



A Proposal for

PROJECT MAHAMPY: PHASE II

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

May 2022

1. Introduction

SEED Madagascar (SEED) is currently seeking £64,758 for Project Mahampy: Phase II, a 36-month phase that aims to improve the sustainability of *mahampy* reed weaving as a traditional women's livelihood activity in southeast Madagascar.

SEED will build on the progress made in Phase I (April 2019 - March 2022) *to maximise the sales potential of the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop, improve the financial resilience of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative, and support weavers in the development and implementation of a strategy to sustainably manage the mahampy reedbeds.*

Phase II will play a crucial role in supporting the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative to increase the income generated from *mahampy* weaving, whilst sustainable management of the reedbeds will ensure the future of *mahampy* weaving as a women's livelihood activity.

2. Context

Madagascar has one of the highest poverty rates in the world, with 77% of the population, including 90% in the Deep South, surviving on less than US\$1.90 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 region of Anosy, women typically weave *mahampy*, a local reed (*Lepironia mucronata*). Able to be practiced in or close to the home and with a flexible time commitment, *mahampy* weaving presents an opportunity for women to provide a small but vital income for their households. However, with low return on investment and poor access to markets, weaving currently fails to provide women with enough income to purchase daily necessities or to invest in their children's education, unable to break themselves and their families out of the cycle of poverty.

Despite the economic and environmental importance of the wetlands to the region, *mahampy* reeds 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.

An Overview of Project Mahampy

Since 2019, Project Mahampy has supported over 160 female *mahampy* weavers in the rural community of Sainte Luce. Previously, weavers sold *mahampy* products independently and, with little negotiation power, were vulnerable to pricing set by buyers in a supplier-rich market. The establishment of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative, composed of five sub-cooperatives, created a network of weavers that improved access to resources and increased the weavers' supplier power when trading products with buyers. The Mahampy Weavers' Workshop provided the Cooperative with a space to produce, store, and sell products, improving the weavers' contact with resellers and customers. SEED's deliverance of weaving, finance, and business training improved the Cooperative's internal operations, further enhanced through a visit to a local women's embroidery cooperative. The visit also informed the development of the Workshop's policies and procedures, including the creation of five operational departments that successfully maximised the Workshop's efficiency and increased the capacity of the Cooperative. Additionally, cooperative members visited a local weaving cooperative, conducting market research to inform the development of products targeted at tourists to generate larger profit margins.

To establish an ecological baseline of the *mahampy* reeds, SEED's Conservation Research Programme (SCRIP) collected data on the characteristics and biological importance of the wetlands throughout Phase I, with findings documented in a final technical report. In 2021, SEED launched a participatory monitoring programme, training five weavers to research the effect of harvesting techniques on the *mahampy* reeds. The weavers were the first women in Sainte Luce to partake in ecological research and are trailblazers in their local community. The

programme was expanded to assess the effect of fire on the regrowth of the *mahampy* reeds after a fire burnt through two wetlands the weavers were monitoring in December 2021.

Lessons and Opportunities

Project Mahampy: Phase I substantially strengthened *mahampy* weaving as a livelihood opportunity for women in Sainte Luce. Building on the progress made during the initial phase, rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) highlighted opportunities to further support the Weavers' Cooperative. In response to limitations presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and severe drought in the region, SEED adapted Phase I activities accordingly, ensuring the project effectively responded to the weavers' needs during a period of increased economic hardship. Given the impact of COVID-19 on project activities, including subsequent restrictions, delays, and changes to the *mahampy* market, Phase II will respond to challenges that limited the potential of *mahampy* weaving as a profitable and sustainable livelihood, whilst building on the successes and learnings of the previous phase.

Routes to Market

Learnings from Phase I have highlighted the importance of national sales to the weavers' income stream. Activities in Phase II will focus on supporting weavers to create products marketable to local and regional buyers, aimed at increasing the Cooperative's local sales.

