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### *Success story*

## Economic empowerment of scheduled tribes through sericulture enterprise: A way forward

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### Introduction

Sericulture in Jammu and Kashmir serves as a subsidiary occupation to farmers providing a valuable additional income through the sale of cocoons. As a village-based industry, sericulture creates employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labour fostering socioeconomic progress. Jammu and Kashmir with its favourable climate for bivoltine sericulture possesses significant potential for expanding industry. Currently, around 2,700 farming families are engaged in sericulture producing approximately 829 metric tons of cocoons worth 5.50 crore. This occupation is accessible to all categories of farmers from small and marginal producers with limited resources to larger agriculturalists. The technologies involved in sericulture are easy to adopt and well within the reach of rural communities making it feasible for all family members regardless of gender or age to participate. Given that India is predominantly an agricultural nation, alleviating rural poverty and unemployment has been a key objective of developmental planning. Emphasis on agriculture and related activities is essential for uplifting the vast rural population.

Sericulture, as an employment-generating industry, not only provides significant job opportunities but also contributes to social and economic advancement. Sericulture plays significant role in rural empowerment, inclusive growth and skill development. Importantly, involvement of women in the silk industry a crucial role in enhancing family's economic stability and educational opportunities. Sericulture optimizes resource utilization with locally available inputs and facilitates for the transfer of urban wealth to rural producers. By acting as a complementary subsidiary livelihood source, sericulture supports rural development. Strengthening research and extension systems in sericulture is critical for generating more employment opportunities, particularly for educated youth and women. Sericulture stands out as a highly rewarding endeavour. Moreover, sericulture not only generates income and employment in rural and semi-urban areas but also enhances participation among low-income and socially

underprivileged groups, with a notable impact on women's empowerment. To support and sustain the livelihoods of the economically poor, sericulture plays a pivotal role in providing employment and increasing income for weaker sections of society. Thus, transforming the sericulture industry from a subsistence operation to a modern scientifically driven system requires the attention of policymakers, administrators and industry stakeholders alike.

### Launch of Project and Support for Adopted Farmers

The Scheduled Tribe community often resides in isolated and sparsely populated regions, which can make livelihood opportunities limited. To address this challenge, a comprehensive survey was conducted in various tribal areas of District Kupwara of Jammu and Kashmir in collaboration with the Sericulture Development Department under a project entitled "Economic Empowerment of Seri-Farmers through Technology Adoption" sponsored by the Department of Tribal Affairs, Jammu and Kashmir and successfully registered over a hundred farmers initially. This effort aims to inspire neighbouring farmers to adopt sericulture as a viable and economically beneficial venture. The concerted efforts were made during 2023 and 2024 with the following key objectives:

- To introduce sericulture to the tribal community and provide comprehensive support to the adopted farmers.
- To enlighten tribal individuals, particularly women about new sericulture technologies and their benefits.
- To create additional employment opportunities, ultimately improving the socio-economic status of farmers.

### Technology Demonstration and Distribution

During the year 2023 and 2024, over a hundred farmers were provided training on various aspects of sericulture, including mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing techniques, disinfection practices, cocoon crop production and protection techniques (Plate 1).



**Plate 1:** One day farmers training programme on recent Sericulture technologies

Under the project material required for fabrication of low cost rearing hut, rearing appliances, chemicals, disinfectants, Electric lantern *etc.* for smooth conduct of silkworm rearing under scientific lines (Plate 2).



**Plate 2:** Demonstration-cum- distribution program

The project staff provided continuous support to the adopted farmers through site visits and on-the-spot assessments of their silkworm rearing practices (Plate 3a) as well as through telephone consultations when needed besides provided marketing assistance (Plate 3b).

One notable success story is that of Mr. Ali Mohd Lone, an adopted sericulture farmer, who harvested 45 kg cocoons from 100 dfls earned ₹15,450 in just 25 days. After successful conduct of rearing in the project area farmers harvested 435.01kg of cocoons generated an impressive income of ₹1,24,642.

While these initial results demonstrated that the sericulture can be a viable source of income for tribal farmers, enabling them to enhance their livelihoods. This approach not only generated employment opportunities right at the doorstep of rural communities but also aimed to curb migration from tribal areas to urban centres in search of work. With continued support and engagement, this initiative has the potential to expand sericulture (silkworm rearing) into more non-traditional areas particularly among tribal communities. This could significantly impact the socio-economic status of farmers especially women and lead to increased cocoon production in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.



**Plate 3a:** On spot examination of silkworm rearing



**Plate 3b:** Marketing of cocoons

## Conclusion

The introduction of sericulture among Scheduled Tribe communities in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir supported by the Jammu and Kashmir Tribal Affairs Department has emerged as a successful initiative. Despite being implemented on a small scale, this project has delivered substantial benefits to local farmers resulted in higher earnings from silkworm rearing. By enhancing livelihoods, this initiative has established a sustainable income source, empowered farmers and contributed to the socio-economic upliftment of the community. This article examines the impact of sericulture on these communities, highlighting the successes achieved thus far while also identifying opportunities for further development in the region. With ongoing support and investment sericulture has the potential to become a key driver of economic empowerment and sustainable development in Jammu and Kashmir in general and for Scheduled Tribe communities in particular.