national policy and strategic plan for sericulture development. NGOs, the private sector including farmers, processors and traders are playing a vital role in sericulture development and their roles will be facilitated, guided and supported where necessary. The vision of the national sericulture policy and strategic plan for the 21st century is "prosperous rural communities and a beautiful country through sericulture farming". The strategy involves longterm plans intended to address major constraints, overcome weaknesses and prepare the industry to exploit the opportunities and face challenges of the 21st century. The mission is "to develop a sericulture industry that will contribute to improvement of livelihoods of the poor rural producers". To realize the vision and mission, the industry will have to constantly take care of the needs of the consumer of the century 21st century, who probably will continue to need reasonably priced but high quality silk.

Strategic Objectives

Sericulture development will be based on long term strategic actions, which are intended to create a technical base and capacity for economic and sustainable silk production in India.

The main objectives are:

- Provide an institutional framework and capacity to implement sericulture policies and strategies.



Empowerment of rural women through sericulture

- Expansion of mulberry plantations.
- Silkworm egg breeding, parent line maintenance and multiplication, egg production and marketing.
- Improvement and expansion of young silkworm rearing facilities and technology.
- Establish an effective extension delivery system for sericulture.
- Support farmers' groups to increase cocoon production and silk processing.

Integrated approaches for taking up women exclusive projects

There must be recognition of the fact that working with poor women requires much more time and investment than is possible under a time bound limited budget scheme, but projects that are long term and programmes that are consistent for longer periods have to be taken up. Such recommendations backed by the special emphasis being laid by the union and state governments on gender issues, and empower them to enjoy their economic and social independences, reward rather overdue for her untiring efforts and sacrifices in making and managing her home and the country as well.

Some of the important women exclusive approaches are:

- Establishment of women technical service centers introducing.
- Subsidized credit facility for women.
- Setting up of sericulture stores, start up expenditure.
- Establishment of women chawki centers

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