

Promotion of Entrepreneurship among Women through Oak Tasar Silk based Sericulture

In mountains, agriculture and agro-based industries play a vital role in the improvement of the rural economy, however, agronomic production generally is enough only for five to six months of food requirement in a year. Sericulture has emerged as the most important income generating agro-enterprise with minimum investment, low gestation period, high employment potential, and highly remunerative return. Sericulture also plays very effective role in the utilization of the natural resources. Women play a major role in various activities of sericulture right from egg production to weaving.

Sericulture (Oak Tasar silk) is one of **Appropriate Technology India (AT India)**'s



flagship programs initiated in Uttarakhand, which clearly reflects organization's synergistic approach of forest conservation through enterprise development. This program, was started way back in 1995 with a strategy to conserve old oak forests and has been continuously providing

sustainable livelihoods for local communities. AT India became the single largest producer of oak cocoons in 2003-04 in the country with a record harvest over 40 lakh Oak Tasar cocoons. Based on the experience gained and knowledge generated in the oak tasar silk sector, the organization now operate in complete silk sector's value chains and had also diversified the production into Eri and Mulberry silk. The Castor plantation coverage has been in 50-hectare land spread across the 86 numbers of villages in 4 mountain districts viz. Rudraprayag, Tehri, Chamoli and Uttarkashi. Nowadays, with the initial efforts of AT India silk sector has become one of the most accepted livelihood options for the participating households of the weaker section of the community. AT India through its activities, such as capacity building in

production activities, and services that lead to marketing of various products is present in ~1000 villages of Rudraprayag and other districts, easily one of the remotest villages of the Central Himalayan Region. It works with ~22,500 households, largely through women.

Smt. Sharda Devi, a 58 years old woman living with her husband, a son and three daughters in Sari, a village in the remote Rudraprayag district in the north central part of Uttarakhand state in India. Her husband is a daily wage labourer, and for their livelihood they were totally dependent on subsistence agriculture and dairy farming. In 2004, AT India with support from ORACLE, implemented a project for livelihood enhancement in the district, which educated and trained her on the benefits of oak tasar silk production and potential value additions. After the training programmes on the appropriate techniques of spinning and yarn weaving, she was able to spin threads out of silk cocoons and had produced a record production of yarn i.e., 15 hank in 2020, and 20 hank in 2021. Her income from selling the yarn was INR 6,000/- and INR 9,000/- in respective years. She used the income to pay off her loans, and support her children's education. Through various capacity building initiatives of AT India, she increased her yarn production from 2.5 kg in 2016 to 20 kg in 2021, resulting an increase in her income from INR 1,125/- to INR 9,000/-.



AT India seeks union between sustainable use of biodiversity and income generation from it. In doing so AT India facilitates the flow of some precious ecosystem services while enabling communities of ~150 villages of high Himalaya to produce silk from oak (*Quercus serrata*), castor (*Ricinus communis*), and mulberry (*Morus alba*). The relationship between mountain communities, and nature and its resources for subsistence living is observed to be diminishing resulting in an alienation of local community from the mountain

ecosystem. This is leading to erosion of age-old knowledge and relationship of communities with nature. AT India attempts to develop a strong relationship between community and nature. This can be integrated in sericulture based on oak tasar, eri and mulberry. The ATI has developed a producer-based



enterprise which includes procurement, processing, weaving and marketing of silk clothes from mountain farmers. The **Devbhumi** brand has added value and helped women entrepreneur position their products locally, regionally and internationally. AT India



trained a group of 35 weavers, mainly women on how to operate the handloom and weave superior quality silk fabric. These women were trained by experts on weaving intricate patterns and designs on silk fabric. At present, this group has been weaving a variety of products like shawls, stoles, sarees, muffler, and other silk fabric exported to Netherland, and other European countries fetching an amount ranging from INR 5,000/- to 20,000/- in the market. This initiative has not only contributed increased income but also given confidence, hope and motivation to many women.