PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. OVERVIEW 3
A. Description 3
B. Ratings and Disbursements 3
C. Key Dates 3
II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES 4
A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities 4
B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities 5
C. Stakeholder Engagement 5
D. Gender Equality 7
E. Knowledge Management 8
III: MINOR AMENDMENTS 8
IV: GEOGRAPHIC COORDINATES OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES 9
V. ANNEX 11

I. Overview

A. Description

Project name
Safeguarding Marine & Terrestrial Biodiversity in Fiji (SAMBIO)

Country
Fiji

GEF ID	Implementing Agency
10675	CI

Executing Entity
Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment

Trust Fund	Project Type
GET	FSP

PIR Submission	Fiscal Year , PIR Number
9/9/2026	FY 2026 , 2nd 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	Development Objective
Moderately Unsatisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory

Overall risk
Moderate Risk

Project Financing	Cumulative Disbursement
7,908,485.00	1,176,516.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval	Agency Approval
6/3/2022	5/23/2022

Implementation Start 11/11/2025	First Disbursement 12/10/2025
Expected MTR 5/27/2026	Actual MTR
Expected Completion 6/30/2029	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

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

During FY2025/26, SAMBIO made important progress in establishing the institutional, technical and stakeholder foundations required for full implementation, although most activities remained at preparatory or enabling stages. Revised implementation arrangements were operationalised, including the mobilisation of BirdLife International as the Executing Support Partner for Components 1 and 2 and strengthened coordination between MECC, BLI and CI-GEF.

Under Component 1, five priority SAMBIO Key Biodiversity Areas were validated through the Fiji KBA National Coordinating Group and submitted for further technical review. Initial livelihood scoping, stakeholder engagement and implementation planning were undertaken in priority landscapes, particularly Natewa–Tunuloa and Nakorotubu. Recruitment of technical consultants and Site Facilitators also progressed. However, baseline assessments, co-management arrangements, formal FPIC, livelihood interventions and field implementation were not sufficiently advanced to report hectares under improved management, new protected areas or verified livelihood beneficiaries.

Progress under Component 1 remained largely preparatory during FY2025/26. No forest or freshwater habitats were formally brought under improved management, no new terrestrial protected areas were designated, and no livelihood beneficiaries were recorded during the reporting period.

Nevertheless, progress was made in establishing the technical and institutional foundations for implementation. Five priority SAMBIO Key Biodiversity Areas were validated through the Fiji KBA National Coordinating Group and submitted for further technical review. Initial stakeholder engagement, livelihood scoping and implementation planning were undertaken for priority landscapes, including Natewa–Tunuloa and Nakorotubu. Consultations on the National Protected Area Policy also progressed, supported by relevant government agencies, statutory bodies, academic institutions and conservation partners.

Preparations continued for the recruitment of Site Facilitators and technical consultants, alongside planning for site assessments, community consultations, safeguards, management arrangements and Free, Prior and Informed Consent processes.

Overall, **Component 1** is progressing but remains behind schedule due to delays in recruitment, procurement and implementation arrangements. The preparatory work completed during FY2025/26 is expected to support accelerated field implementation and delivery of measurable terrestrial conservation and livelihood results during FY2026/27.

For **Component 2**, progress towards establishing new and improving the management of existing MPAs/LMMAs in Fiji's Eastern Division remained at different stages across the target sites during FY2025/26.

In the Lau Seascape, marine conservation and community-based management activities were implemented through Conservation International's BHP Project. Conservation International, as a SAMBIO co-financing partner, provides progress updates and evidence on these activities. This work contributes to improved marine management, biodiversity protection and community capacity in Lau.

A significant planning progress was achieved in the Lau Seascape, including marine spatial planning, zonation and development of management plans for proposed offshore areas. These were submitted for Government consideration/endorsement. In Kadavu and the Ringgold Islands, activities focused on project socialisation, provincial and traditional stakeholder engagement and preparatory

planning. Measurable MPA/LMMA outcomes remained dependent on further consultation, government endorsement and mobilisation of site-level implementation.

Progress under **Component 3** focused on establishing the policy, financing, biodiversity and data-management foundations required to accelerate the expansion and improved management of Fiji's PA and MPA network. Although no measurable outcome-level results were achieved during the reporting period, important preparatory work progressed. Delivery remains dependent on completing procurement processes, securing the necessary endorsements and mobilising consultants during FY2026/27.

