



A 12-Month Report for
PROJECT MAHAMPY PHASE II

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

September 2023

Summary

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.¹ 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 support the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative to increase the income generated from *mahampy* reed weaving. Building upon the success of the previous phase, SEED is supporting the Cooperative to improve sales at the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop (Outcome One), improve the financial resilience of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative and its members (Outcome Two), and improve reedbed management for livelihood security (Outcome Three).

Summary

This report discusses progress made since Phase II of Project Mahampy project began in September 2022, with a focus on activities completed since March 2023.

Building on success achieved during the first six months of the project (September 2022 – February 2023), achievements of activities continued throughout Year 1 include:

- Weavers attended 12 months' worth of literacy training sessions (Output 1.4)
- 71 weavers participated in 10 months of the education saving scheme, and redeemed their savings for annual school fees (Output 2.2)
- The first pilot round for the alternative loan scheme was completed with five weavers, with all loans successfully repaid (Output 2.2)
- 10 women completed a pilot of seven sessions for financial literacy training (Output 2.2)
- The ecological baseline report on *mahampy* wetlands was completed by SEED's Conservation Research Programme (SCRIP) (Output 3.1)
- 10 weavers involved in the participatory monitoring programme have completed 12 months of wetland monitoring surveys (Output 3.2)

Progress Detail

During the first six months of Phase II, significant progress was made under Outcome One. Main achievements between September 2022 and February 2023 include improving the marketability of traditional products to *mahampy* resellers. Following two meetings held between weavers and resellers and the delivery of two technical weaving sessions to improve the quality of *mahampy* mats, resellers have since continued to visit the Workshop monthly to buy *mahampy* mats.

To further encourage sales through the Mahampy Weaver's Workshop, an extension was built to improve the functionality of the space, and weavers attended up to three training sessions on departmental roles and responsibilities to improve Workshop operations.

Following on from these activities, progress made in Project Mahampy Phase II, Year 1, with a focus on activities completed between March 2023 and August 2023 are outlined below.

Outcome One: Improved Sales at the Mahampy Weavers Workshop

Capacity to manage Cooperative operations

Since September 2022, the 32 elected Committee members, responsible for the Cooperative, have continued to attend monthly Committee meetings to govern Workshop operations, with an average attendance of 80%. In the last six months, the Committee has focused on managing Cooperative funds, which are generated by weavers contributing 10% of profit from all sales made through the Workshop. These funds are currently used for condolences, a tradition in Malagasy culture in which funds are paid out to members by a way of support when a family member has passed. The Committee is also responsible for ensuring each Cooperative member is performing relevant duties. In July 2023, to remove any tensions between members and improve Workshop efficiency, the Committee made the decision to let go Cooperative members not fulfilling the designated roles and responsibilities.

Four meetings with the whole Cooperative were held in Year 1, with an average attendance of 82%. Cooperative-wide meetings aim to support a collective ownership of the Cooperative and its operations, disseminating results of Committee decisions and allowing each member to participate in discussions.

Additionally, 11 months of literacy classes have been delivered. Of all members in the Cooperative, 89% attended at least one class, and 32 members attended six or more sessions. Sessions covered writing the alphabet, and most weavers in the Workshop are now able to write their names and do so when signing the sales logbook. As a result, the weavers are now able to record sales, stock, and income in logbooks, which has reportedly resulted in increased confidence in their roles.



Cooperative Members attending a literacy training session in the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop extension.

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

Alternative Loan Scheme

The pilot for the alternative loan system launched in March 2023, providing weavers with loans sufficient to cover immediate costs, such as food or medication, as well as invest in *mahampy* reeds to weave new mats. Under the new system, when mats are sold, weavers are to pay back 10% of income to the Cooperative, 20% towards repaying the loan, and keep 70% as profit.

Five weavers participated in round one of the alternative loan scheme pilot and each received a loan of 10,000 Ariary, roughly three times the amount of a mat money loan, in March 2023. Feedback collected at the end of Year 1 revealed that all five participants wove and sold nine to 12 mats, with each Cooperative member having repaid the loan within six to eight weeks. All weavers reported the loan was useful for covering the cost of food and reeds, and paying the loan off in a timely manner was easily attainable.

