



A Six-month Progress Report for

## PROJECT MAHAMPY: PHASE II

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Improving the sustainability of *mahampy* reed weaving as a women's livelihood

March 2023

## Summary

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### Context

Madagascar has one of the highest poverty rates in the world, with 81% of the population surviving on less than US\$2.15 per day.<sup>1</sup> Livelihood opportunities are extremely limited, particularly for women who, due to deeply entrenched cultural expectations and domestic responsibilities, are restricted from accessing more lucrative livelihoods, such as lobster fishing, which are traditionally male-dominated.

In the southeast Anosy region, women traditionally weave *mahampy*, a local reed (*Lepironia mucronata*), to generate household income. An activity that can be practiced in or close to home and with a flexible time commitment, *mahampy* weaving is one of the few livelihood opportunities available to women. However, with low return on investment and poor access to markets, weaving currently fails to provide enough income for weavers to support themselves and their families' daily expenses.

Despite the economic and environmental importance of the wetlands to the region, the *mahampy* reedbeds are severely understudied. Fire, land degradation, and the unregulated harvesting of reeds threatens both *mahampy* weaving as a livelihood and the existence of a variety of threatened species and ecosystem services provided by the wetlands.

### Project Overview

SEED Madagascar (SEED) aims to improve *mahampy* weaving as a financially and environmentally sustainable livelihood activity for rural women in southeast Madagascar. Building upon the success of the previous phase, this will be achieved by improving sales at the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop (Outcome One), improving financial resilience of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative and its members (Outcome Two), and improving reedbed management for livelihood security (Outcome Three).

### Summary

This report discusses activities that have been completed since the project began in September 2022.

Achievements from the initial six months include:

- Weavers met with local resellers to increase communication and improve local sales at the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop (Output 1.1).
- Weavers attended weaving skills training to improve *mahampy* mat sales (Output 1.1).
- The Mahampy Weavers' Workshop was expanded to increase the available area to weave (Output 1.3).
- The Committee met every month to oversee Cooperative operations (Output 1.4).
- Members attended up to three departmental role training sessions and six literacy education classes to improve sales monitoring (Output 1.4).
- 71 weavers enrolled in an education saving scheme, saving monthly for annual school fees (Output 2.2).
- SEED's Conservation and Research Programme (SCRIP) concluded their research, with findings discussed in the report *Establishing an Ecological Baseline for the Mahampy Reedbeds in Sainte Luce* (Output 3.1).
- The Participatory Monitoring Programme was expanded, with five additional weavers trained to research the effect of harvesting techniques on reed regrowth (Output 3.2).

## Activities (September 2022 – February 2023)

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Activities that have been completed during the initial six months of the project are outlined below.

### Outcome One: Improved Sales at the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop

#### Reseller Meetings

To improve regional sales, meetings were held between the Cooperative and local resellers to promote the Workshop as a hub for purchasing *mahampy* mats. Increasing communication between both parties, the meetings discussed how to improve the sales potential of the mats and how the Workshop can better appeal to local buyers. Following the meeting, weavings skills sessions were delivered to improve the technical abilities of members and encourage more resellers to buy from the Workshop.

#### Weaving Skills Sessions

Weaving skills sessions were delivered to improve the aesthetic and quality of the *mahampy* mats, specifically their finish. Following the train-the-trainer model, two highly skilled weavers were selected from the Cooperative to lead the training. During the sessions, the weavers improved their sewing skills and their ability to weave the mats tightly with straight edges.

#### Expansion of the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop

Based on the weavers' feedback from Project Mahampy: Phase I, the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop was expanded to improve the functionality of the space, increasing the available area to weave. An outside shelter was constructed to enable the weavers to weave mats in their entirety at the Workshop and encourage collaboration and skill sharing between members. In December, Cooperative members planted a fence around the Workshop using pink peppercorn, a cash crop that can be sold or used for cooking.