Component 3 progressed through the Protected Area Policy process, Sustainable Financing Framework procurement, gender mainstreaming, communications, keystone species work and development of the PA/MPA Data Management System. The PA Policy consultation process advanced, while gender and communications consultants were mobilised and safeguard instruments continued to be strengthened. The Data Management System procurement progressed through technical evaluation but remained dependent on ITC endorsement, while the Sustainable Financing Framework required further procurement action.

Under **Component 4**, quarterly and annual reporting, safeguards monitoring, stakeholder engagement and preparations for the Mid-Term Review progressed. The Q4 report and FY2025/26 PIR were prepared, while coordination for the MTR, including stakeholder interviews, site visits and logistics, was advanced.

Overall, FY2025/26 delivered substantial enabling outputs, but these had not yet translated into verified objective-level results such as hectares under improved management, legally designated PAs/MPAs or attributable beneficiaries.

The project made progress in establishing the institutional, technical and stakeholder foundations required to achieve its objective. However, most activities remained preparatory, and no additional terrestrial or marine protected-area hectares were formally designated or brought under improved management during the reporting period.Five priority SAMBIO Key Biodiversity Areas were validated through the Fiji KBA National Coordinating Group and submitted for further technical review. Marine spatial planning was undertaken, and draft management plans for proposed offshore areas in Lau and Kadavu were developed, pending government endorsement. Planning for coastal and nearshore management also continued.

Progress was made on the National Protected Area Policy, Sustainable Financing Framework, protected-area data management system, keystone species programme, safeguards, gender, communications, and monitoring and reporting systems. Project governance and coordination were strengthened through engagement with government agencies, technical partners, provincial authorities and local stakeholders.Overall, the project is progressing towards its expected objective but remains behind schedule due to procurement, recruitment and approval delays. The foundations established are expected to support accelerated field implementation and measurable results during FY2026/27.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

Implementation during FY2025/26 was affected mainly by delays in recruitment and procurement, limited consultant availability, pending Government approvals and endorsements, and the transition to the revised implementation arrangements. The mobilisation of BirdLife International and recruitment of Site Facilitators and specialist consultants took longer than anticipated, delaying the commencement of on-ground activities under Components 1 and 2.

Government approval processes also affected several outputs. Protected-area and marine management processes require technical review, community consent, formal FPIC and Government endorsement before results can be recognised. Similarly, procurement of the PA/MPA Data Management System was delayed pending ITC endorsement, while the Sustainable Financing Framework procurement required revision and further tendering.

Remote and maritime project locations created additional logistical constraints, including travel planning, fuel availability, weather conditions and accessibility of communities. These factors affected the scheduling of site consultations, assessments and field activities. Availability of Provincial Council representatives and customary resource owners also occasionally delayed consultations and FPIC-related engagement.

As a result, several planned outputs remained behind schedule at year end. No terrestrial PA hectares, offshore MPA hectares, improved-management hectares or verified direct beneficiaries were reported because the necessary baselines, formal consent, management arrangements, field implementation and evidence were not yet complete.

Mitigation measures included revised activity sequencing and procurement schedules, weekly MECC–BLI coordination, closer follow-up on approvals, technical working-group support, revised Terms of Reference and improved advance planning for field travel and logistics.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement for the SAMBIO project began at the planning stage and has involved government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academia. As the project moved into its initial implementation phase, the PMU team prioritized timely engagement by raising awareness of SAMBIO and initiating introductory discussions with Divisional Commissioners in the Eastern, Central, Western, and Northern divisions. Building on this, the team engaged provincial administrators (Roko Tui) to secure blessings and verbal Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from resource owners. A key challenge has been the limited availability of Provincial Council Offices and resource owners, which at times slowed the consultation process. To address this, the team adopted flexible scheduling, maintained continuous communication, and leveraged existing provincial structures to ensure participation. In parallel, relevant stakeholders who will support implementation have been engaged early, strengthening collaboration and ownership. As a result, the project has established a foundation of trust and legitimacy, ensuring that stakeholders are informed, aligned, and prepared to contribute effectively to the next phases of SAMBIO

Stakeholder engagement remained a key priority during the reporting period and was implemented in accordance with the project's Stakeholder Engagement Plan. Building on the engagement initiated during the project design phase, the SAMBIO/BLI PMU and CI continued to strengthen partnerships with government ministries, provincial administrations, traditional governance structures, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and development partners. Introductory meetings were held with the Divisional Commissioners for the Eastern, Central, Western, and Northern Divisions, followed by consultations with Provincial Administrators and Roko Tui to introduce the project, discuss implementation arrangements, and seek support for community engagement and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes with customary resource owners.