Feedback confirms the weavers involved are no longer relying on the mat money system. Following this success, the pilot continued, doubling the loan amount, which was given to an additional five participants. The loan amount increased in response to feedback from the weavers on the current market of *mahampy* reeds, reporting that the price had increased, quality had decreased, and there is a long waiting time to harvest.

Financial management

To support Cooperative members with saving for annual school fees, an education savings scheme was launched in Year 1. The scheme encouraged 71 weavers to save consistently over 10 months. As an incentive, a 5% bonus of the total amount each weaver saved under the scheme was distributed to those who saved monthly, with exceptions made during the lean season, during which there is particularly low food and income availability. Around 20% of women involved qualified for the bonus. Savings were released in September 2023, when school fees need to be paid.



Say Rosemene, a Cooperative member, presenting work in a financial literacy training session.

The average amount saved per weaver was around 25,000 Ariary. School costs for tuition range from 10,000 Ariary to 90,000 Ariary, and additional costs for copy books, stationery, and uniforms can be up to 60,000 Ariary. Two weavers saved the full amount to cover both fees and equipment costs to send their children to school. Although the full amount was not raised by most weavers involved, savings contributed to making the cost of schooling more attainable. Since finishing the saving scheme, feedback suggests Cooperative members are more aware of the benefits of participation and have expressed excitement to start the next scheme.

To improve weavers understanding of personal financial management, a pilot financial literacy training was implemented with 10 participants. The pilot consisted of seven sessions, which included topics such as understanding and planning household spending, understanding budgeting and saving, investing in one's business, and long-term financial planning. Results from analysis of the baseline and endline Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey revealed the largest knowledge increases were in areas including how expenses differ throughout the year, how important it is to invest in one's business, and the percentage of women who plan ahead for times of financial strain. Understanding these topics is integral to participants' ability to improve household financial management. As many of the weavers in Project Mahampy are married to lobster fishers, many households experience particularly low income during the lean season, from January to April, when lobsters are not caught or sold in Sainte Luce. By understanding seasonal fluctuations in income, alongside different ways to prepare for lean financial times, weavers have gained knowledge in how to adapt habits by saving or investing funds during more lucrative seasons.

Outcome Three: Improved Reedbed Management for Livelihood Security

SCRIP Research

Since September 2022, the SCRIP team completed six water assessments in the *mahampy* wetlands (S9, S11, S14, S17, S21, S26). In May 2023 this data set was compiled in an ecological baseline report, contributing towards the understanding of the characteristics and biological importance of the wetlands. Alongside learnings from the Participatory Monitoring Programme, these results will inform the development of a conservation management strategy for the *mahampy* wetlands in Project Year 3.

To support this research, 24 aerial drone surveys were completed, four for each of the six *mahampy* wetlands being monitored. Drone surveys were conducted every three months in order to monitor landscape changes over time. Results from the Participatory Monitoring Programme and aerial drone surveys during Year 1 were analysed and included in the September 2023 Technical Report.

Participatory Monitoring Programme

10 weavers led research for the past 12 months to analyse the effects of harvesting techniques and fires on the regrowth of reeds in five *mahampy* wetlands (S9, S11, S17, S21, S26). Research investigated harvesting techniques, and which technique led to faster regrowth rates of *mahampy* reeds. The September 2023 technical report reviewed the data collected over the past 12 months. Preliminary analysis concluded that pulling the reeds out, rather than cutting the reeds, leads to faster regrowth, unless the reeds had been affected by fires, in which case there is no effect of harvesting technique on regrowth rates.

This data set is being collected to inform the development of a conservation management strategy for the local community, aiming to secure *mahampy* weaving as a livelihood through the sustainable management of *mahampy* reedbeds.

The Participatory Monitoring Programme is supporting the first women partaking in ecological research in Sainte Luce, equipping the participants with the skills and knowledge to conduct and lead research efforts. The weavers participating reported increased confidence in using data collection tools, and increased knowledge about the wetlands as well as the surrounding environment.

