



24-Month Report for

PROJECT MAHAMPHY

Improving the Sustainability of Mahampy Reed Weaving as a
Women's Livelihood

October 2024

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 are restricted from accessing more lucrative livelihoods such as lobster fishing, which are traditionally male dominated. These limitations stem from deeply entrenched cultural expectations and domestic responsibilities.

In Anosy, the southeast region of Madagascar, weaving is one of the few livelihood opportunities available to women. Traditionally women weave *mahampy*, a local reed (*Lepironia mucronata*), into mats and baskets to generate household income. This activity can be practiced in or close to home and with a flexible time commitment. Despite its cultural significance and accessibility, the economic viability of *mahampy* weaving is challenged by low return on investment and poor access to markets, resulting in insufficient income to support the daily expenses of weavers and their families.

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, a group of women in Sainte Luce who rely on *mahampy* reed weaving for a livelihood, to increase the income generated from *mahampy* products. 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

Project Mahampy Phase II, which began in September 2022, has made significant progress under all three outcomes. This report discusses progress made during the first two years of Phase II, with a particular focus on the last six months (March 2024 – August 2024).

The main achievements of the first 24 months of this project include:

- Meetings with resellers have been completed, and advertising cards have been developed to increase sales potential through the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop (Outcome 1).
- Three technical weaving sessions were delivered by skilled members of the Cooperative through a train-the-trainer approach, sharing weaving knowledge and techniques. The last session, in November 2023, was attended by 55% of weavers in the Cooperative (Output 1.1).
- One workshop on value-added products was delivered through a collaboration with an external product development specialist, attended by 54% of Cooperative members (Output 1.2).
- An external extension was added to the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop, and shelving and storage solutions were installed inside, enhancing the overall functionality of the space (Output 1.3).
- Weavers attended six training sessions on departmental roles and responsibilities to improve Workshop operations. On average, the attendance rate of Cooperative members in departments pertinent to the training, was 72% (Output 1.4).
- Weavers completed 24 months worth of literacy training sessions (Output 1.4).

- During Project Year One, 63% of weavers participated in the education saving scheme for 10 months and redeemed their savings to pay annual school fees. The scheme was repeated in Project Year Two, with 53% of weavers taking part (Output 2.2).
- Two rounds of the alternative loan scheme have been completed, with all loans successfully repaid in both instances. A third round was initiated in April 2024 (Output 2.2).
- A total of ten women completed a pilot of seven sessions for financial literacy training, and a new curriculum has been developed (Output 2.2).
- Altogether, ten weavers involved in the participatory monitoring programme have completed 24 months of wetland monitoring surveys (Output 3.2).
- Data from the participatory monitoring programme and aerial drone surveys were used to inform two technical reports on the health of the *mahampy* wetlands (Output 3.2).

Progress Detail

The project progress outlined below focuses particularly on activities completed between March to August 2024.

Outcome One: Improved Sales at the Mahampy Weavers Workshop

Workshop Operations

Weavers attended two literacy sessions each month, with an average attendance of 25 members per session. In March 2024, a significant step was taken towards Cooperative independence by electing a skilled member of the Cooperative to lead these training sessions. This change was aimed at encouraging members to invest their own time and knowledge into the Cooperative's development. Alongside this leadership shift, a new literacy curriculum that was tailored to the local context, was introduced. This curriculum focused on essential everyday vocabulary for weavers and was designed with current literacy levels and international adult training guidelines in mind. SEED provided lesson plans and resources to support the teacher in delivering the curriculum effectively.

To further support the Cooperative's independence, training on departmental roles and responsibilities has continued. Over the past six months, two training sessions were held and were attended by 84% of the sales and stock department members. The sessions supported weavers to accurately record sales and manage new commissions.

Since March 2024, there have been three meetings between the 29 Committee members and three meetings with the whole Cooperative, bringing together 72 members. The Committee meetings were focused on operational management, including overseeing finances, ensuring members fulfil departmental roles and responsibilities, and making decisions about significant activities like large commissions. All of these Cooperative meetings provide a platform for all members to voice any concerns and for Committee members to share new information or decisions.