The main challenge encountered was the limited availability of Provincial Council Offices, government representatives, and customary resource owners, which affected the scheduling of consultations and engagement activities. To address this, the PMU adopted a flexible and adaptive approach by coordinating closely with provincial offices, aligning consultations with existing provincial meetings and community schedules, and maintaining regular communication with stakeholders. In addition, recruitment of Site Facilitators is underway, and once engaged, they will play a key role in strengthening stakeholder engagement by supporting ongoing consultations, facilitating communication with communities and local institutions, coordinating project activities at the site level, and maintaining regular engagement with resource owners and other stakeholders throughout project implementation.

These engagement processes have strengthened stakeholder ownership, reinforced collaboration across key institutions, and established a solid foundation for effective implementation of project activities in FY2026/27. Early engagement has enhanced coordination, promoted transparency, and ensured that stakeholders are informed and prepared to actively support project delivery across the eight project sites.

Challenges:

1. **Recruitment, procurement and consultant availability :** Unsuccessful SFF tenders and delayed technical recruitment materially affected Components 1–3.

Impacts **-** Delays in recruiting key technical consultants and the unsuccessful procurement of the Sustainable Financing Framework (SFF) consultancy slowed implementation across Components 1–3. This affected the commencement of field implementation, development of technical outputs, and delivery of project milestones, resulting in several indicators remaining in the preparatory phase during the reporting period.

Actions Undertaken: The project reviewed and refined Terms of Reference, strengthened procurement planning, and engaged with CI technical advisers and potential service providers to improve market interest. Procurement schedules were revised, evaluation processes expedited where possible, and recruitment of the remaining technical consultants and Site Facilitators continued. Priority activities that were not dependent on consultant recruitment, including stakeholder engagement, policy consultations and preparatory planning, were advanced to maintain implementation momentum.

2. **Change Government approvals and endorsements :** Several results cannot be counted until formal decisions are issued; this is a critical path risk.

Impacts: Achievement of several project outputs and outcome indicators depended on formal endorsement by Government approval bodies. Although substantial technical work was completed, results such as policies, management plans and technical recommendations could not be reported as achieved until formal government decisions were issued, delaying recognition of progress against the Results Framework.

Actions Taken: The project maintained regular engagement with relevant ministries, technical working groups, PAC, NEC and other approval bodies to support timely decision-making. Comprehensive technical documentation and evidence were prepared and submitted, with continuous follow-up undertaken to facilitate review and endorsement while advancing preparatory activities that did not require formal approval.

3. **Remote and maritime transport, fuel supply and logistics :** Access to remote islands remains costly and weather-sensitive, and fuel disruption could delay consultations and surveys.

Impacts: Implementation across geographically dispersed terrestrial and marine sites remained constrained by high transport costs, vessel availability, weather conditions and occasional fuel supply disruptions. These factors affected the scheduling of stakeholder consultations, field assessments and community engagement activities, increasing implementation costs and extending activity timelines.

Actions Taken: The project adopted flexible implementation planning by scheduling field trips well in advance, coordinating logistics with provincial offices, government partners and local communities, and combining multiple activities within single field missions to maximise efficiency. Contingency time was incorporated into implementation schedules to minimise disruptions caused by adverse weather and transport constraints.

D. Gender Equality

At this stage of SAMBIO implementation, most activities anticipated by the Gender Mainstreaming Plan (GMP) have not yet been fully rolled out, as the project has not commenced ground-level work; therefore, the answer is No, the activities have not all been implemented. The main challenge has been the limited opportunity to operationalize gender actions at the community level, compounded by logistical constraints such as availability of provincial offices and resource owners. Adaptive management is being considered to ensure meaningful participation of women once site-level activities begin, including flexible consultation schedules, gender-sensitive facilitation, and partnerships with women's organizations. While quantitative gender outcomes are not yet visible, early engagement has shown encouraging signs such as increased interest among government officials in embedding gender considerations and openness from community leaders to involve women in decision-making.

