



# History of Population, Health, and Environment Approaches in the Philippines

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# Acronyms

BALANCED	Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development
EMPOWER	Empowering Rural Youth with Population Health Environment and Enterprise Development Know-How
IEC	information, education, and communication
IPOPCORM	Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management initiative
LGU	local government unit
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PACE	Policy, Advocacy, and Communication Enhanced for Population and Reproductive Health Project
PESCO-DEV	People and Environment Coexistence Development Project
PHE	population, health, and environment
POPCOM	Commission on Population
POPDEV	Commission on Population and Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development





# Foreword

Two decades have passed since I was introduced to the population, health, and environment (PHE) integrated approach. I played a key role in designing and directing one of the trailblazing programs grounded in the PHE approach in the Philippines—the Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management (IPOPCORM) initiative. While developing IPOPCORM in the late 1990s, I can still recall our team, brimming with public health experience, carefully considering risks and assumptions related to health, conservation, economics, and other factors. Respecting the context, priorities, and expertise of the P, H, and E sectors, we formed a multisectoral team, allowing for continual learning and adaptation. That was my baptism to the PHE approach, and the rest has been a PHE practitioners’ journey of learning by doing—sifting through lessons learned and promoting the integrated approach toward better health and environment for all, now and for generations to come.

Even after the PHE approach was first accepted on a cognitive level, and used for practical and programmatic purposes, we still lacked resources to fast-track the learning

curve. The limited amount of information on this topic at first posed both a challenge and an opportunity. Searching online, one could find information about predecessor fields like rural development, but finding “PHE” on any search engine was impossible. Now, PHE knowledge and tools are available online to anyone, at any time—and our programs in the Philippines have contributed to the popularity of the approach, as we have shared our learnings with other countries even outside of Asia. The rich history of PHE in the Philippines, however, is spread among multiple resources and project reports, and some lessons learned were never documented explicitly. This critical resource highlights the evidence and experiences from decades of PHE programs in the Philippines—synthesizing numerous documents, project reports, and in-depth interviews with experts. By documenting and sharing this information, other countries can incorporate these learnings into their own PHE programs, and continue to learn from our experience here in the Philippines.

The *History of Population, Health, and Environment Approaches in the Philippines* booklet chronicles the paradigm shift, conceptually and operationally, from a single-

sector to a synergistic integrated response. It describes the benefits of the PHE approach among vulnerable and marginalized communities, while sustaining the integrity of the natural resources people depend upon. This is a story of fellow advocates, practitioners, and the greater human population working with communities facing food insecurity, poverty, and the effects of climate change.

Congratulations and thank you to the Knowledge SUCCESS project at the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs, and to the United States Agency for International Development, for developing and publishing this booklet. Its publication is timely, considering the COVID-19 pandemic. The current state of the world emphasizes the need to take a closer look at the PHE integrated approach, which highlights the critical interrelated dynamics of people and the environment, to catalyze sectoral actions in a more united front and response.

I am beholden to all the PHE colleagues, mentors, and storytellers who generously shared their challenges, successes, and hopes that we all can learn from. Working on PHE

programs has been a ride. It has brought me personal and professional transformational growth. Before, I was a medical doctor. Now, I am a physician, a public health frontline worker, and a conservationist, all rolled into one. The PHE approach broke the barriers of sectoral and thematic divide.



**Joan Castro,**  
Executive Vice President,  
PATH Foundation  
Philippines Inc.  
April 2021

Image credits: Sarah V. Harlan (top left and bottom right); PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. (bottom left, middle, top right; headshot)



**“Our problems are interconnected, and the solutions need to be integrated.”**

— Community resident in a coastal village of the Philippines<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

**In a nation composed of more than 7,100 islands and islets—or roughly 22,000 miles of coastline—the Philippines offers a wonder of natural beauty and resources. Yet, it is no surprise that the connection between people and their environment is particularly strong as the fragile ecosystem is subject to volatile natural hazards, including flooding, droughts, cyclones, earthquakes, windstorms, tidal waves, and landslides.**

Most Filipinos live within 50 miles of the coastline and as the population continues to grow,<sup>2</sup> communities further expand into more vulnerable areas of the country, both increasing their risk and taxing the nation's ecology. Among more than 108 million Filipinos, roughly a quarter remain in poverty, which is both a cause and consequence of rapid growth paired with a lack of social and economic protections. Harmful agricultural and fishing practices have led to declining catch rates and agricultural production, and an alarming destruction of mangroves, which provide both shoreline protection and nutrient cycling. As many as 70 percent of coral reefs surrounding the Philippines are also considered threatened.<sup>3</sup>

