



30-Month Report for

PROJECT MAHAMPHY

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

March 2025

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 and a half years of Phase II, with a particular focus on the last six months (September 2024 – February 2025).

The main achievements of the first 30 months are listed below:

- Meetings with resellers have been completed and advertising cards have been developed to increase sale 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 and was attended by 54% of the Cooperative members (Output 1.2).
- An external extension was added to the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop. Additionally, shelving and storage solutions were installed inside to enhance 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 62% (Output 1.4).
- Weavers completed 30 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. Given its popularity, the weavers continued the scheme into year three, with 33% 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).
- The new financial literacy training curriculum has been designed and implementation has commenced with an average of 85% of weavers and their partners attending all five workshops conducted so far. (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 are being 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 September 2024 to February 2025.

Outcome One: Improved Sales at the Mahampy Weavers Workshop

Workshop Operations

Since September 2024, weavers have attended between two and four literacy training sessions per month, with an average attendance of 64%. The cooperative has continued with its approach of partnering with an elected member of the cooperative to implement the new curriculum, designed with weaver literacy levels and international adult training guidelines in mind. The Literacy teacher, Fenosoa, has now completed the delivery of the new programme which included topics that support every day vocabulary of the weavers and bolsters their capacity to support workshop operations. The final recap session was followed by an endline assessment to ascertain the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the group.

By the end of the course, 67% of participants said they use their new literacy skills often (to very often) with 33% expressing they felt very confident using these learned skills regularly. A total of 93% of the participants were able to use the knowledge from the curriculum to describe daily activities when asked and 85% of weavers were able to write a given date when requested. These statistics highlight how the skills shared during the sessions are able to be utilised in everyday scenarios.

Alongside literacy training, in October, SEED facilitated a training session for thirty-four weavers on department roles and responsibilities. In February, this training was redesigned for the sales and stock team and will be delivered in March. The updated design focuses on improving the sales book model to now include a 'sold to' column so that the sales team can record which category of buyer purchased the item. Categorises include 'tourist', 'reseller', 'local community member', and 'SEED employee'. Equipped with new information, this upgraded design will support weavers in designing products and streamlining production towards target markets. Stronger understanding and confidence in their capacity to fulfil their roles will contribute to more efficient workshop relations where weavers will be able to independently operate sales recording and tracking. The improvement of the weavers in their ability to accurately record sales is a testament to the success of the sessions, with total transactions correctly recorded increasing from 25% in Project Year 2 to 50% in Project Year 3.

There have been two committee meetings since September 2024, where topics such as overseeing finances, ensuring members fulfil departmental roles and responsibilities, and making decisions about significant activities like large commissions are discussed. All Cooperative meetings provide a platform for each of the members to voice any concerns and for Committee members to share new information or decisions. Three cooperative wide meetings were held, which saw an average of 79% of members attending to discuss the implementation of the new Financial Literacy scheme, future planned activities, and the data feedback session.

Data feedback sessions

As part of directing workshop operations towards that of an independent business, all sales have been recorded in a logbook, including information on the weaver, the product sold, the price, and when it was sold. In February 2025, Project Mahampy began the process of feeding the sales data back to the weavers to incentivise production strategy and reflection on spending habits, laying the road for the weavers to be able to collect and distribute this data themselves in the future.

The session began by presenting total cooperative sales from the last three years individually, as well as the aggregate sales of the project. Session two will be conducted in March and will include giving weavers their individual sales totals in private to inspire individual reflection. Going forward, weavers have expressed interest in learning about the sales patterns of successful products to inform their production strategy. By introducing mechanisms for women to track sales and production, it will promote the design of a business strategy and better financial management.



The weavers at a Cooperative wide meeting discussing the data feedback.

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

Education Saving Scheme

The weavers have continued to participate in the Education Saving Scheme in Project Year three to save money from September 2024 until the start of the school year, in August 2025. To date, a total of 21 members have been participating, representing 32% of the cooperative. So far, each member has, on average, saved 6,877 MGA (£1.14) with the total amount saved 447,000 MGA (£73.92). The least saved so far by an individual was 5,000 MGA (£0.83) and the most saved to date has been 60,000 MGA (£9.92). The annual cost of sending a child to an Ecole Primaire Publique (EPP), the equivalent of a primary school, is 60,000 MGA (£9.92). It is important to note that there are five more months of contributions left, with savings to be distributed in August 2025 to align with the start of the school year.

Financial Literacy Training

To further support weaver's ability to manage household finances, SEED developed a new financial literacy training curriculum and began its broader implementation in November. 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. Results from analysis of the baseline Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey showed that participants were very confident in planning during the lean season but also possessed poor spending prioritisation habits. In the baseline survey, household maintenance (23%), household goods (23%), and education fees (19%) were highlighted as financial goals to attain using the knowledge they learn in the curriculum.