No. Not all activities anticipated under the Gender Mainstreaming Plan (GMP) were implemented during the reporting period, as the project remained largely in the preparatory phase and community-level implementation had not yet commenced. Consequently, opportunities to implement gender-responsive activities at the site level were limited.

The main challenges included delays in commencing field implementation following project restructuring, recruitment and procurement processes, and scheduling consultations with Provincial Council Offices, customary resource owners, and other key stakeholders. These factors delayed the operationalisation of planned gender activities within project sites.

Adaptive management measures were introduced to ensure gender considerations remain integral to project implementation. The project initiated the recruitment of a Gender Mainstreaming Consultant to develop a project-specific Gender Action Plan, implementation toolkit, and capacity-building programme. Gender considerations were also integrated into stakeholder engagement and implementation planning, while recruitment of Site Facilitators will strengthen inclusive consultations and promote the meaningful participation of women, youth, and vulnerable groups once field activities commence. The project also plans to systematically collect sex- and age-disaggregated data to monitor progress against gender targets.

Although measurable gender outcomes are not yet evident, early stakeholder engagement demonstrated encouraging support for gender equality. Government agencies, implementing partners, and community leaders expressed commitment to promoting inclusive participation and recognised the importance of ensuring women are actively involved in project planning, decision-making, and implementation. This positive institutional commitment provides a strong foundation for achieving the project's gender objectives.

For FY2026/27, priority will be given to finalising and implementing the Gender Action Plan, integrating gender-responsive approaches across all project activities, delivering gender awareness and capacity-building programmes, strengthening partnerships with women's organisations and relevant government agencies, ensuring meaningful participation of women and youth in consultations and decision-making processes, and routinely monitoring and reporting sex- and age-disaggregated data to track progress towards the project's gender targets.

E. Knowledge Management

The SAMBIO Project continued to strengthen its Knowledge Management (KM) approach during FY2025/26 by establishing mechanisms to support information sharing, stakeholder engagement, transparency, and learning among implementing partners and key stakeholders. Following the revised implementation arrangements and onboarding of BirdLife International as the Executing Support Partner, efforts focused on developing the institutional foundation for systematic knowledge generation and dissemination.

Key KM products and communication outputs developed during the reporting period included project presentations, stakeholder awareness materials, meeting reports and minutes, quarterly and weekly implementation reports, and technical documentation supporting activities such as the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) validation process, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Sustainable Financing Framework discussions, Protected Area Policy development, and Mid-Term Review (MTR) preparation. These products were shared with the Project Steering Committee, Government ministries, provincial administrations, implementing partners, conservation organisations, development partners, and community representatives through meetings, workshops, email correspondence, and online platforms.

Project information was disseminated through stakeholder consultations, technical workshops, inception meetings, and community engagement sessions to ensure that information reached both national and local stakeholders. Communication materials were prepared in clear and accessible language, with consultations conducted in English, Fijian and iTaukei where appropriate to facilitate meaningful participation of local communities, women, youth and vulnerable groups.

The project also initiated the recruitment of a Communications Consultant to develop a comprehensive Communication and Knowledge Management Plan that will guide the systematic production, documentation and dissemination of project knowledge products throughout implementation. This will strengthen learning, visibility, replication of good practices and long-term knowledge sharing across Fiji's terrestrial and marine protected area network.

Although implementation of field interventions remained limited during the reporting period, the project successfully established the institutional and communication foundations necessary to support effective knowledge management and adaptive management throughout the remainder of the project.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	BirdLife International was onboarded as Executing Support Partner in November 2025 to deliver Components 1 and 2. MECC remains the Executing Agency and overall project coordinator under the amended execution arrangements.
Financial Management	The amended Grant Agreement provides separate grant allocations and financial reporting for MECC (USD 2.3 million) and BirdLife

	International (USD 4.9 million), while MECC consolidates technical reporting to CI-GEF.
Implementation Schedule	The implementation schedule was revised and the project completion date extended to 31 March 2029 to allow delivery under the amended execution arrangements.
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	The risk analysis was updated to reflect recruitment and procurement delays, government approval dependencies, consultant availability, extreme weather, staff continuity, and transport and fuel constraints affecting remote and maritime sites.
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	20260807_FY26 PIR_10675_SAMBIO