A multisectoral approach seeks to interrupt the cyclical nature of high fertility, environmental degradation, and poverty by simultaneously addressing these various factors under one set of interventions. In an overwhelmingly Catholic country, it has also proven to offer an “acceptable” rationale for prioritizing investment in family planning, which remains out of reach for many. One in 10 Filipino adolescents (ages 15 to 19) have already begun childbearing,<sup>4</sup> yet half of all pregnancies are unintended and the vast majority (90 percent) are due to a lack of modern methods of contraception.<sup>5</sup> Poor and rural young women are even more likely to experience unintended pregnancy.<sup>5</sup>



The Commission on Population (POPCOM), launched in the Philippines in 1970, initially focused almost entirely on population growth and family planning policies. During the 1980s, the commission shifted to address larger development questions, including natural resource planning. In 1987, under the Corazon Aquino administration, the POPCOM board issued a statement that “the ultimate goal of the Population Program is the improvement of the quality of human life in a just and humane society [ . . . ] The achievement of this goal requires a recognition of the close interrelationships among population, resources, and environmental factors.”<sup>6</sup>

This policy shift paved the way for a greater appreciation of the interconnection between population and the environment, leading to more integrated planning in population and development, which by the 1980s and 1990s, specifically linked population, health, and environment (PHE) issues, such as urbanization, migration, and land use.

Today, the Philippines continues to be a leader in promoting community-based PHE programs, seeking to improve natural resource management, deliver greater reproductive health services, and enhance food security and the sustainable livelihood of its citizens.

This booklet summarizes the journey of PHE in the Philippines. We synthesized decades

of leadership and learnings from PHE programs led by local and regional experts and supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international donors (e.g., David and Lucile Packard Foundation, United Nations Population Fund). Until now, the information in this booklet has been scattered among various project reports, journal articles, and meeting notes—and in some cases, not documented at all. This resource reviews the rich history of PHE in the Philippines, highlighting key projects and milestones. It then summarizes implementation guidance, lessons learned, and key themes that have emerged during the last two decades, and provides links to resources and tools with more details. This resource intends to serve as a practical guide for others interested in PHE implementation, including program managers, technical advisors, or policymakers in the Philippines and around the world.

It makes intrinsic sense that integrating approaches across development sectors helps avoid overlap and redundancy. Thanks to decades of learnings and rigorous evaluations, these programs have also delivered strong evidence backing the benefit of integration for both people and the environment. As the Philippines continues to face the effects of catastrophic typhoons, such as Haiyan in 2013 and Goni in 2020, the need and opportunity to learn from and scale up successful practices from PHE programs is as pertinent as ever.





# A Timeline of PHE in the Philippines



**1980s-1990s**  
**The Philippine government initiates national poverty alleviation projects that integrate population, health, and environment (PHE) issues such as urbanization, migration, and land use. The Philippines adopts the International Conference on Population and Development Programme for Action and international partners begin a number of pilot community-based PHE projects.**

**1981**  
National Economic and Development Authority implements Population and Development Planning and Research,<sup>7</sup> with support from the United Nations Population Fund

**1987**  
Aquino administration releases a statement recognizing the close interrelationships among population, resources, and the environment

**1990**  
National Economic and Development Authority implements the Integrated Population and Development Project<sup>8</sup>

**1994**  
The Philippines adopts the International Conference on Population and Development Programme for Action

Image credit: Sam Bayle/Unsplash

Image credits: The U.S. National Archives (left); Charles Deluvio/Unsplash





**1996–1999**  
POPCOM, National Economic and Development Authority, Department of Interior and Local Government, and academic partners conduct population and development planning at the local level,<sup>8</sup> identifying 109 core indicators reflecting local, national, and sustainable development goals

**1990s**  
POPCOM administer the Population Policy Operations Project, contributing to a set of implementing rules known as the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992<sup>8</sup>

**Early to Mid-2000s**  
**The PHE community begins to consolidate and transition pilot efforts toward broader implementation and scale-up.**

**2000–2008**  
Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management (IPOPORM) initiative<sup>8</sup>  
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation supports operations research to test hypotheses about the added value of linking interventions versus single-sector approaches<sup>9</sup>

**2000–2004**  
People and Environment Coexistence Development Project<sup>10</sup>

**2000**  
Philippine NGO Council on Population, Health and Welfare launches campaign to train media on reproductive health, gender, and development/environment<sup>8</sup>

**2001–2004**  
World Neighbors assesses impact of integrating reproductive health with natural resource management program<sup>11</sup> and convenes workshop in 2001 on simultaneous, bridge, symbiotic, and staggered approaches to introducing PHE strategies

**2001–2004**  
Soil and Water Conservation Foundation

**2002**  
**USAID supports diverse PHE project portfolio, ranging from field-based integrated health and conservation to communications and outreach, knowledge management, and information dissemination.**

