



ALCP | Alliances
Caucasus 2
REGIONAL MARKET ALLIANCES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

ALLIANCES CAUCASUS 2
SILK FARMERS FOCUS GROUP SURVEY
NOVEMBER 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Silk is a new sector for the Alliances Programme. Unlike other traditional agriculture sectors sericulture declined in Georgia thirty years ago. Despite this, there are still people in rural Georgia who remember or continue silkworm farming practice and see it as one of the additional income generating activities which encourages and supports local home-made handcrafting tradition and has a potential to be connected to the local rural tourism market. This is described in detail in the *ALCP2 Sericulture Market Research*.

METHODOLOGY

To find out farmers perspectives regarding the silkworm farming, silk cocoon production and use the ALCP2 conducted three focus groups in three regions Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli (KK) and Imereti. The focus groups' geography and its participants were chosen according to one main criteria – connection to silkworm farming in Soviet era and in recent years. The small number of FGs do not give quantitative information but is enough for qualitative analysis. There were no differences between the answers of male and female participants. All FGs participants are ethnic Georgians because of lack of any recent sericulture practice in Azeri or Armenian communities.

Table 1 FG Geography, Gender, Age, and Ethnicity

| Region/municipality /village | Kakheti / Akhmeta Municipality / Magraani Village | Kvemo Kartli / Bolnisi Municipality / Ratevani Village | Imereti / Tskaltubo & Zestaponi |
|------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|
| Gender | 3 Male & 3 Female | 7 Female | 3 Male & 4 Female |
| Age | 48-80 | 50-78 | 26-65 |
| Ethnicity | Georgians | Georgians | Georgians |

The majority of the FGs participants, from age 48 and up, said that their families were engaged in silkworm farming in Soviet times, the participants under the age 48 knew about silkworm farming from their parents/grandparents and internet/media sources. The FG participants from Kakheti and Imereti had been practicing silkworm farming during last three years, in Kakheti 2020-2021 and in Imereti 2022. The FG participants from Kvemo Kartli had been involved in silkworm farming until 1987.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SILKWORM FARMING WITH A GEDSI¹ LENS

Silkworm farming is an inclusive family activity where all members are involved regardless of their age or gender, see *Table 2* below. All FGs participants stated that during the forty days of farming for cocoon production, silkworms need maximum attention and intensive feeding, farmers rear silkworms along with other regular activities and that's why family groupwork is very necessary, women and men are equally involved in the whole process, and old people and children are involved mainly in feeding, cleaning, and harvesting.

¹ GEDSI –Gender Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion

Table 2 Division of Roles & Responsibilities in GEDSI Lens

| Activities | Women | Men | Social Inclusion |
|---|-------|-----|---------------------------------|
| Silkworm Cocoon Production | | | Old & Disabled people, Children |
| Taking care of Mulberry trees (irrigating, pruning) | X | X | X |
| Preparation of a rearing room (disinfection, shelves) | X | X | X |
| Feeding silkworms | X | X | X |
| Cleaning waste | X | X | X |
| Harvesting cocoons | X | X | X |
| Selling cocoons | X | X | |

SILKWORM FEEDING - MULBERRY TREES

Mulberry tree leaves are the only feed silkworms eat. From millions of trees and thousands of hectares of plantations only 10-20 percent survived in Georgia. According to the FGs participants, in their villages/municipalities the number of mulberry trees decreased over the last 30 years by 70-90 percent. The reasons were: mulberry tree disease and the stopping of silkworm practice. People cut the trees and used them for heating. All the participants and their villagers have at least 1 or 2 mulberry trees in their gardens. They are using neighbors' trees for free. All participants are willing to plant more mulberry trees but do not know where to buy the seedlings.

KNOWLEDGE OF SILKWORM FARMING

All participants know how to prepare the rearing room and can name the main silkworm diseases.

All of them, who practiced silkworm farming in last four years, have had a case when their silkworms died because of high temperatures or mulberry tree leaves poisoned by pesticides used in agriculture.

All participants think that a short-term training course on silkworm farming is necessary, and four out of twenty said that an online course will be better for them.