Output Progress

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		In progress and on track
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

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

During Year 1 of Project Mahampy: Phase II, SEED followed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework to enable the project to remain responsive to emerging challenges and learning.

Below is an overview of updated participant information collected in August 2023:

- The Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative now includes 82 members.
- The age of members ranges from 20 to 71, with an average age of 43.
- The Cooperative is divided into five sub-cooperatives: Mahefa (7 members), Fanatenana (21 members), Soamandroso (15 members), Taratsy Mahavotsy Mpandray (21 members), and Soa Gny Rary Ste Luce (18 members).
- Each member fulfils a departmental role: the majority of the women belong to the Cleaning department (23%), followed by Sales and Stock (21% each), Quality Control (18%), and Materials (17%).

Attendance for all meetings and training sessions has been recorded, ensuring each Cooperative member is represented and SEED can monitor interest and demand for project activities.

Mahampy Weavers' Workshop Sales Logbook

Implementing a system of coding products and weavers has allowed Cooperative members to record sales data in a logbook and attribute sales to particular weavers. The sales data from Year 1 will inform the average baseline level of Workshop income and inform targets for Year 2 and 3. The total of all sales recorded by weavers in the Workshop since September 2022 is 4,249,000 Ariary. The sales from the last six months of Year 1 increased by 42% from the first six months, highlighting process towards improving sales.

However, analysis of the sales logbook also highlighted gaps in recordings of sales to resellers, suggesting actual income from the Workshop is likely higher. Learnings from this analysis displayed the need for further training in roles and responsibilities for the stock and sales departments. These trainings will be implemented in Year 2 to improve the accuracy of the sales logbook.

Financial Literacy Training KAP Survey

The baseline and endline KAP survey for the financial literacy training pilot covered four main topics including spending, saving, investing, and financial planning, and evaluated knowledge, attitudes, and practices for each topic. The results for both the baseline and endline surveys were compared and analysed to assess the impact of the financial literacy sessions, and inform any adjustments needed before continuing and expanding the sessions.

In the baseline, 40% of weavers responded they had 'a lot' of knowledge on how to invest in their *mahampy* weaving business. At the endline, this figure increased to 89%. Additionally, weavers that agreed they had 'a lot' of knowledge on how their income and expenses differ throughout the year increased from 30% at baseline to 100% at endline. A stronger understanding of fluctuations in household income and different ways to save and generate funds, such as investing, aims to support weavers to be more informed and prepared for lean financial times.

To encourage participants to partake in financial management practices, the training sessions included discussions on why these practices are important. The survey showed an increase in weavers that reported it was 'very important' to invest money in their businesses and plan ahead for when they have less income. The largest increase regarded the importance of investing in *mahampy* weaving, increasing from 30% at baseline to 67% at endline.

In practice, the percentage of weavers who 'always' or 'often' plan daily household spending before buying an item increased from 50% to 78%. Additionally, in the baseline survey 60% of respondents agreed they 'never' plan ahead for lean financial times. In the endline survey, this figure increased, with 66% of respondents agreeing they 'often' or 'always' plan ahead for times of lower income. The increase in both these responses is a positive

indication that weavers will be better prepared to manage household spending and build savings in advance of the upcoming lean season.

Next Steps

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

Local Markets (Output 1.1)

To further improve the quality of *mahampy* mats in the Workshop, technical weaving sessions will be delivered. Following a train-the-trainer model, the sessions will be led by highly-skilled selected weavers in the Cooperative.



A selection of traditional Mahampy baskets and other products.

Value-Added Products (Output 1.2)

Following the reestablishment of tourist markets over the past year following Covid-19, a series of training sessions on Value-Added Products (VAP) are scheduled for Year 2, aiming to generate higher profits for the Cooperative.

Increased Capacity of Cooperative Members (Output 1.4)

To continue building the capacity of weavers to independently manage Cooperative operations, the training sessions on departmental roles and responsibilities will resume. The sessions aim to increase each department's understanding of their roles, focusing on topics such as recording sales and monitoring stock. Literacy education sessions will also continue, further developing weavers' confidence and ability to record information and understand Workshop operations.