Due to COVID-19-related border closures and travel restrictions, activities relating to the value-added product (VAP) pilot were only able to resume in the final month of Phase I. With the reopening of Madagascar's borders, the resumption of the VAP pilot has the opportunity to provide the Cooperative with a means to capitalise on the tourist market returning to Sainte Luce, increasing the weavers' access to higher profit margins.



Mahampy baskets for sale at the Workshop

Weavers' Workshop

Construction of the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop was intended to provide weavers with a space to weave, store, and sell products. With Cooperative membership higher than initially forecasted, there is currently not

enough floor space for multiple women to weave in the Workshop at one time. An expansion of the Workshop is required to increase the Cooperative's weaving capacity, as well as the quantity and frequency of sales.

Workshop Operations

Whilst restrictions on gatherings delayed the opening of the Workshop and the attendance of members at departmental training sessions, learnings from the project endline have informed further training sessions planned for Phase II, aiming to further increase the capacity of Cooperative members to ensure the Workshop can operate at maximum efficiency.



Members of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative pictured outside the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop

Financial Literacy and Management

The socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic and drought were felt acutely by the weavers. SEED revised the project's approach to addressing the informal, exploitative social welfare system, known as the mat money system, understanding that during a time of heightened financial vulnerability, eliminating participation in the system was unviable for many weavers in need of immediate financial assistance. In response, SEED facilitated focus groups and meetings with the Cooperative to examine the role of the mat money system in the community and to monitor the weavers' participation in the system. Informed by Phase I learnings, Phase II will pilot an approach to directly support weavers to lessen their reliance on mat-money loans and to improve the financial resilience of Cooperative members.

Conservation of the Mahampy Reedbeds

In November 2021, SEED's approach to wetland research was revised based on valued feedback from industry professionals. In order to gather sufficient data through the revised methodology, SCRP will continue to conduct water assessments for an additional six months, utilising learning from the previous phase to fulfil the research aim of Phase I: *to establish a previously unknown ecological baseline of the mahampy reedbeds and understanding the differences, if any, amongst wetlands with different historical rates of harvest.* Increasing the frequency of drone surveys will enable SEED to effectively monitor landscape changes to the wetlands each year.

Similarly, to enable weavers to gather a sufficient quantity of data to understand the effects of harvesting techniques and fire on the regrowth of the *mahampy* reeds, the participatory monitoring programme will

continue and expand in the next phase. Weavers will gain the knowledge and skills to lead on the development and implementation of a reedbed management strategy that will ensure the sustainability of *mahampy* weaving as a livelihood activity.



Weaver from the participatory monitoring programme measuring the reeds

3. Proposed Project

To continue to improve the livelihoods of traditional of *mahampy* weavers in Sainte Luce, Project Mahampy: Phase II aims to achieve the following three outcomes:

Outcome One: Increased number of sales through the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop

Outcome Two: Improved financial resilience of the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative and its members

Outcome Three: Improved reedbed management for livelihood security

Outcome One: Increased sales

Routes to Market

To increase the Cooperative's sales, Phase II aims to improve routes to local markets, and will resume the VAP pilot for weavers to generate income from tourist sales.

A traditional product in high regional demand, SEED will support the Cooperative to maximise the sale of *mahampy* mats, engaging with resellers to establish the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop as a hub for local mat sales. SEED will facilitate training sessions to improve the quality and aesthetic of the weavers' mats, specifically their finish, to adhere to reseller requirements.

To capitalise on the tourist presence in Sainte Luce, the Cooperative will trial value-added products in the Workshop. A small group of weavers will be trained to create products that are marketable to tourists. If

successful, the weavers involved will teach others how to make the products, with the potential to increase the Cooperative's profit margins as tourism resumes in Madagascar.