Weavers have completed five out of eight workshops including sessions with topics on spending, budgeting, saving, and investments. Motivation was high at the outset of the programme and is evident during each session, with active participation from everyone. The final recap session and the endline assessment is scheduled to be complete by July 2025.

Alternative Loan Scheme

Established in Project Year One, the alternative loan scheme has been reintroduced for the third time to support Cooperative members during the lean season (January to April), when funds for purchasing *mahampy* reeds for weaving are lower. The scheme provides loans to cover immediate costs, with a repayment structure designed to enable income generation while repaying the loan. The loan scheme faced challenges in the last calendar year. The loans distributed after the last lean season (April-May 2025) were not used for productive resources nor repaid within the planned timeframe. Weavers took out loans but rising costs meant that weavers could not purchase the necessary resources for production and instead spent the money on more immediate needs. It took until December for all weavers who took out the loan to repay. The fear of taking out a loan and misusing it has caused unpopularity with the scheme. These challenges and participant feedback will be taken into account when considering its implementation after the lean season of 2025.



Weavers at a Literacy training session.

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 aerial 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 (SCRIP), an initial analysis of the data has been completed. In the last sixth months, the technical report on the sustainability of reed harvesting has been under review to clarify methodological transparency and improve statistical analysis. Areas highlighted for improvement are being appropriately responded to and will be considered when conducting similar future activities. Once finalised, the conclusions will be considered as part of potential plans to design a community natural resource management strategy in collaboration with members of the local community.

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	 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	 Expected 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 30 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 65 members, down from 112 due to internal disagreements within the Cooperative.
- The age of members ranges from 20 to 71, 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 (16 members), Soamandroso (5 members), Taratsy Mahavotsy Mpandray (17 members), and Soa Gny Rary Ste Luce (20 members).
- Each member fulfils a departmental role; members are roughly equally dispersed between the Sales (18%), Quality Control (22%), Stock (23%), Materials (22%), and Cleaning departments (15%).

To maintain the relevance and effectiveness of activities, regular informal focus groups, surveys, and interviews with Cooperative members have been held to evaluate impact and inform improvements. Feedback on the literacy curriculum, participatory monitoring program, and financial initiatives, including the alternative loan and education savings schemes, has been thoroughly reviewed, guiding adjustments for enhanced participant outcomes. Attendance data is also examined to gauge engagement levels. This approach ensures that activities remain responsive to the evolving 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 (£707.34). The most frequently sold product was priced at 15,000 MGA (£2.48), while the average sale price was 11,346 MGA (£1.88). In Project Year 2, the Cooperative saw a significant increase in total sales, reaching a figure of 6,809,500 MGA (£1126.04). During this period, the mode of product sales remained at 15,000 MGA (£2.48), but the average sale price rose to 17,733 MGA (£2.93). This represents a 59% increase in total sales and a 56% increase in average sale price during this period.

From September 2024 to January 2025, the first sixth months of Project Year 3, the total weaver's income has totalled 3,019,200 MGA (£499.26), down from 3,695,500 MGA (£611.10) from the same calendar period of Project Year 2. It is important to note that since Project Year 2, the almost halving of weavers led to a decrease in production capacity within the cooperative. Despite this, the income per weaver during the first 6 months of Project Year 3 has increased from 32,996 MGA (£5.46) to 46,449 MGA (£7.68). The average sale price from the same period has increased dramatically from 12,037 MGA (1.99) to 18,410 MGA (£3.04). This increased average of sales highlights the resilience of the cooperative and the strength of its organisational structure, despite challenges in the face of less production power.

Next Steps

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

Business Skills (Output 1.4)

To enhance business operations and expand market reach, a business training curriculum will be developed and implemented focusing on internal organisation, team leadership, sales strategies, and market dynamics. These strategies will be informed by international best practice, a market analysis, and a cross visit with other productively and organisationally successful cooperatives. Previous learnings from the Cooperative's activities in Years 1 and 2 and the first half of Year 3 will also be included to ensure a comprehensive curriculum.

Routes to Market (Output 1.2)

April 2025 will mark the commencement of the market analysis, an array of activities directed at identifying competitors' production and productivity levels to ascertain the cooperative's current market position. Once identified, strategies to increase competition and facilitate alternative market access will be considered. This data will be fed back to the weavers to inform business thinking and production strategy.

Increase Capacity of Cooperative Members (Output 1.4)

These initiatives are intended to empower members and promote effective self-management. Initiatives will keep strengthening the Cooperative's capacity by offering both internal and external advanced weaving skills sessions. Training will also target improving proficiency in departmental roles and responsibilities within the Cooperative. Emphasis will be placed on fostering independence and self-governance, including standardising product dimensions and prices, as well as managing cooperative finances. These initiatives aim to empower members and support effective self-management.