**2002**  
Population Reference Bureau and Save the Children host first advocacy-building PHE training with 18 PHE program specialists and managers<sup>8</sup>

**2002–2004**  
Conservation International Philippines Integrated Population Environment Program

**2002–2008**  
Healthy Families, Healthy Forests project

**2004**  
Mapping Population-Biodiversity Connections in the Philippines project<sup>8</sup>

**2004**  
First National Conference on Population, Health, and Environment<sup>12</sup>

**2004–2010**  
Fisheries Improved For Sustainable Harvest project

**2005**  
SIGUE, the initial PHE coalition, renames itself the PHE Network

**2005–2008**  
Alternative Advocacy Project<sup>13</sup>

**2006–2010**  
**PHE movement shifts to increase focus on peer-to-peer learning.**

**2006**  
Population, Health, Environment, Education and Livelihood Network formed in Central Visayas

Second National Conference on Population, Health, and Environment<sup>12</sup>

**2007**  
World Wildlife Fund PHE project evaluated<sup>14</sup>

**2007**  
PHE Network adopts formal organizational structure and operating manual

**2008**  
Third National Conference on Population, Health, and Environment<sup>15</sup>

**2008**  
Integrated Community-Based Family Planning/Reproductive Health and Fisheries Management Project<sup>16</sup>

**2008–2010**  
Population, Poverty, and Environment Project<sup>13</sup>

**2008–2013**  
Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development (BALANCED) Project

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Image credits: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. (left); Sarah V. Harlan (right)





- 2012**

The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act is signed into law, guaranteeing universal access to contraception, fertility control, sexual education, and maternal care.
- 2012**

Fifth issue of the State of the Philippine Population Report is published on PHE
- 2013-PRESENT**

**PHE projects increasingly focus on reaching remote and marginalized communities.**
- 2011-2014**

Empowering Rural Youth with Population Health Environment and Enterprise Development Know-How (EMPOWER Project)
- 2014-2017**

Women Engendering Nation Building by Linking Sexual and Reproductive Health, Population Health and Environment and Climate Change Initiatives
- 2018**

Executive Order 71 officially changes the name of POPCOM (Commission on Population) to POPDEV (Commission on Population and Development), emphasizing the key role of population in development
- 2019-2020**

Population Reference Bureau partners with the Philippine Business for Social Progress, Inc., to implement an activity for the Policy, Advocacy, and Communication Enhanced for Population and Reproductive Health (PACE) project challenge

Image credits: Sarah V. Harlan

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**“We convinced a core group of about 14 organizations to meet and we did training on what PHE meant. Folks came in from Conservation International, neighbors, and local Filipino groups. We had local mayors who came in, we had a local funding group, and they decided that they wanted to come together as a coalition and a body.”**

— Roger-Mark De Souza, Former Technical Director of Population, Health, and Environment, Population Reference Bureau

## History of PHE in the Philippines

### How It All Began

The needs of coastal communities in the Philippines are complex and the correlation between growing population and coastal resource depletion has been demonstrated by reduced fish catch rates and declining agricultural production since the 1950s. Development projects that address the intersection of people, health, and the environment have generated significant interest at the local, regional, and national levels. In several villages and regions in the Philippines, these projects have helped improve natural resource management, deliver greater reproductive health services, and enhance food security and livelihood options for poor Filipinos.

While a specific framework for PHE did not emerge until decades later, the Philippines launched the Total Integrated Development Approach in the 1970s to integrate family planning with several development areas. Though still an informal strategy, in the early 1980s to the 1990s, the government began national poverty alleviation projects that specifically linked population, health, and the environment.

As documented by De Souza in 2008,<sup>8</sup> in the late 1990s nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international partners in the Philippines began piloting community-based projects that formally addressed PHE, working

in diverse villages and regions. These projects benefited from the precedence of national-level projects and focused specifically on promoting locally owned efforts to improve

**“The most prominent and definitive program related to population and the environment started around the various programs of the Total Integrated Development Approach, where we had conscious consideration of the impact of family planning on the environment. This was continued in 1994 during the Ramos administration when we highlighted the PRE [population, resource, and environment] framework, but it was also then that we restated the Philippine Population Management Program, highlighting the importance of the program within the context of environmental development and other sectoral development concerns. This continued on with the several projects of the commission with more explicit integration of the population within ecological development . . . In short, from its conception, the Philippine Population Management Program has explicitly considered population, health, and environment interconnectedness as one of its key strategies.”**

— Lolito R. Tacardon, Deputy Executive Director, Philippines Commission on Population and Development



natural resource management, expand reproductive health, and enhance food security and livelihood options. Following the success of these community projects, implementing agencies sought to further expand them into adjacent or more distant sites. PHE programming gained momentum throughout the early 2000s, expanding into new geographic areas of the country and beyond traditional PHE areas, such as into disaster mitigation and food security.

