

**038** **Ericulture as a Subsidiary Occupation for Women**  
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**a) Researcher's Identity**

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**b) Objectives**

The Objectives of this action research project are as follows:

- i) To examine whether it is possible to rear Eri-silk-worms and harvest the cocoons at the Academy;
- ii) To create new employment opportunities for rural women; and
- iii) To introduce a literacy and family planning programme among the rural women.

**c) Executive summary**

About 50% of our total population is women and over 90% of them are the members of rural households. They have great potential to contribute to both their families and society. At the moment their life is associated with a lot of problems both social and economic. One major cause behind these problems is their ignorance which is again the consequence of their illiteracy. They always remain involved in unpaid household activities and enjoy lower social status. Under the present socio-economic deterioration of the country, they are facing acute problems in their day-to-day life. Of them, the condition of the majority of rural women who belong to the landless families is already worst. They live much below the subsistence level resulting in extreme socio-economic problems like casual starvation and severe malnutrition.

The rural women of these landless labourers' families remain engaged in food processing and child care activities only for a few hours and have a long free but idle time everyday. They do not know how to utilise their time

for productive purpose. It is expected that given the opportunity, they could utilise this leisure time in different economic activities like poultry rearing, goat rearing, milch cow rearing, rice processing, sericulture and criculture which would not only supplement their family income but also help to improve their status in the family as well as in the society.

All the above mentioned family based economic activities except Sericulture and Ericulture require more or less a good amount of capital investment and/or hard labour. From this point of view Sericulture and Ericulture appears to be a simple economic activity which requires some skill and a little capital investment. This is considered to be suitable for the women and can be adopted as a subsidiary occupation for the rural women.

Ericulture mainly depends on eriworms. Eri-worms eat young green leaves of the castorplant. After eating green leaves, they form cocoons. The cocoons are spun into yarn by using hand operated spinning machine called 'Charka'.

Castorplants can be grown around the homestead. While its leaves are used as food of the eriworms, its seeds can also be processed into edible oil.

To test the possibility of growing eriworms and involving the rural women in Ericulture, an action Research Project on Ericulture was taken up by the Academy in November, 1980. Implementation of the project is divided into two phases: firstly, to experiment the idea of Ericulture and secondly, to spread the experimental results through expansion of the project.

#### **d) Conclusions and Recommendations**

On the basis of the progress of the project a few observations are made:

1. Castor plant does not require much space. It can be grown in the homestead areas and in the fallow land. But drought affects the growth of castor plant and causes a risk of loss.
2. The technique of rearing the eriworms and spinning the eriyarn are simple in normal temperature (25°C) but sometimes variation in temperature creates problems for the proper hatching of endiegs.
3. At this moment, the price per unit of endithread is Tk. 1.00. This price should be at least Tk. 2.00.
4. At the initial stage the members of the society faced a lot of obstacles created by the village leaders in forming the society. But as the time went on, most of the problems were solved.

5. The poor women are sincere in attending the weekly meetings and regular in their weekly savings.
6. The poor women are mostly illiterate but they depend on memory and correctly remember their total amount of weekly savings deposited in the Society.
7. All the members practise the habit of savings which they can utilize to meet their emergency needs. This makes them more interested to deposit their savings regularly.
8. Supervision by the concerned authority is essential to ensure regular repayment and proper utilization of loan.

On the basis of the above observations, it can be said that such type of economic activities would supplement the family income but high risk is involved. Similar experience has been observed in other projects. Some of those are Saptagram Nari Swanirvar Parishad Faridpur, The Christian Health and Agriculture Project and Faridpur and Bogra Seri culture nursery. The experience in the above projects shows that castor plant is required for rearing the eri-worms. The growth of this plant was found luxurious but after the passing of one year disease of the castor plant started. Not only was that, several times the endi-eggs damaged because of unfavourable weather. Besides these, Sericulture Nursery could not supply the endi-eggs on time. And the remuneration of the endi-thread was less than the labour. As a result, the two organisations stopped the said economic activity. All this experience indicates that high risk is involved in it. Therefore, as an alternative arrangement we can think of Sericulture. But we do not know how far it will fulfill our objective. It needs further experiment.