*Cooperative members weaving in their newly constructed shelter.*

## Workshop Operations

Responsible for managing the Cooperative, the elected Committee have met once a month since project start to discuss and oversee Workshop operations. To improve the efficiency of the Workshop, members of the Stock, Sales, Materials, and Quality Control departments received up to three training sessions to improve logbook entry and sales monitoring using a new product coding system. Since September, members have also begun attending monthly literacy classes, increasing their confidence and ability to record Workshop sales. Cooperative members have shown high motivation to learn, with 88% of members attending at least one class and some now able to write their name. Classes were divided into a beginner and intermediate group in February, providing more focused support to women of varying abilities.



*Abeline (left) and Gina (right) working together during a logbook training for the Stock team.*

## Outcome Two: Improved Financial Resilience of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative and Its Members

### Education Savings Scheme

To support Cooperative members with saving for annual school fees, an education savings scheme was launched in November. Weavers who chose to participate pay a small amount to their personal savings account each month. To encourage long-term saving, participants receive a small savings interest in August, when savings are released to pay for annual school fees. Due to widespread mistrust in financial services, uptake was expected to be low. With 71 members enrolled in the scheme, participation has been significantly higher than predicted. To better support the women during the lean season, a period of particularly low food and income availability, the scheme was adapted with no payments required between January and March. Additionally, support sessions were delivered in February during which participants created a personal saving plan.

## Outcome Three: Improved Reedbed Management for Livelihood Security

### SCRP Research

During Project Mahampy: Phase I, SCRCP began research to improve understanding of the *mahampy* wetlands. Collecting data on the characteristics and biological importance of the wetlands, SCRCP aimed to *establish a previously unknown ecological baseline of the mahampy reedbeds and understand the differences, if any, amongst wetlands with different historical rates of harvest*. SCRCP concluded their research in February 2023, completing water assessments to fulfil the research aim of Phase I. The full results are detailed in the accompanying technical report, *Establishing an Ecological Baseline for the Mahampy Reedbeds in Sainte Luce*. Two drone surveys have been conducted in six wetlands since September, enabling SCRCP to monitor landscape changes in the wetlands over time.

### Participatory Monitoring Programme

The Participatory Monitoring Programme was established during Project Mahampy: Phase I, involving Cooperative members leading on research to study the effect of fire and harvesting techniques on reed regrowth. Whilst the programme previously had included five Cooperative members, the methodology has since been revised and the programme subsequently expanded. From September, research was divided across two groups with the existing group continuing to research the effect of fire on reed regrowth. In October, five additional weavers were trained to investigate the effect of harvesting methods on the *mahampy* reedbeds. The group established nine new quadrats across three different wetlands and began their research using the renewed method. Supported by SCRCP, each group has completed three bimonthly monitoring visits during Phase II, collecting data to improve sustainable management and use of the *mahampy* reedbeds.



*Project Coordinator, Paula, explaining to Cooperative member, Tojorine, how to enter the data.*

## Output Progress Bars

Below is a summary of project outputs that are either completed, in progress, or delayed.



Complete or in progress  
and on track



In progress with slight  
challenges



In progress with serious  
challenges

Output 1.1 Traditional products are marketable to <i>mahampy</i> resellers		In progress and on track
Output 1.2 Cooperative members have increased capacity to produce high quality, marketable Value-Added Products		Due to start in Project Year Two
Output 1.3 The Mahampy Weavers' Workshop is an effective space for weavers to store, sell, and weave <i>mahampy</i> products		In progress and on track
Output 1.4 Cooperative members have increased capacity to manage Cooperative operations		In progress and on track
Outcome 2.1 Reduced participation of Cooperative members in the mat money system		Due to start in March 2023
Outcome 2.2 Improved confidence and ability of Cooperative members to manage their personal finances		In progress and on track
Outcome 3.1 Established ecological baseline of the <i>mahampy</i> wetlands		Completed
Outcome 3.2 Recommendations for reedbed management developed		In progress and on track
Outcome 3.3 Reedbed management strategy developed by the community		Due to start in Project Year Two
Outcome 3.4 Improved understanding of fire mitigation practices within the community		Due to start in Project Year Two

## Next Steps

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Contributing to the following outputs, activities that will be completed during the next six months are detailed below.