Starting in the early 2000s, local and international NGOs, policymakers, and journalists increasingly worked together. This was seen in 2002 as the Population Reference Bureau and Save the Children formalized an active PHE community that

systematically disseminated community project lessons and explored opportunities for their broader application. The First National Conference on Population, Health, and Environment followed in 2004, resulting in the Antipolo Declaration, which urged people from all sectors to make PHE linkages and was signed by nearly 100,000 Filipinos. In 2005 an informal PHE coalition called SIGUE—which sought to refine best practices, provide training, and make recommendations to increase integrated PHE benefits—renamed itself the PHE Network, later adopting a formal organizing structure in 2007. These efforts continued throughout the 2000s, helping to coalesce a thriving PHE community in the Philippines.

**“During my first couple of years working with PATH Foundation and PATH International, we were mostly doing reproductive health and AIDS prevention work. I started to look at other areas where we could help make a contribution, and one of them was in child malnutrition. We did a desk review on the root causes of child malnutrition . . . We didn’t just look at nutrition and health, but we looked at what was going on in the fishery sector, what was going on with the coastal environment, and we also looked at local governance issues.**

**All this information indicated that childhood malnutrition was linked to high parity among women in fisher households, the decline of both the fisheries and the coastal resources that are important for sustaining the fisheries. We also looked at the poverty-related constraints, and the lack of alternative livelihood opportunities in fishing communities. We realized that we couldn’t just go in with a traditional malnutrition prevention program. It needed to have a multisectoral and a multidisciplinary approach.**

**That’s where we came up with an approach that could address the high population density in the coastal area... We realized that we needed to take a very holistic approach to the problem. And we put together the IPOPCORM model.”**

— Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.





## Initial PHE Projects in the Philippines: Community-Based Models

Implemented by PATH Foundation Philippines, **IPOPCORM (Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management)** was a five-year project (2000–2008) to improve the quality of life of communities that depend on coastal resources, while maintaining biological diversity and productivity of coastal resources. Specifically, the project sought to improve reproductive health outcomes, improve management of coastal and marine resources, and increase awareness and support for the integration of coastal resource management and reproductive health approaches among policymakers and the public.

Launched in the Palawan and Bohol provinces, the project eventually expanded into eight provinces in the southern Philippines, reaching 216 villages in 33 coastal municipalities. Through an integrated approach, the project addressed food insecurity caused by declining marine fish supplies and increasing numbers of people living on the coast. It implemented a peer education model, both for youth and adults, sharing information about environmental stewardship (for example, encouraging men to refrain from destructive fishing methods such as using dynamite and poisoning with cyanide) and family planning. Contraceptive supplies were made available through small store owners. The project supported alternative livelihood and environmentally friendly businesses for fisherfolk, such as seaweed harvesting, and included a microcredit initiative for women.

Through IPOPCORM, the Philippines was the first country in the world to develop community-based mechanisms for fisheries

**“The United Nations Development Programme helped the Philippines government come up with their biodiversity strategy, identifying the most critical areas. They had a table of the biozones, detailing where the resources were that needed to be sustained, and where the threats were. We took that and did an analysis of the population dynamics in those ‘hot spots.’ Then we were able to narrow down which of those hot spots—especially ones with high population density and population momentum—to start in. With the initial grant, we worked in about five of those priority biozones, and with the follow-on projects, we were able to cover about 12 of the 17 most critical biozones.”**

— **Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.**

and coastal resource management. The main results included increased family planning use (from 43 to 83 percent),<sup>9</sup> improved coastal resource stewardship, improved food security, and increased household income (up 20 percent between 2003 and 2006). It helped protect marine sanctuaries and allowed endangered fisheries to rebound.

Through a rigorous assessment, the project’s integrated approach was found to have a significantly higher impact on reproductive health, coastal resource management, and food insecurity indicators than stand-alone programs, and it reduced program costs.<sup>17</sup> This project became a gold standard for the region and demonstrated that integration has an additive impact compared with single-sector approaches. The project also helped demonstrate the importance of aligning PHE activities to people’s lifestyles and underscored the tangible benefits of increasing access to family planning.<sup>9,18,19</sup>



**“One of the lessons that we learned under IPOPCORM is that it was difficult to actually convince the environment sector that bringing reproductive health into some of their ongoing activities would provide any benefit, or contribute to their environmental and conservation objectives and goals. And what we were able to show in our operations research is that the integrated approach also produced higher-level outcomes—both for CRM and RH [coastal resource management and reproductive health]. And we articulated that FP/RH [family planning and reproductive health] was a mechanism that could help sustain conservation gains.”**

— **Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.**

Starting in 2000, Save the Children began implementing the **People and Environment Coexistence Development (PESCO-Dev) Project** to help address widespread overfishing and destructive fishing practices. Initially launched in the Municipality of Concepcion on Panay Island, it later expanded to 10 other municipalities on Panay and Guimaras islands. Its overall goal was to achieve a sustainable balance between people and the environment for these communities.

