

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	10675
Project Name:	Safeguarding Marine & Terrestrial Biodiversity in Fiji (SAMBIO)
Countr(ies):	Fiji
Implementing Agency:	CI

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Safeguarding Marine & Terrestrial Biodiversity in Fiji (SAMBIO)

Country

Fiji

GEF ID

10675

Implementing Agency

CI

Executing Entity

Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

FSP

PIR Submission

9/10/2025

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2025 , 1st PIR

Objective

To establish new marine and terrestrial protected areas within priority areas of biodiversity and strengthen Fiji's protected area network, improve the management of key biodiversity areas in forests and coastal ecosystems to protect Fiji's most threatened biodiversity, and strengthen policy and financing pathways to secure ecosystem services and other benefits to island communities into the future.

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress

Not Rated

Development Objective

Not Rated

Overall risk

Moderate Risk

Project Financing

7,908,485.00

Cumulative Disbursement

255,791.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

6/3/2022

Agency Approval

5/23/2022

Implementation Start 10/27/2023	First Disbursement
Expected MTR	Actual MTR
Expected Completion	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

During FY24/25, the SAMBIO Project remained in its start-up phase, and as a result, no on-the-ground implementation activities were undertaken for component 1 and 2. The key focus for the year was on mobilizing institutional arrangements, finalizing recruitment processes, and initiating foundational planning for field activities expected in FY25/26.

The recruitment of the Executing Support Partner (ESP), BirdLife International, was completed in Q4, and formal onboarding is anticipated in early FY25/26. Due to the delay in ESP mobilization, no formal outputs were delivered under the Results Framework during the reporting period. As such, planned activities across all components—such as site-level management, MPA designation, community livelihood development, and policy implementation—were not initiated.

Despite the delay, important preparatory work has been completed by CI Fiji through BHP co-financing in the Lau Seascape activities. This includes a finalized Marine Spatial Plan, baseline livelihood and biodiversity assessments, CFIP pilot implementation, and training of community-based environmental stewards. These outputs, while not formally recorded under SAMBIO, establish a strong technical foundation for implementation in FY26.

The development of the National Protected Area Policy and regulatory framework also progressed under Component 3, with technical papers submitted to the Protected Area Committee (PAC) and National Environment Council (NEC) for endorsement. The endorsement of the GEF PAS 4 Report and related policy guidance is expected to trigger formal legislative and regulatory work in the next fiscal year.

The Project Management Unit (PMU) continued its core operational setup, including recruitment of key staff and development of the Annual Work Plan and Budget in collaboration with the ESP and CI. Safeguard planning has been completed, and the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) is in place, ready for application once field activities begin.

Overall, while no formal outputs were delivered in FY25, the SAMBIO Project has laid the groundwork for full-scale implementation in FY26.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

The SAMBIO Project experienced significant delays in FY24/25 due to a range of operational and institutional challenges. A key factor was the late identification by EA of the need for an Execution Support Partner (ESP). The subsequent decision-making and engagement process, prolonged by complex national procurement procedures, significantly stalled all planned field activities. As a result, implementation was delayed until the final quarter of the fiscal year.

Staff hiring delays and turnover further impacted operations. Key PMU positions remained vacant due to the time-consuming government recruitment process, limiting the project's technical capacity and slowing coordination, safeguard implementation, and M&E functions.

The FY24/25 Annual Work Plan could not be finalized, as alignment with the ESP was still pending before submission to the Project Steering Committee. Institutional processes, such as Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) finalization, were also delayed due to frequent changes in internal timelines within the Ministry of Environment.

Other constraints included delayed co-financier materialization letters, which complicated PIR reporting, and a mid-year government financial freeze (June–August), that disrupted salary disbursements and was not communicated to CI-GEF. These issues were not fully anticipated in the project’s original planning and contributed to implementation delays and staff morale concerns.

Additionally, pending endorsement of key policy documents by the National Environment Council (NEC), including the GEF PAS 4 Report and National Protected Area Policy, slowed progress under Component 3. As a result, full-scale implementation has been deferred to FY25/26, following ESP mobilization and resolution of key institutional requirements. To be endorsed by the National Environment Council which include members of the Permanent Secretary for all the ministries which will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Environment and Climate Change.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

During FY2025, stakeholder engagement focused on national-level coordination, with several technical and pocket meetings held with key government agencies, including the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Finance, and members of the Protected Areas Committee (PAC). These engagements supported the development of the draft Protected Area Policy and the regulatory framework. Civil society partners and technical advisors also contributed through policy workshops.