In August 2024, new shelving units were installed in the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop, offering enhanced protection and a more professional display for *mahampy* products. The shelving enhances product appeal to resellers and tourists, boosting local sales.

Cross Visit

In April 2023, ten women from the Mahampy Weavers Cooperative participated in a cross visit, gaining insights and drawing inspiration from four different *mahampy* weaving cooperatives that work locally. During the visits, the weavers shared knowledge on new finishing techniques for products, managing commissions from local shops, standardising product prices, and the importance of quality control and self-management in the Cooperative. The visit concluded with a tour of several boutique shops in Fort Dauphin that stock *mahampy* products, where the weavers were able to explore potential new market opportunities and better understand local quality standards.

Value-Added Products

In March 2024, a consultant from the product development and capacity building organisation, Tamalà, visited the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative to collaborate on a new range of value-added products. The new products were designed for ease of packaging and transporting, increasing access to the local tourist market and regional and international reseller markets. The development process provided inspiration for diversifying and modifying *mahampy* products and supported the professional capacity of weavers to collaborate with partners. As a result of this collaboration, the Cooperative received a series of commissions from Tamalà and The Imiloa Collective, a company based in the USA.



A selection of the value-added products developed with Tamalà

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

Financial Management

A total of 38 members began participating in the education savings scheme in September 2023, representing 53% of the Cooperative. Savings were distributed at the end of August 2024 to align with the start of the school year. Member participation in the scheme varied in both amount and consistency. On average, each member saved 43,000 Malagasy ariary (MGA), with contributions ranging from a minimum of 2,000 MGA to a maximum of 220,000 MGA. The annual cost of sending a child to an Ecole Primaire Publique (EPP), the equivalent of a primary school, is 60,000 MGA. On average, members saved for six out of the 11 months of the scheme, with 16% of members making contributions every month.

To further support weaver's ability to manage household finances, SEED has developed a new financial literacy training curriculum. Acknowledging the feedback and results from the financial literacy training pilot during Project Year One, the new curriculum is designed to build upon existing financial management knowledge. It incorporates tools and structures tailored to the local context and aligns with the participants' capabilities. The updated curriculum will be introduced in Project Year Three.

Alternative Loan Scheme

Established in Project Year One, the alternative loan scheme has been reintroduced to support Cooperative members during the lean season (January to April), when funds for purchasing *mahampy* reeds for weaving are scarce. The scheme provides loans to cover immediate costs, with a repayment structure designed to enable income generation while repaying the loan. For the past six months, sub-cooperative presidents have managed the distribution of loans and the collection of repayments. By involving the sub-cooperative presidents in overseeing the loan scheme, the Cooperative aims to develop independent management structures that are sustainable beyond intervention of SEED staff.

Outcome Three: Improved Reedbed Management for Livelihood Security

Participatory Monitoring Programme

Since the project began, a group of ten weavers have led 24 months of data collection across five wetlands. The programme sought to understand the most sustainable form of *mahampy* reed harvesting by assessing which of two harvesting techniques, referred to as pulling and cutting, led to the quickest regrowth of reeds. This data collection was supported by eight areal drone surveys of the wetlands, analysing changes in the landscape over time and presenting a broader assessment on the health of the wetlands.

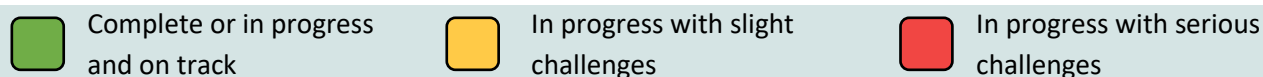
After two years of data collection, the Participatory Monitoring Programme concluded in August 2024. With support from SEED's Conservation Research Programme, analysis of the data has been completed. A technical report on the sustainability of reed harvesting has been finalised. During Project Year Three, the technical report will be used to inform a community natural resource management strategy, created in collaboration with members of the local community.