Developed in partnership with local government units, the project carried out workshops with *barangay* leaders—the Filipino term for a village, district, or ward—to strengthen their community mobilization, development planning, and project decision making. The project advocated for budgetary and policy support to align with annual municipal development planning and introduced the Appreciative Community Mobilization model<sup>20</sup> to activate community participation in project focal areas.

Image credit: Sarah V. Harlan





Through peer educator training, policies, and other project activities, this project increased the use of modern family planning methods among couples of reproductive age<sup>10</sup> and reduced poverty, crude birth rate, maternal mortality, and malnutrition among young children. The Concepcion local government formally introduced the PHE model, and Concepcion later became a place where local and international development groups and donors came to visit and learn.<sup>21</sup>

**Conservation International** initiated the Integrated **Population Environment Program** (2002–2004) in the Northern Sierra Madre Biodiversity Corridor. The program demonstrated the link between reducing population pressure and improving biodiversity conservation. Along with local partners and local government units, Conservation International Philippines worked with Indigenous people and others in remote upland communities, providing these remote communities access to basic services that fostered healthy families, while improving their capacity to manage forest resources.

There were three intervention models, each delivered by different NGOs, local government units, and civil society organizations (e.g., fisher folk associations, women, and youth), and each consisting of a standardized set of activities, including service delivery, education and communication, and policy advocacy.

**“I first learned about PHE through the PESCO-Dev Project. Because of the success of the project and the promising future of PHE, I continued to promote it. I was drawn to PHE because I thought it was quite unique. The work I had been involved with was more on children’s programming—early childhood development. With PHE, you have a very broad network. So the relationships you’re building are not only with the department of health, but environment too. You’re building your linkages within the sub-sectors of environment—forestry, urban areas, solid waste management, etc. In our Metro Manila program, PHE works with solid waste management. And here in Western Visayas, our work was about the overlay of coastal resource management with reproductive health.”**

— Norma Pongan, Former Senior Program Manager, Save the Children

The coastal resource management intervention was informed by a participatory coastal resource assessment and established marine and mangrove protected areas, mangrove reforestation, management and enforcement, and peer education and behavior change communication to encourage community compliance.

The reproductive health intervention supported family planning information and counseling for informed choice, community-based distribution through local midwives and provincial health workers, social marketing of over-the-counter methods such as condom and pills, referral for other services and care, and peer education and behavior change communication to reduce risk of unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. The integrated approach included both types of interventions delivered as one service package.

The project sought to sustainably strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations, Indigenous people, and local government units, to implement and monitor their development plans and enforce conservation policies and initiatives. It increased family planning and reproductive health services, protected more than 1,600 hectares, and developed 196 hectares of agroforestry farms. Filipino project managers addressed root causes of instability including poverty, community health issues, and environmental degradation, and organized goat-rearing as a supplemental livelihood project. A memorandum of agreement was signed by farmer beneficiaries, barangay councils, and Conservation International to ensure the project would benefit others in the future.<sup>22</sup>

Several additional projects looked to address the unique challenges of urban areas, such as in the National Capital Region or greater metropolitan area of the city of Manila. These projects were highly collaborative, including

**“Conservation International’s first [PHE project in the Philippines] was up in the mountains in the north. It was interesting to see how well the Philippines’ health system is set up. They have a very extensive community health worker network. And their local government is so devolved—they have a lot of authority, budgetary and otherwise. So they have a strong platform for integration—for bringing together health and conservation. That is one of the successes of the Philippines. The PHE messages—like ‘healthy families, healthy forests’—resonate a lot. They do have huge challenges in terms of poverty and MCH [maternal and child health] indicators, but they have a lot of successes. I also appreciate the Filipino love for karaoke. It reflects to me this very strong culture of getting information out and really wanting to communicate. They are really strong in that way, and empower people who need these integrated services.”**

— Janet Edmond, Senior Director, Peace and Development Partnerships, Conservation International

the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, private-sector actors, civil society, health department, and international NGOs. Starting in 1993, for example, the homegrown Sagip Pasig Movement<sup>23</sup> was established to work with communities to establish waste management programs. In 2002 it expanded its program to integrate PHE by adding reproductive health services when requested. The Pampalusog Bata Project<sup>24</sup> by Save the Children and Johnson & Johnson launched in 2004 to increase awareness of health risks among residents and schools in the Masville community. The project also improved drainage and sanitation systems and increased recycling and composting.