However, engagement with community-level stakeholders, indigenous groups, and private sector actors was limited due to the delayed onboarding of the Executing Support Partner (ESP), who is responsible for coordinating ground-level implementation. This has affected interactive sessions, particularly in rural and remote areas.

To address this, the project prioritized institutional consultations and used existing platforms like PAC and NEC to maintain momentum. Stakeholders were kept informed through targeted updates and briefings, and preliminary awareness materials were distributed to select provincial officers.

Full implementation of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan—including inclusive, gender-sensitive, and community-based consultations—will begin in FY2026 once the ESP is in place. The project remains committed to participatory planning and will scale up engagement efforts across all components.

D. Gender Equality

Progress on gender mainstreaming during FY2025 was mainly through participation in policy-level technical meetings and workshops. Women were represented in PAC discussions and regulatory planning processes. However, due to the delayed start of field implementation and the absence of the Executing Support Partner (ESP), community-level gender-focused engagement and benefits have not yet been realized.

- a) All activities anticipated by the GMP were implemented? Yes/No Why?

No.

Most field-based gender activities could not be implemented as planned because the ESP, who will lead ground-level implementation, has not yet been engaged. Only national-level gender-sensitive planning and consultation occurred.

- b) Did the project face any challenges to implementing GMP as initially proposed? Please describe the challenges in case there were any.

Yes.

The main challenge was the delay in onboarding the ESP, which affected delivery of community consultations and gender-responsive field activities.

- c) As compared to the original GMP, was any adaptive management applied to promote meaningful participation of women and advance towards other gender sensitive targets?

Yes.

Despite implementation delays, women were actively involved in national-level planning and consultation processes. Project teams ensured gender representation in technical workshops and promoted women’s input during PAC discussions. This was an interim adaptation to maintain inclusion until full activities begin in FY2026.

- d) Did the project team/stakeholders observe any unintended outcomes (positive or negative) related to gender equality, that are difficult to capture in a quantitative way during this period of time? For example women are more active in decision-making processes in the project, or public servants are more interested and open to advance gender outcomes, men or women are more reluctant to participate in the project activities, or other similar situations.

Yes

(positive).

Women participating in PAC and technical meetings became more visible in decision-making spaces, contributing confidently to policy discussions. This increased interest in gender equality among some government partners and highlighted the value of continuing to include women in policy processes.

- e) Considering all the above, what are the recommendations for next FY to continue advancing towards gender sensitive targets?

Conduct targeted outreach to women in remote communities through local networks and women's groups.

1. Ensure the ESP includes gender and social inclusion specialists in field teams.
2. Integrate gender-sensitive indicators into all management plans and regulatory documents.
3. Organize gender training for project staff and implementing partners.
4. Track and report sex-disaggregated data consistently during all engagement and benefit delivery phases.

E. Knowledge Management

As the SAMBIO Fiji Project is still in its early stages, with work on the ground yet to commence, significant progress on the implementation of the Knowledge Management (KM) approach is still pending. The project is waiting for the Executing Support Partner (ESP), BirdLife International (BI), to be onboard before the implementation work can roll out. The planning phase has emphasized the following preparatory steps:

- i. **KM Framework Development:** The KM approach has been outlined as part of the planning stage, identifying the key target audiences and potential channels for knowledge dissemination. Plans are in place for future KM activities such as newsletters, brochures, and community-based communications once the ESP is onboard and implementation begins.
- ii. **Stakeholder Engagement and Preparation:** Efforts have been made to engage key stakeholders, including local communities, government bodies, and other conservation partners, to prepare for active participation when implementation starts. This has involved initial consultations to understand their information needs and ensure that when the project begins, the KM products will effectively meet those needs.
- iii. **Emphasis on Planning:** A key lesson has been the importance of thorough planning to ensure a smooth roll-out of implementation activities once the ESP is onboard. This involves carefully considering the timing, resources, and systems needed to execute the project's activities successfully.

2. Key Lessons Learned from Project Design and Implementation

- i. While the project is in the early stages, several valuable lessons have already been learned from the design phase and initial planning efforts:
- ii. **The Importance of Proper Planning:** One of the key lessons learned during the early stages is the critical importance of careful and thorough planning. Proper planning is essential to ensure that the project can transition smoothly into implementation once the ESP is in place. This includes having clear strategies for stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, and setting up monitoring systems from the start.
- iii. **Patience and Stakeholder Coordination:** The waiting period for the ESP has emphasized the importance of maintaining strong relationships with all stakeholders. Ongoing communication and collaboration have been critical to ensuring that everyone is prepared and aligned when the time comes to start the work on the ground.

