



Role of Sericulture in Women Empowerment and Rural Livelihood Development

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Sericulture is a rural agro-based industry that provides significant employment opportunities for women, who form a major share of the workforce. Women actively participate in activities ranging from mulberry cultivation to silkworm rearing and silk processing, contributing to household income and improving their socio-economic status. The sector supports women's empowerment through income generation, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), government training programs, and financial assistance. With proper policy support, skill development, and market access, sericulture can serve as an effective tool for women's empowerment and sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Sericulture, Women empowerment, Rural livelihood, SHGs, Economic empowerment

Introduction

Sericulture is a labour-intensive agro-industry involving the cultivation of silkworms for silk production, widely practiced in rural India and other regions, providing flexible, home-based employment opportunities. Women constitute a major part of the sericulture workforce, often 60-70%, engaging in all stages from mulberry cultivation to reeling, weaving, and post-cocoon activities, which supports their economic participation and empowerment. This sector contributes significantly to rural livelihood development by generating income for small farmers, landless labourers and marginalized women, thereby enhancing household incomes and promoting community development (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025). Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperative models linked to sericulture have been effective in fostering women's economic independence and social awareness, while also addressing poverty and caste-based inequalities (Patil et al., 2024). Overall, with targeted policy support, capacity building, and improved market linkages, sericulture can be a sustainable livelihood strategy that advances women's socio-economic status and rural development (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025).

Women participation in sericulture activities

Women play a crucial role in various sericulture activities, contributing significantly to the entire silk production process. Women are involved in all stages of sericulture including mulberry cultivation, leaf harvesting, silkworm rearing, feeding and bed cleaning, mounting and cocoon harvesting, as well as reeling and spinning. Their maternal instincts and attention to detail make them particularly effective in nurturing silkworms and managing delicate processes like reeling (Bukhari et al., 2019).

How sericulture empowers women

Sericulture empowers women primarily through economic empowerment by providing regular income generation and self-employment opportunities, especially in rural areas where

alternative jobs are limited (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025). Women's participation in sericulture activities such as silkworm rearing, cocoon harvesting, reeling, and handicraft production enables them to contribute significantly to family income, enhancing their financial independence and decision-making power within households (Bukhari et al., 2019). The sector's labour-intensive nature and home-based work model allow women to balance domestic responsibilities while earning, fostering greater inclusion and social empowerment (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025). Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperative structures linked to sericulture further support women by facilitating access to credit, training, and markets, which strengthens their entrepreneurial skills and community standing (Patil et al., 2024).

Government support and training programs

Government support and training programs play a vital role in empowering women in sericulture by enhancing their skills, providing financial aid, and fostering community organization. Training programs organized by government agencies and sericulture departments focus on capacity building in mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, cocoon harvesting, reeling, and value addition, which improve productivity and income for women. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are widely promoted to facilitate collective action, access to credit, market linkages, and skill development, enabling women to become self-employed entrepreneurs and improve their socio-economic status. Subsidy schemes and extension services offered by the Central Silk Board and state governments provide inputs like quality seeds, equipment, and technical guidance at reduced costs, lowering barriers for women's participation in sericulture (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025). These interventions also address challenges such as limited access to technology, wage disparities, and workload by promoting gender-sensitive policies and ergonomic tools tailored for women workers (Kankanawadi et al., 2025). Overall, sustained government support combined with community-based training enhances women's financial independence, decision-making power, and long-term empowerment in rural silk-producing regions (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025).

Success stories

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) involved in sericulture have demonstrated notable success in improving rural livelihoods and fostering entrepreneurship. For example, in Karnataka, the Cluster Promotion Programme (CPP) significantly enhanced women farmers' knowledge, adoption of new technologies, and income through collective action and training, with SHG membership increasing by over 78%, leading to better access to credit and extension services (Geetha et al., 2020). In Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region, women engaged in traditional Indi silkworm rearing through SHGs gained financial autonomy and decision-making power while preserving cultural heritage, showing how sericulture can empower women economically and socially even in marginalized communities (Brahma and Basumatary, 2022).

Suggestions to improve women participation

Improving women's participation in sericulture can be effectively achieved through targeted training programs that build technical skills and awareness of improved practices, enabling women to adopt better mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing techniques. Easy access to credit and financial services tailored for women, including through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperative societies, can empower them to invest in inputs and technology, overcoming common barriers related to collateral and financial literacy (Shravanilakshmi et al., 2025). Promoting women's cooperative societies enhances collective bargaining power, market access, and knowledge sharing, which strengthens their economic position and motivation to engage in sericulture activities. Technology dissemination through local demonstrations and group discussions at women's homesteads fosters adoption of innovations while accommodating their time constraints and social norms. Overall, a combination of capacity building, financial inclusion, cooperative development, and supportive policies is essential to

maximize women's empowerment and sustainable livelihoods in sericulture (Bukhari et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Sericulture is an effective livelihood option that enhances women's economic independence and social empowerment. It provides flexible, home-based employment that supports small and marginal farmers, landless labourers, and especially women, who often constitute 60-70% of the workforce in silk production activities. With continued support through training, credit facilities, and women-friendly policies, the sector can further strengthen women's participation and contribute to inclusive rural development.

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