### Local Markets (Output 1.1)

Additional meetings will be held with resellers to continue improving communication between the Cooperative and local buyers. Building on previous discussions, resellers will be invited to view the Cooperative's progress and discuss further ideas for increasing local sales. Continuing to improve the quality of *mahampy* mats, additional weaving skills sessions will also be delivered.

### Improving the Effectiveness of the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop (Output 1.3)

Overhead storage and shelving will be built inside the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop, enabling weavers to store a larger volume of mats and display a greater number of products. With products currently stored on the floor, overhead storage space will enable the weavers to organise the space more efficiently and use the Workshop as a shop front for sales to resellers and tourists.

### Increased Capacity of Cooperative Members (Output 1.4)

Roles and responsibilities training will continue to enhance members' confidence and understanding of their departmental roles, gradually increasing the Cooperative's independence with managing the Workshop. Literacy education sessions will continue to increase members' confidence and ability to monitor sales activities, aiming to teach the women the full alphabet by the end of Project Year One. As the women progress, the sessions will support the women to improve their reading skills.

### Reduced Participation of Cooperative Members in the Mat Money System (Output 2.1)

SEED has developed an alternative loan scheme to reduce weavers' reliance on the negative cycle of the mat-money system, an informal welfare system that often exploits vulnerable weavers. SEED will pilot the alternative loan scheme in March, providing Cooperative members with an interest-free loan, equivalent to the current market price of three *mahampy* mats. The alternative loan scheme will enable weavers to earn the full price of three mats and reinvest their profits into future production. SEED will gather feedback from the weavers before making the scheme increasingly available to Cooperative members over the next six months.

### Improved Management of Members' Personal Finances (Output 2.2)

Over the next six months, Cooperative members will continue to pay monthly instalments to the education saving scheme, building their savings until August, when they will be withdrawn to pay for annual school fees. To further improve the confidence and ability of members to manage their personal finances, financial training will begin in April. The sessions will support the women to better manage their income, invest their money into their business, and prepare for times of financial hardship.

### Reedbed Management (Output 3.2)

Supported by SCRP, weavers will continue to monitor the wetlands bimonthly, gathering data to assess the effect of hire and harvesting technique on reed regrowth. Two additional drone surveys will be conducted.



*Cooperative member, Edwige, measuring reed density.*

## Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

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During the first six months, all project activities were delivered according to plan and budget.

Below is an overview of participant information collected to date:

- The Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative includes 112 members. Since the start of Project Mahampy: Phase II, no members left the Cooperative.
- The age of members ranges from 21 to 72, with an average age of 40.
- The Cooperative is divided into five sub-cooperatives: *Mahefa* (8 members), *Fanatenana* (26 members), *Soamandroso* (23 members), *Taratsy Mahavotsy Mpandray* (30 members), and *Soa Gny Rary Ste Luce* (25 members).
- Each member fulfils a departmental role: the majority of the women belong to the Cleaning department (26%), followed by Sales (21%), Stock (20%), Materials (17%), and Quality Control (16%).

Attendance has been monitored for all meetings, gatherings, and training sessions to ensure members are equally represented, and to respond to changes in an appropriate and timely manner. For instance, monitoring of the literacy education classes revealed that attendance was dropping in January. It was found that, although the women were still motivated to learn, many had to tend to more immediate needs during the lean season, and were therefore not able to attend sessions. Consequently, additional resources were created to facilitate self-study at home, with more flexible hours, enabling women to continue their learning process.

Furthermore, rigorous sales monitoring by the Sales team has provided insights into the Workshop's monthly income. The new product coding system has also enabled a more in-depth analysis of sales per product. Currently, these data are being analysed by SEED and results will be shared regularly with the Cooperative to inform strategic choices.





*Cooperative member, Jacqueline, weaving in front of the Workshop.*

## References

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<sup>1</sup>The World Bank (2022). The World Bank in Madagascar: Overview.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar/overview>