To start the farming or improve the production they need the information:

1. About the market - cocoon selling opportunities and prices, and
2. How to process and use the cocoons to make additional income

To start silkworm farming all participants need assistance in purchasing silkworm eggs and in selling the cocoons.

SELLING AND USE OF RAW SILK (COCOONS)

In 2020-2021 Kakheta FG participants sold the cocoons for twenty Gel, but this price is not acceptable for them now. For farmers an adequate price per kg of cocoon varies from thirty Gel (Imereti, KK) to fifty Gel (Kakheta).

The FG participants from Imereti and Kakheti attempted to process the cocoons by themselves and made silk filled blankets and handmade silk thread. The blankets were sold in Tbilisi, as for the silk thread, a woman from Zestaponi, who made it, said that the quality of the thread was not good, and she wants to learn more about the traditional handcraft and use of silk as they could process the cocoons and make products for sale.

Farmers lack information about silkworm by-products. Only one from total twenty participants had heard about pupae oil and silkworm skin and excrement usage.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS SERICULTURE PRACTICES

All participants agree that sericulture is a part of Georgian culture and tradition, but also say that silkworm farming is not popular anymore. Mulberry trees are available in the villages but in a small number. Only those rural people who reared silkworms in soviet times have sufficient knowledge of silkworm farming, young people lack the knowledge and interest. Farmers need information about silkworm farming practice and short training courses, including online training. All participants said that silkworm rearing is not difficult, anyone can do it, but it is hard, 24-hour work for 40 days. Also, all agreed that the use of sericulture products and making valuable handcraft products from silk should be encouraged, and availability/accessibility of learning silkworm farming and silk cocoon processing through VET colleges and online informal channels is necessary.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON SILKWORM FARMING

The main sources of information on silkworm farming for all the participants were parents and grandparents, in second place for younger people are friends/neighbors and internet sources. Only one third of participants got the information on silkworms from agriculture professionals and media. See *Figure 1*. below.

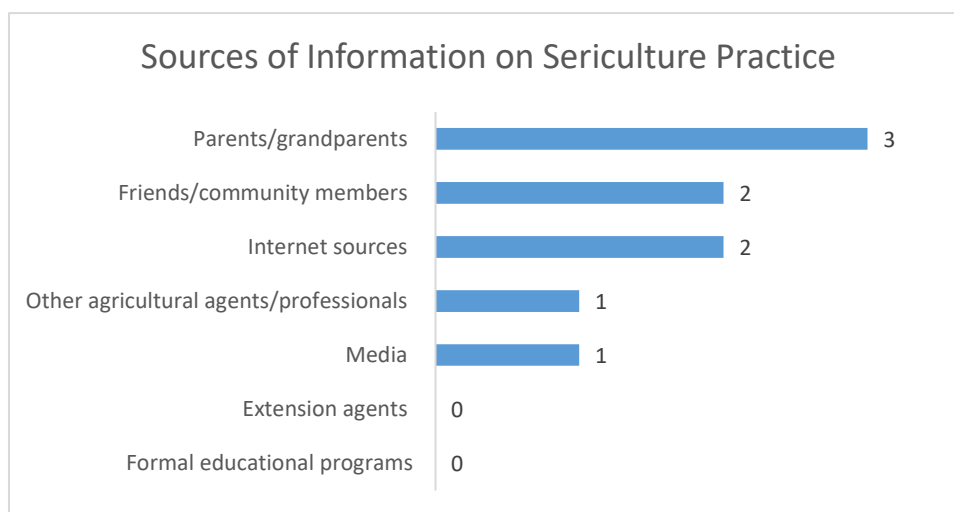


Figure 1 Sources of Information

THE MAIN CONSTRAINTS AGAINST ADOPTION OF SERICULTURE PRACTICE

The main constraints for adoption of sericulture practice all participants named were:

Lack of suitable rearing house / equipment – in the soviet times people were rearing silkworms in their houses but now most of them have renovated these rooms and would need to have separate buildings or rooms specially for silkworms.