Improved Financial Resilience of Cooperative Members (Output 2.1 and 2.2)

The education saving scheme will continue in Year 2, giving all weavers the opportunity to pay in monthly instalments to a savings pot which will be redeemed next September, when school fees are due. The scheme will support women to adopt a monthly savings routine. Following the pilot for the financial literacy training in Year 1,

the results of the pilot will inform the development of a wider training initiative to reach more members of the Cooperative. The training will focus on the weavers' ability to record and manage expenses and increase confidence in savings and investments. Both the education saving scheme and financial literacy training aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of financial management, building the foundation for financial resilience.

With the aim to reduce Cooperative members' participation in the mat money system, pilot rounds for an alternative loan scheme will continue. The pilot aims to gain a deeper understanding of the most effective loan scheme for weavers, including the loan amount, expected payback rates, and the best time of year to implement. By the end of Year 2, the Cooperative will be supported to independently run the loan scheme to a wider group of weavers.

Reedbed Management (Outputs 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4)

Over the next six months of the project, participatory monitoring trips to collect data on regrowth rates of *mahampy* reeds in the wetlands will continue, alongside two drone trips. The aim of the data collection by the participatory monitoring trips is to inform a sustainable reedbed management strategy which will be disseminated in the local community.



Two members of the Participatory Monitoring Programme measuring and recording reeds in the wetlands.

Conclusion

Within the first 12 months of Project Mahampy: Phase II, significant progress has been toward achieving all outcomes. Activities such as the literacy training, roles and responsibilities training, and Committee and Cooperative meetings, are continuing to build the confidence and ability of members to independently manage Cooperative operations.

During Year 1, activities to improve the financial resilience of members of the Cooperative were implemented. The financial literacy training proved successful with members building knowledge in how to invest in their business, and a higher number of participants reporting to plan ahead for financially lean times by endline.

Results of the KAP survey and feedback will inform a wider Cooperative training initiative over the next project year. The alternative loan scheme proved successful for the five original participants in reducing the need for reliance on the mat money system. The pilot will continue into the second year of the project, continuing to build knowledge on how to implement a more effective loan scheme, taking into consideration local challenges. The education saving scheme led to a collective savings pot of just over 1,900,000 Ariary from the 70 weavers involved and will be continued in Year 2 of the project, when all weavers will have the opportunity to start saving monthly from October 2023.

To improve the capacity of Cooperative members to produce high quality, marketable Value-Added Products, a series of skills training sessions will be delivered in Year 2. Through a train-the-trainer model, further training sessions on technical weaving training sessions will also be implemented.

The first technical report on the data collected by the participatory monitoring data collection in the wetlands has been completed, contributing towards the development of a reedbed management strategy over the next two years of the project. Monthly participatory monitoring trips, led by weavers and supported by SCRP, will continue in Year 2 of the project.

Financial Report

Overall, 88% of the total budget for Year 1 was spent, with underspend due to cost savings achieved during the implementation of certain project activities. In particular, reductions in transportation costs can be attributed to streamlining transport with other project teams. Spending in activities were lower than expected due to reduced participation in certain training sessions, and costs saved during the construction of the Workshop extension. Underspend will be carried over into Year 2 implementation.

Project Mahampy, Phase II: Year 1 Expenditure			
Item	Detail	Y1 Total Budget	Y1 Total Spent
Human Resources	Project staff, associated staff costs	£ 9,740	£ 9,976
Activities	Project setup, Mahampy Workshop, Mahampy Cooperative, routes to market, community engagement and education, reedbed monitoring and analysis	£ 6,158	£ 4,154
Travel & Subsistence	Project team field travel & subsistence, regional travel & international flight allowance	£ 2,451	£ 1,508
Communications	Mobile, internet, printing & translation	£ 549	£ 486
Running Cost Contribution	Organisational management, compliance & running cost contribution (15% of total)	£ 3,319	£ 3,319
TOTAL		£ 22,217	£ 19,443

References

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