**“I clearly remember going to a Save the Children project in a slum outside Manila. It was eye-opening, because when I think about PHE I think of our rural experiences—like in Madagascar, you have to hike two days to get to the health center. The Philippines gives you the breadth of PHE. This was a slum built on a garbage dump. No water and sanitation. It sticks with me now as one of the most dire living situations and Save the Children was there doing education in schools, doing WASH [water, sanitation, and hygiene] stuff, trying to do integrated messaging. So you get a variety of the PHE spectrum in the Philippines.”**

— **Janet Edmond, Senior Director, Peace and Development Partnerships, Conservation International**

As the PHE community transitioned toward broader implementation, the Philippines hosted the first PHE Philippines Conference in 2004 and Second Conference on PHE in 2006 focused on creating concrete strategies for sustainable development.<sup>12</sup> More than 350 international representatives from government, civil society, and the private sector gathered to learn about cutting-edge approaches to PHE implementation, advocacy, and research through case studies. These were landmark events in terms of building leadership skills, highlighting how data could be used for policymaking, and helping new actors understand and appreciate the value of exploring the PHE dimensions of pressing development priorities. Conference attendees pledged to collaborate in “The 2006 Philippine PHE Action Plan,” also known as the Cebu Accord, which outlined strategies for implementing PHE programs and policies through policy development, information, education, communication, and research. Following the conference, the Population Reference Bureau also began working with local partners to

support a global PHE network that has served as a center of excellence and training in using integrated approaches for improving the well-being of communities and the environment.

#### **The Alternative Advocacy Project**

(2005–2008), which was a follow-on grant to IPOPCORM, was designed to build on PHE successes to increase policymakers’ awareness and support in the ecoregion of the globally significant Danajon Bank reef system in Central Visayas. It focused on policymakers and decision makers at the local level and looked to increase the integration of family planning and reproductive health in municipal development plans. Through constituency building, capacity strengthening, education, and PHE site visits, the project increased awareness among key decision makers of demographic factors likely to impact coastal environment and food security, such as the “youth bulge,” helping transform their attitudes and encourage mainstreaming of family planning into coastal resource management efforts.<sup>25</sup>

## Scaling up PHE in the Philippines and Beyond (2006–2013)

The next era of PHE implementation in the Philippines focused on scaling up PHE as an effective development strategy and fostering peer-to-peer learning.

### **Applying Lessons Learned**

In 2008 the Philippines PHE Network convened the **Third National Population, Health, and Environment Conference** in March 2008 in Tagaytay City. The conference gathered more than 300 practitioners, policymakers, advocates, researchers, and journalists and focused on scaling up PHE in the Philippines and in East Africa.<sup>15</sup>

This was also the last year of **IPOPCORM**, which initially had expanded through “horizontal” replication into new biogeographical areas, followed by “functional” replication to incorporate new issue areas, such as nutrition issues endemic to coastal areas (e.g., iodine efficiency) and other rural coastal economic challenges, such as energy sources. Over time, IPOPCORM was scaled up “vertically” from a municipal-wide engagement to an ecosystem-wide engagement with adoption by an interregional management body that included four provinces and 18 municipal governments that shared joint jurisdiction over the Danajon Bank reef system in Central Visayas. Eventually it achieved nationwide engagement and was adopted by the Philippines National Anti-Poverty Commission and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau. It was also replicated in select East African countries.<sup>26</sup>

**The Poverty-Population-Environment Project** (2008–2010) supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation was

initiated in 2008 to address opportunities and requests for technical assistance to support reproductive health as part of natural resource management and poverty alleviation initiatives. It sought to cultivate public-private partnerships, enabling local governments and private-sector organizations to plan and implement cross-sectoral PHE approaches. It focused on high-risk provinces in Visayas and Luzon.<sup>27</sup>

Starting in 2008, the global **Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development (BALANCED) Project** advanced and supported wider use of PHE approaches worldwide. Funded by USAID and led by the Coastal Resources Center at University of Rhode Island, PATH Foundation Philippines, and Conservation International, BALANCED Philippines was implemented in 28 targeted municipalities in the Bohol Province and sought to establish cadres of competent PHE champions and practitioners. Through global collaboration, the project encouraged the sharing of knowledge and state-of-the-art practices in remote, biodiversity-rich areas and focused on how to grow the evidence base showing the comparative advantage of integrated PHE programs.

The BALANCED Project hosted a learning exchange in 2010 for individuals from the project’s globally funded sites. This was a cross-institutional learning opportunity for government officials and executives of relevant NGOs in East Africa and Asia. Representatives from Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, the Philippines, and the United States visited PHE sites in the Philippines to see and learn about the wide range of stakeholders implementing PHE activities. The aim was to share Philippines PHE experiences with the larger global community and encourage poverty alleviation through family planning, conservation, and health programs.