- iv. **Readiness for Adaptive Management:** While the project is still in the planning phase, the need for flexibility and readiness to adapt to unforeseen challenges has been recognized. This will be important once the project moves to implementation, particularly in terms of adjusting activities as conditions evolve.

3. Knowledge Sharing with the Broader Conservation Community

i. **Early Networking with Conservation Partners:** Although work on the ground has not yet begun, preliminary discussions with regional and international conservation networks have been initiated. This will ensure that the SAMBIO project is well-positioned to integrate into the broader conservation efforts in Fiji and the Pacific region once operational.

ii. **Capacity Building Preparations:** Plans for capacity-building activities, including workshops and training sessions, are in development. These activities will be designed to strengthen the knowledge and skills of local stakeholders in anticipation of the full roll-out of the project.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	A minor amendment was made to the institutional and implementation arrangements of the SAMBIO Project through the recruitment of BirdLife International (BLI) as the Executing Support Partner (ESP). BLI will support the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC) in implementing project activities, in line with the roles and responsibilities outlined in the approved Project Document. This partnership enhances execution capacity and enables more effective delivery of project outputs, particularly in technical implementation and field coordination as MECC had no granting mechanism to flow funds to partner organizations. The amendment does not alter the Executing Agency, which remains MECC, but strengthens the overall institutional framework for project delivery.
Financial Management	A minor amendment was made to the project's financial management arrangements due to the engagement of BirdLife International (BLI) as the Executing Support Partner (ESP). This required changes to the financial flow structure, including the establishment of two separate grant agreements: one between CI-GEF and MECC, and another between CI-GEF and BLI. As a result, BLI will now submit its own financial reports directly to CI-GEF, in addition to MECC's financial reporting obligations. These adjustments ensure clarity in fund disbursement, accountability, and alignment with the roles defined under the amended implementation structure.
Implementation Schedule	A minor amendment was made to the project implementation schedule due to delays in the recruitment and onboarding of the Executing Support

	Partner (ESP), BirdLife International. As a result, field-level implementation and core activities planned for FY 2024–25 were postponed. The project is now expected to commence full implementation in FY 2025–26 following the formal engagement and mobilization of the ESP. The end date of the project is amended from January 2029 to June 2029. This adjustment ensures adequate time for proper coordination, contracting, and alignment of roles between the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC) and BLI to support effective and timely delivery of project outputs.
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	
Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	
Location of Project Activity	
others	

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Greater Tomaniivi	-17.6142	178.0184	2,197,605

Location Description:

High-altitude forest ecosystem in the central highlands of Viti Levu, Fiji's largest remaining native forest area.

Activity Description:

Conducting ecological assessments and preparing for co-management of forest habitats with local communities.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Nakorotubu	-17.5668	178.3405	12,041,681

Location Description:

Coastal-upland landscape in Ra Province with significant biodiversity and freshwater systems.

Activity Description:

Engaging communities in landscape-level planning and mapping of key biodiversity areas.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Nakauvadra Range	-17.4363	178.1242	2,205,064

Location Description:

Mountainous area in northern Viti Levu with cultural significance and critical watershed services.

Activity Description:

Facilitating stakeholder consultations and compiling baseline data for terrestrial conservation planning.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Greater Delaikoro	-16.5873	179.3141	2,199,974

Location Description:

Elevated forest zone in Vanua Levu, important for biodiversity conservation and water catchment

Activity Description:

Undertaking field surveys to inform improved management practices for upland forest ecosystems.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Natewa-Tunuloa	-16.5829	179.8178	2,201,112

Location Description:

Peninsula in Vanua Levu known for endemic species and unprotected forest biodiversity

Activity Description:

Coordinating site-level biodiversity assessments and conservation prioritization workshops.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Lau Seascape	-18.2048	-178.7925	4,036,133

Location Description:

Expansive archipelago in eastern Fiji comprising coral reefs, seagrass beds, and traditional fishing areas.

Activity Description:

Implementing marine spatial planning and strengthening community-based marine management systems.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Kadavu	-19.0181	178.1972	8,617,785

Location Description:

Southern island in Fiji with intact forest and reef systems supporting high species endemism.

Activity Description:

Carrying out participatory assessments and integrating traditional knowledge into MPA planning.

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Ringgold Isles	-16.2500	-179.4166	4,035,923

Location Description:

Remote cluster of coral islands and reef systems north of Taveuni with high ecological sensitivity.

Activity Description:

Conducting preliminary ecological scoping to inform future conservation and management activities.

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	20250910_FY25 PIR_10675_SAMBIO