Three Cooperative members in the participatory monitoring programme in the mahampy wetlands

Output Progress Bars

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



Output 1.1 Traditional products are marketable to <i>mahampy</i> resellers		Completed
Output 1.2 Cooperative members have increased capacity to produce high quality, marketable Value-Added Products		Completed
Output 1.3 The Mahampy Weavers' Workshop is an effective space for weavers to store, sell, and weave <i>mahampy</i> products		Completed
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		Completed
Outcome 3.3 Reedbed management strategy developed by the community		Due to start in Project Year Three
Outcome 3.4 Improved understanding of fire mitigation practices within the community		Completed

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

During the last 18 months of Project Mahampy: Phase II, SEED followed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework to ensure the project remains responsive to emerging challenges and learnings.

Below is an overview of updated participant information:

- The Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative now includes 72 members.
- The age of members range from 20 to 72, with an average age of 44.

- The Cooperative is divided into sub-cooperatives based in the five local communities Cooperative members live within: Mahefa (7 members), Fanatenana (18 members), Soamandroso (7 members), Taratsy Mahavotsy Mpandray (19 members), and Soa Gny Rary Ste Luce (21 members).
- Each member fulfils a departmental role; members are roughly equally dispersed between the Sales (22%), Quality Control (22%), Stock (21%), Materials (19%), and Cleaning departments (15%).

In Project Year One, baseline and endline surveys from the literacy training programme indicated low levels of learning, with attendance records showing inconsistent participation. To address these issues, participant feedback on preferred content, along with research into international best practices and local needs, guided the creation of a new literacy curriculum. This curriculum was designed to improve the relevance and effectiveness of literacy skills training within the Cooperative. In March 2024, a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) baseline survey was conducted, followed by the introduction of the updated curriculum. By August 2024, a midline assessment with a randomly selected group showed improvements in participants' ability to write their own names and increased confidence in reading new words.

To ensure activities remain relevant and effective, regular informal focus groups, surveys, and interviews have been conducted with Cooperative members to assess impact and guide improvements. Feedback on the literacy curriculum, participatory monitoring programme, and financial initiatives such as the alternative loan and education savings schemes has been closely reviewed, informing adjustments for better participant outcomes. Attendance records are also analysed to assess engagement levels. This approach ensures the activities stay relevant and responsive to the needs of Cooperative members.

Financial performance also improved significantly over time. In Project Year One, the Cooperative achieved total sales of 4,277,500 MGA. The most frequently sold product was priced at 15,000 MGA, while the average sale price was 11,346 MGA. In Project Year 2, the Cooperative saw a significant increase in total sales, reaching 6,809,500 MGA. During this period, the mode of product sales remained at 15,000 MGA, but the average sale price rose to 17,733 MGA. This represents a 59% increase in total sales and a 56% increase in average sale price. This growth highlights the Cooperative's success in developing value-added products, which are priced higher and targeted at more lucrative markets, such as the tourism sector. Additionally, the increase in sales may also be attributed to an enhancement in the quality of traditional products, allowing for higher price points.



A group of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative Members outside the Workshop

Next Steps

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

Business Skills and Routes to Market (Output 1.2)

To enhance business operations and expand market reach, strategies will be developed and implemented to provide business training focusing on team leadership, sales strategies, and market dynamics. These strategies will be informed by international best practices in business training and previous learnings from the Cooperative's activities in Year 1 and Year 2. In addition, research will be conducted to identify and establish effective routes to market, with findings from this market analysis contributing to strengthening the Cooperative's market presence and attracting new business opportunities.

Value-Added Products (Output 1.2)

Building on the successful development and commissioning of value-added products, future efforts will concentrate on further product innovation. A market analysis will be conducted to identify in-demand products, which will guide the planning of these activities. The primary goal is to expand the range of products within the Cooperative to reach new markets and secure additional commissions.