**“Between 2011 and 2014, I took the IPOPCORM model and helped NGOs in Ghana, Nepal, and Tanzania to adapt that integrated approach to their program areas. It’s been adapted in forestry management in Nepal, fisheries management in Ghana, and I worked with the Jane Goodall group in Tanzania to help them integrate reproductive health and family planning. In Nepal, we added improved cookstoves, because there was a lot of ARI [acute respiratory illness] and ARI mortality in [children] under 5, as a result of using traditional wood-burning stoves that were not efficient and that put out a lot of smoke. When I worked with those groups, they had their issue and I made them take a broader approach to see where they could make the connections. That’s the hardest part in designing PHE projects—you identify the relevant sectors and you look how you can make the connection with other sectors, and build bridges.”**

— Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

Participants learned, for example, how PATH Foundation Philippines worked with rural governments to increase access to community-based family planning and how they developed integrated strategies to alleviate rural poverty. The project included post-training mentoring and “twinning up,” or the pairing of an experienced PHE practitioner with a less experienced practitioner to help institutionalize needed PHE skills and support.<sup>28</sup>

Also during this time, through a buy-in from the USAID Philippines Health and Environment Offices, the BALANCED Project implemented PHE activities in two key marine biodiverse areas—the Danajon Bank and the Verde Island Passage.

Starting in 2005, the **Roxas Project**, part of a multi-country World Wildlife Fund PHE project sponsored by Johnson & Johnson and USAID, integrated programs to improve

knowledge around family planning and reproductive health and coastal resource management. By strengthening PHE capacity, improving access to family planning services, and promoting sustainable fishing practices in Palawan Island, the project was able to reach new family planning users with a consistently affordable and available supply of contraceptive methods. It also initiated development of community marine sanctuaries and the establishment of five new marine-protected areas at the barangay level, the smallest local government unit. The project established a monitoring system to conserve the marine area around Roxas City and integrated family planning into resource management strategies. PHE knowledge and awareness greatly increased in the seven target communities and desired family size decreased.

**The Integrated Community-Based Family Planning/Reproductive Health and Fisheries Management Project** used the IPOPCORM approach to improve food security and quality of life in communities that depend on coastal resources and maintain biological diversity of marine ecosystems. Through a PHE approach, the project improved reproductive health outcomes of people living in coastal communities, such as reaching new family planning users, and enhanced community marine and coastal resource management by delivering integrated messaging to

target communities linking population, family planning, and sustainability. It increased awareness and support for linking reproductive health and fishery management and policy reforms. The project was turned over formally to the municipal executives and all four local government units assumed responsibility for sustaining the project activities.<sup>16</sup>

At the close of this period of burgeoning PHE programs, the Philippines passed the **Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012**. Officially designated as Republic Act No. 10354, the law guarantees universal access to contraceptive methods, fertility control, sexual education, and maternal care and has been a foundation for expanding family planning programs. The importance of multi-stakeholder alliances was integral to successful scale-up across various projects. Involving diverse stakeholders—including national and subnational governments, civil society organizations, private entrepreneurs, external donors, and the fisherfolk and coastal communities themselves—ensured that greater consensus was generated about the value of PHE. Having solid impact evaluation data, a clear theory of change, vision for scale-up, social capital to foster champions, and empowered communities were also integral to ensuring buy-in and driving progress forward.<sup>29</sup>

**“When we started [in the early 2000s], PHE was really driven from the family planning sector, and environmental groups bought into it because they believed in the approach. We all became champions. And I feel like we were talking about PHE, but it was really family planning integration into environmental programming. The health component wasn’t always there. I feel like integrated programming is more of a buzzword now. I feel like the concept has broadened. Now, we talk about population environment development or integrated natural resources management. And the concept has become a little broader.”**

— Elin Torel, Director for International Programs, Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island



## Reaching Marginalized Communities (2013–2020)

After universal access to family planning was guaranteed by law through the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, the PHE movement became increasingly focused on reaching marginalized communities, such as youth (ages 15 to 24), and mainstreaming sexual and reproductive health into the climate emergency agenda.

### Empowering and Engaging Youth

One in 10 adolescents (ages 15 to 19) in the Philippines have begun childbearing, and based on the most recent data it appears that number is growing.<sup>30</sup> With the second-highest teen pregnancy rate in Southeast Asia,<sup>31</sup> ensuring reproductive health among adolescents and youth is of paramount need and interest.