Lack of sufficient number of mulberry trees – 1 or 2 mulberry trees are not enough to feed even 1 g silkworms which can give 4 kg cocoons. Farmers understand that, if they decide to start silkworm farming, they will need to plant more mulberry trees.

Lack of access to silkworm eggs – silkworm eggs are not for sale in Georgia. A Biology teacher, a FG participant from Kvemo Kartli, said that she wants to grow silkworms in school and involve her students but does not know where to buy silkworm eggs.

Lack of Market – The farmers main concern is lack of markets for the cocoons, and they will not start farming without knowing that someone will buy it.

Two thirds of the participants along with above mentioned constraints named:

Lack of knowledge and trainings – the farmers think that formal training courses in VET collages would be good, but they also mentioned online short courses which could be more useful in terms of time efficiency and the possibility to study from home and involve other family members as well.

Lack of support from the government and funding – the farmers mentioned that small grants for the arrangement of rearing houses, for purchasing silkworm eggs and mulberry tree seedlings would help them.

The farmers think that climatic conditions in Georgia are still suitable for silkworm farming and in case of high temperature or humidity they will be able to regulate them. *See Figure 2. below.*

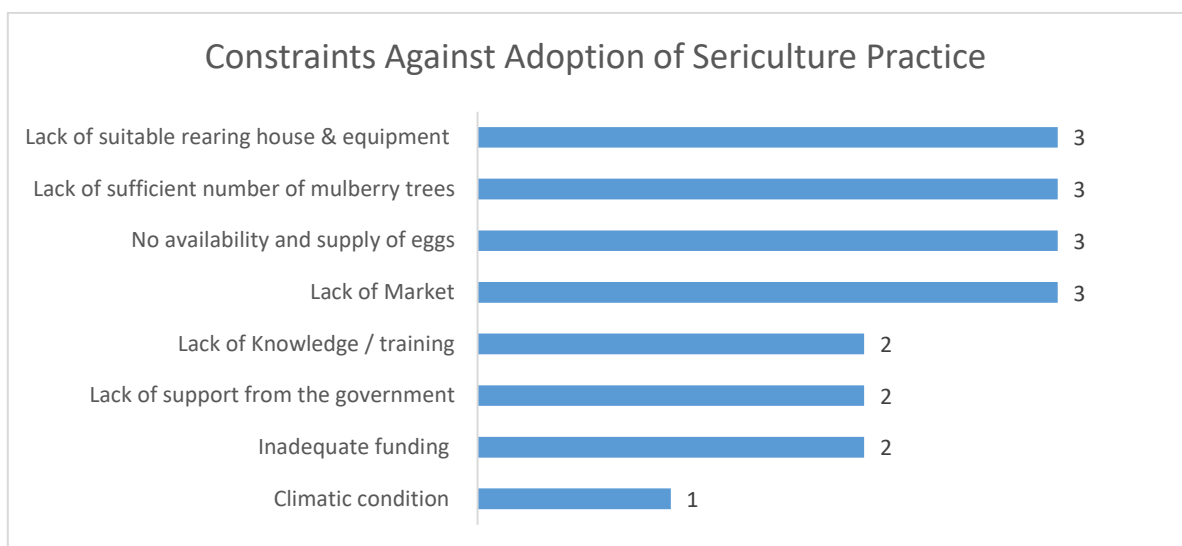


Figure 2 Main Constraints Against the Adoption of Sericulture Practice

The Silk FGs showed farmers perspectives regarding reviving the silkworm farming in rural areas. Figure 3 below describes their opinions and expectations.

| How to enhance sericulture practices in villages? | Core Market | Supporting Functions & Rules |
|---|---|--|
| | Development of Silk cocoon collection points | Information about cocoon selling opportunities / markets |
| | Government support in providing mulberry tree seedlings and silkworm eggs | Small grants for silkworm farming e.g., for equipment of a rearing room, access to consultancy & knowledge |
| Sericulture promotion and encouragement | | |

Figure 3 Farmers Perspectives for the Revival of Silkworm Farming