Improved Financial Resilience (Outcome 2)

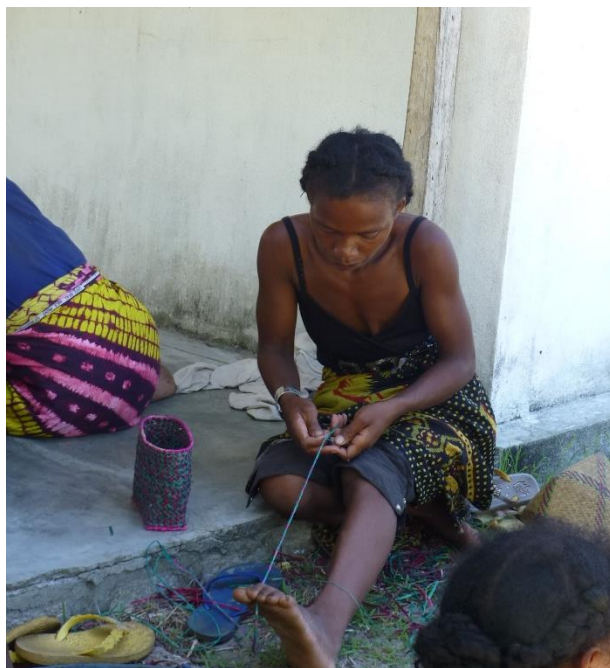
The final three financial literacy training sessions cover topics on planning, debt, and financial services, before a final recap session and an endline assessment designed to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the curriculum. Learnings will be taken forward when adapting the programme and insights will be considered when making decisions about knowledge gaps and the potential review of certain core elements.

The education saving scheme will continue up until August when school fees are due and the money will be redistributed to participants, with its repetition to be considered based on participant feedback.

In March, a comprehensive needs assessment will be conducted to understand the level of key characteristics of the cooperative including trust and motivation for a cooperative wide saving scheme. This scheme will be separate from the education saving scheme in that the funds will not be designated for any particular cause, and the group will be designed to eventually evolve into an independent, internal loaning system.

Improved Reedbed Management (Output 3.2 and 3.3)

Results from the participatory programme will be re-analysed and shared with key actors. Using insights from the data collected, a collaborative reedbed management strategy will be considered in collaboration with the community. This strategy will support the sustainability of *mahampy* weaving as a livelihood activity, ensuring long-term environmental and economic benefits.



A weaver outside the workshop

Conclusion

Within the first 30 months of Project Mahampy: Phase II, significant progress has been achieved across all key outcomes. The completion 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 six months, remaining activities will be complete and preparations for the next phase will begin.

Both product quality and product sales have increased year on year and how to retain these benefits without continued support from SEED will be the cross-cutting theme when planning activities for the next phase. The market analysis will be foundational when understanding the Mahampy Cooperative's market standing and the decisions made by the cooperative based on the findings will be crucial in steering the project's direction.

The education savings scheme has proved a bedrock of the financial resilience for the cooperative members and the repeated requests of its continuation attest to the desire for improved financial management. The pause of the alternative loan scheme allows the project to further understand the complexity of loaning systems in the project sites and will allow SEED to utilise this information when designing an improved approach. The high attendance rates of the Financial Literacy Training of both weavers and their husbands further indicates the enthusiasm for improved household economic practices. Inspired by the success of the education saving scheme and the financial literacy programmes, an assessment of new mechanisms to encourage savings will be conducted.

Once reviewed, the Participatory Monitoring Programme technical report will be included in decisions to guide the development of a community resource management strategy, created in collaboration with local stakeholders. The strategy would support local communities to adopt the most effective approaches for sustainable management of the *mahampy* wetlands.

Financial Report

Overall, 49% of the total budget for Year 3 has been spent, with underspend due to more expensive activities being conducted in the second half of Project Year 3. In particular, the cooperative cross visit (£1,381.70), business training (£595.74), and activities for the reedbed management strategy (£671.19) are yet to be conducted. There is also contingency funding like the solar panel maintenance (£106.38) which has not been

required to date. Any underspend at the end of the next six-month period will be carried over into the next phase's implementation.

Project Mahampy, Phase II: Year 1 Expenditure			
Item	Detail	Y1 Total Budget	Y1 Total Spent
Human Resources	Project staff, associated staff costs	£ 10,006.96	£ 6677.14
Activities	Project setup, Mahampy Workshop, Mahampy Cooperative, routes to market, community engagement and education, reedbed monitoring and analysis	£ 5,316.66	£ 795.80
Travel & Subsistence	Project team field travel & subsistence, regional travel & international flight allowance	£ 2,742.89	£ 1227.57
Communications	Mobile, internet, printing & translation	£ 605.21	£ 426.13
Running Cost Contribution	Organisational management, compliance & running cost contribution (15% of total)	£ 3,659.36	£ 1829.68
TOTAL		£ 22,331.09	£ 10,956.31

References

¹The World Bank (2022). The World Bank in Madagascar: Overview. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar/overview>. Accessed March 2025.