Weavers' Workshop

Based on the weavers' feedback, SEED will expand the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop to improve the functionality of the space, increasing the area available to weave. Given the length of the reeds, the current building will be expanded through the construction of a sheltered area and an outdoor kitchen, enabling weavers to weave the mats, in their entirety, at the Workshop and to dye the reeds on site. The expansion will create a distinct space for weaving at the Workshop, aimed at increasing the volume of mats the weavers are able to produce and the frequency of reseller visits to Sainte Luce.

The construction of the shelter will also expand the area available for product production and enable the Cooperative to use the current facility to increase the number of products on display for prospective buyers. With more weavers using the Workshop together, the space will encourage collaboration and skill sharing between members, increasing the capacity of the Cooperative overall. To further increase the efficiency of the Workshop, overhead storage units and shelving will be provided. With products currently stored on the floor, weavers will be able to store the products efficiently and use the current facility as a shop front for sales to resellers and tourists. Such activities will therefore enable weavers to use the space as originally intended; to weave, store and sell *mahampy* products collectively.



Mahampy mats, hats and baskets for sale at the market

Workshop Operations

SEED will conduct training sessions to improve the skills and ability of members in their roles, aiming to increase the efficiency of the Workshop and maximise sales. Roles and responsibilities training will be continued to increase the weavers' confidence and understanding of their departmental roles, enhancing the learning the

women received since the Workshop opened in December 2021, and improving communication across the five operational departments. Once comfortable in their roles, SEED will facilitate a cross-visit for weavers to meet with another artisanal weaving cooperative, fostering mutual learning and knowledge exchange to encourage continuous improvement of Cooperative operations.

At the request of weavers, informal literacy education sessions were held with Cooperative members during Phase I, who were motivated to improve their reading and writing skills. In Phase II, SEED will formalise these sessions to improve the weavers' understanding of, and participation in, Workshop operations, increasing weavers' confidence in their roles.

Outcome Two: Improved Finances

Financial Literacy and Management

SEED aims to increase the financial resilience of weavers by reducing Cooperative members' reliance on the mat money system, increasing weavers' financial literacy, and promoting saving for individual expenses such as school fees.

As evidenced by the high percentage of women currently relying on the mat money system, *mahampy* weaving currently fails to generate enough income to finance many of the weavers' daily food and household expenses. Whilst project activities collectively aim to increase income from weaving, SEED will also initiate an alternative loan scheme to reduce weavers' reliance on the negative cycle of the mat money system. To do so, SEED will provide Cooperative members with a loan at times of financial strain, equivalent to the price of materials for five *mahampy* mats. The scheme will enable weavers to earn the full price of five mats and to reinvest their profits into future production. Financial literacy sessions will also take place alongside the loan scheme, to support the weavers with financial management.

To support weavers with saving money, an education savings scheme will be piloted, automatically saving a percentage of a weaver's income from their Workshop sales. Weavers who choose to participate will receive a small savings interest to encourage and incentivise their involvement, with their savings released each September when yearly school fees have to be paid. Each year, the savings scheme will be open to all members of the Cooperative.

Outcome Three: Reedbed Conservation

Sustainable Management of the Mahampy Reedbeds

Revisions to SEED's approach to wetland research in Phase I prevented SCRP from establishing an ecological baseline of the *mahampy* reedbeds as planned. Whilst biodiversity surveys will be complete in April 2022, SCRP will continue to conduct water assessments for an additional six months, strengthening conclusions that will be detailed in a technical wetland report produced in 2023. Drone surveys will enable SCRP to monitor landscape changes in the wetlands each year and assess the variability in *mahampy* resource availability, which is of particular concern to the weavers given the impact of climate change on wetland health and the increasing frequency of fire in the wetlands.