Increased Capacity of Cooperative Members (Output 1.4)

Initiatives will continue to build the Cooperative's capacity through comprehensive literacy training and advanced weaving skills sessions. Training will also focus on advancing proficiency in departmental roles and responsibilities within the Cooperative. Encouraging independence and self-governance will be emphasised, including standardising product dimensions and prices and managing Cooperative finances. These initiatives are intended to empower members and promote effective self-management.

Improved Financial Resilience (Outcome 2)

The rollout of financial literacy training across the Cooperative will be a key focus, equipping members with essential skills in financial management. Depending on Cooperative feedback following this training, consideration will be given to continuing mechanisms such as the savings scheme or alternative loan scheme to support financial stability among members. While the specific approach will be determined based on further assessment, these initiatives aim to enhance the Cooperative's overall financial resilience and reduce reliance on informal welfare systems.

Improved Reedbed Management (Output 3.2 and 3.3)

Results from the participatory programme will be analysed and shared with stakeholders. Using insights from the data collected, a collaborative reedbed management strategy will be developed and disseminated within the local community. This strategy will support the sustainability of *mahampy* weaving as a livelihood activity, ensuring long-term environmental and economic benefits.

Conclusion

Within the first 24 months of Project Mahampy: Phase II, significant progress has been achieved across all key outcomes. The implementation of a new literacy curriculum, alongside ongoing training in departmental roles and responsibilities, and regular Committee and Cooperative meetings, has strengthened members' capacity to manage Workshop operations independently. During the next 12 months, all activities will remain ongoing, ensuring members continue to build on these achievements.

The Cooperative has seen advancements in both product quality and market reach. The introduction of value-added products, supported by specialised training from Tamalà, has expanded market opportunities and

diversified product range. In the upcoming year, product innovation will continue with a market analysis guiding new product development to secure additional commissions.

The education savings scheme and alternative loan scheme have played a significant role in supporting financial resilience. In Project Year Three, financial literacy training will be introduced to enhance financial management skills, while financial support systems will be created and implemented in response to Cooperative feedback.

Data collection through the participatory monitoring programme and aerial drone surveys has informed a technical report on *mahampy* reed harvesting techniques. Moving forward, this report will guide the development of a community resource management strategy, created in collaboration with local stakeholders. The strategy will support local communities to adopt the most effective approaches for sustainable management of the *mahampy* wetlands.



A group of mahampy weavers during a value-added product development workshop

Case Study: Tsihalala Siza Fenosoa

Tsihalala Siza Fenosoa, aged 20, is a dedicated member of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative in Sainte Luce. As the Secretary for her sub-cooperative, Taratsy Mahavotsy Mpandray, Fenosoa plays a crucial role in the Cooperative Committee. She has been actively involved in the cooperative's activities throughout Phase II, attending all committee and cooperative-wide meetings and contributing to the cooperative's operations and decision-making.

In addition to her role on the committee, Fenosoa has engaged in various Cooperative training sessions, including a workshop on value-added products. From this training, she informally manages new commissions, showcasing her adaptability and commitment.

A significant development in Fenosoa's journey with the cooperative is her role as a literacy teacher. In March 2024, she took on this role as part of the introduction of a new literacy curriculum. This curriculum, tailored to the needs of the weaving community, focuses on essential vocabulary and is a key component of the cooperative's efforts to foster self-reliance.

Fensoa's feedback highlights the impact of the literacy sessions. She notes that the lessons are particularly beneficial to motivated participants, especially in areas like reading medical terms and understanding information about illnesses and cures. Fensoa has also provided valuable input for improving the sessions, such as the need for more practice in writing names and additional reading materials. Her enthusiasm for learning and teaching is evident in her own words: "I am always ready to learn."



Fensoa teaching a literacy skills session in the extension of the Mahampy Weaver's Workshop

References

¹ The World Bank (2022). The World Bank in Madagascar: Overview. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar/overview>. Accessed February 2024.