

BRAC played a pioneering role in the development of sericulture in Bangladesh. BRAC's sericulture enterprise was established to engage rural women in income-generating activities (mulberry cultivation, silkworm egg production, silkworm rearing and cocoon production, reeling and spinning of silk yarn, silk weaving and marketing silk).

Sericulture is a labour-intensive activity which needs very soft handling and intensive care. Silk is a high-value, low-volume commodity that is in high demand both locally and abroad. There is great potential for sericulture to be integrated with other household-based agrarian systems. Presently, there is a demand for 360 metric tons of silk in Bangladesh. However, only 60 metric tons of silk are produced each year. Thus there is tremendous scope for growth in silk production.

In 1978, BRAC began its sericulture programme as part of the Manikganj integrated project. In 1996, the environment group at BRAC conducted an investigation of BRAC's sericulture programme. It was found that the sericulture programme and activities of the Ayesha Abed Foundation that were related to silk production were socially and environmentally sustainable. The sericulture programme, now established as an enterprise, has involved rural women in income generation



Workers sorting silk worm cocoons before they are spun into yarn

and employment creation through mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, cocoon production, raw silk production and silk fabric production.

### BRAC Sericulture today

BRAC Sericulture is currently involved in introducing high-yielding varieties of mulberry trees and seasonally adopted high quality bivoltine silkworm species at 10 farms in nine different districts. BRAC is producing fine quality (20-22 denier) raw silk at Taragonj Reeling Centre, and started silk fabric production (*sarees*, *dupattas* and scarves, as well as *endi*, *balaka*, *dupion* and *muslin* fabrics) at Natore weaving centre. These are marketed mainly through Aarong and BRAC Kanon.

BRAC Sericulture supports the continuation of traditional silk reeling and spinning practices by individual

charka spinners in the northern areas (Rangpur, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Panchagorh and Bholahat) of Bangladesh.

### Quick Stats

BRAC Sericulture cultivates an improved variety of mulberry trees on 80 acres of land. The enterprise engages 1,159 women in mulberry maintenance, silk worm rearing, silk reeling, raw silk production, silk weaving and fabric production at a BRAC centre. It produces 62,000 disease free layings (DFLs), 21 metric tons cocoons, 1.6 metric tons of raw silk and 37,500 yards of silk fabric on average each year.

BRAC Sericulture has also assisted 2,724 village women to engage in individual charka spinning within their homes.