Led by the weavers themselves, the participatory monitoring programme will continue research to assess the effect of different harvesting techniques on *mahampy* regrowth. Quadrats will be re-established in two wetlands that were burnt during the December 2021 fire and data collection will resume for the next 24 months. Once analysed, the weavers will lead on the dissemination of their research findings to weavers from neighbouring communities. Prompted by the fire, the participatory monitoring programme will be expanded to involve an additional five weavers who will assess the effect of fire on the regrowth of the *mahampy* reeds. The weavers will share their findings with weavers from neighbouring communities and conduct fire mitigation information sessions that will cover how to prevent, and respond to, unnatural fire in the wetlands. Collectively, research findings will be used by the Cooperative to develop a reedbed management strategy. The implementation of local

sustainable harvest and management practices will be supported through the painting of a mural on the exterior of the Workshop to encourage community compliance.



Mahampy reeds drying in Sainte Luce

4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

To understand project impact and address emerging needs, SEED will undertake in-depth MEL. Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) surveys will be conducted to assess training success. Sales will be monitored through a Workshop logbook, kept by Cooperative members and regularly checked. Aiming to expand the number of weavers involved with financial literacy and management activities each year, SEED will evaluate their effectiveness yearly and adapt activities based on participant feedback. Regular meetings will enable beneficiaries to provide feedback and to learn about project progress, informing implementation and promoting community ownership of Project Mahampy: Phase II.

5. SEED's Capacity to Deliver

SEED is an award-winning, holistic international development charity who envisages communities and ecosystems thriving across Madagascar. Our central mission is to enhance the capacity of individuals, communities, organisations, and government in fulfilling sustainable environment, education, and development goals in southeast Madagascar. To date, SEED has delivered multiple, [successful conservation and livelihoods projects](#), taking an interdisciplinary approach that brings together local expertise, scientific research, and community support.

Made up of both Malagasy and international staff, SEED's Conservation & Sustainable Livelihoods Department is a highly experienced team, with expertise in both conservation and sustainable livelihood development. As a result of more than 20 years' experience working in the target community, SEED has the contextual knowledge and relationships with key local stakeholders to put the organisation in a unique position to deliver all our programmes in a way that is contextually appropriate to the area.

Effective MEL is a priority for SEED. An MEL Framework informs the design of MEL tools tailored to each project, supported by a dedicated MEL Committee. SEED uses industry-standard methodologies to monitor and analyse impact, and responds to emerging needs as they arise, while keeping donors regularly informed of progress.

6. Summary

Building upon the success of the previous phase, Project Mahampy: Phase II will support the Mahampy Weavers' Cooperative to increase the income generated through *mahampy* weaving, whilst ensuring that the reedbeds upon which they rely are sustainably used and managed. Aiming to maximise the number of sales through the Mahampy Weavers' Workshop, an extension to the current building will enable weavers to utilise the space for weaving purposes. In addition to skills-based learning and training, the project will seek to increase the Cooperative's sales through improved engagement with local and regional buyers, as well as tourists visiting Sainte Luce. Financial literacy sessions, the alternative loan system, and the Cooperative-wide saving scheme will empower weavers to better manage their finances and improve the financial security of the Cooperative. Research conducted by the weavers will inform the development of a reedbed management strategy that, supported by SCRIP, will protect the reedbeds for future use, ensuring the sustainability of *mahampy* weaving as a women's livelihood.

7. Summary Budget

Item		Total Budget (GBP)
Human Resources		£30,706.69
Activities	Workshop Expansion and Maintenance	£2,049.04
	Cooperative and Workshop Operations	£4,660.02
	Routes to Market	£931.00
	Financial Literacy and Management	£1,792.31
	Wetland Monitoring Programme	£4,040.19
	Community and Stakeholder Engagement	£898.74
Communications		£1,730.53
Travel & Subsistence		£7,485.53
Running Costs	Madagascar Running Costs	£8,209.92
	UK Running Costs	£2,253.72
Total Budget		64,757.69

8. References

¹ ACAPS (2022). *Madagascar: Food insecurity crisis in the Grand Sud regions*. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/madagascar/madagascar-food-insecurity-crisis-grand-sud-regions> [Accessed April 2022]