From 2011 to 2014, the **Empowering Rural Youth with Population Health Environment and Enterprise Development Know-How (EMPOWER Project)**, funded by the Ashmore Foundation, specifically sought to address the needs of impoverished youth living in coastal communities whose livelihoods depended on fisheries, which were in rapid decline due to overfishing and environmental degradation.

Building on the lessons and best practices of IPOPCORM, which documented the positive impact of integrated population, coastal resource management, and income diversification on poverty reduction, human health, and ecosystem resilience, the EMPOWER Project sought to strengthen youth capacity to plan and implement integrated PHE approaches. These approaches promoted self-help, improved quality of life, and enhanced the sustainability of coastal and marine resources in priority hot spots, including the Danajon Bank and

the Verde Island Passage Marine Biodiversity Conservation Corridor, which experienced heightened population growth and a significant unmet need for family planning and reproductive health services.

Through the design and implementation of community-based and integrated family planning and coastal conservation activities, EMPOWER sought to increase public awareness of PHE interrelationships in the coastal Philippines and its linkage to food security and sustainable livelihoods. The project also sought to improve reproductive health outcomes among youth living in rural coastal areas and their vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity.<sup>27</sup>

Exposing youth to information about PHE and food security was a powerful tool to spark their interest and commitment for the environment and responsible family planning. A *barkada* (“buddy”) system helped instill a level of social pressure and encouraged continued participation. In this age group, parent support was also key to helping youth gain confidence in their abilities to be pro-health, pro-environment PHE leaders. Providing leadership opportunities for youth-driven conservation, resource management, and environmentally friendly livelihoods helped reinforce their commitment to conservation work, while also enabling youth to become economically productive members of society.<sup>13</sup>

### Integrating Sexual and Reproductive Health Into the Climate Change Dialogue and Agenda

As climate change continued to alarm the international community, projects like the **Women Engendering Nation Building by Linking Sexual and Reproductive Health, Population Health and Environment, and Climate Change Initiatives**, supported by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, sought to integrate

reproductive health and biodiversity conservation into the climate change agenda and discourse.<sup>27</sup>

During the three-year project, a key advocacy strategy, in partnership with the PHE Network, was to build an ongoing dialogue with policymakers from the House of Representatives and civil society members, which in turn informed further advocacy activities in Iloilo City as well as publications. The dialogue focused on updates to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the need for integrated PHE approaches as a means for creating more resilient communities. Subsequently, the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women produced a paper on reproductive health and climate change,<sup>32</sup> and the USAID-supported Knowledge for Health Project assisted PHE partners in organizing and conducting a PHE Voices Storytelling Initiative<sup>33</sup> to enhance storytelling capacity among PHE partners.

### Population Integral to Development

In 2018, nearly 40 years after the establishment of POPCOM (Commission on Population) as the central coordinating and policymaking body of the government in the field of population, Executive Order 71 officially changed the name to POPDEV (Commission on Population and Development), further emphasizing the key role of population in development.

Image credit: Gerald James Cabal





**“I believe that there is no single solution to a population problem, health problem, or environment problem. It really has to be the interface of these various areas of work. All the more now, it’s really important that we all work together. We’re no longer able solve a problem by just working individually or separately along these three areas.”**

— Naida Pasion, Chief Business Development Officer,  
Save the Children Philippines

## Implementation Guidance and Lessons Learned

A host of lessons learned through PHE project implementation in the Philippines can help inform future efforts. The following is a synthesis of key themes that have emerged from more than four decades of PHE in the Philippines. Intended as a practical summary, it includes highlights from various projects as well references for further reading.

### Communicating About the Evidence

Advocates, donors, governments, program managers, and other stakeholders often seek to understand and learn from existing PHE evidence. While there has been some robust data demonstrating the benefits of integrated programming, the complex interrelationships between population, health, and environment suggest additional factors can influence project impacts. Documentation is often complex, isolated in project reports across different organizations and countries, and often not disseminated widely.

While donors increasingly collect data to document implementation and demonstrate impact, such monitoring and evaluation efforts are still limited and difficult to compare. In addition, the impact of scaling up approaches can take years to demonstrate—well beyond the time frame of funding for most projects to continue monitoring and evaluation efforts.<sup>34</sup>

**“It’s really very important to have a common understanding of the concept [of PHE] among all stakeholders or partners involved . . . In relation to that, a very important lesson is also the need to demonstrate, which can be facilitated with models, the good practices that we already have so we can appreciate the impact and the benefits of integrated PHE interventions.”**

— Lolito R. Tacardon, Deputy Executive Director, Philippines Commission on Population and Development



**“I think that all of us who work in PHE, we have this gut feeling that doing PHE or integrated programming is the right thing to do because people’s lives are integrated. People don’t think in silos . . . but when we report to our donors, they want proof that integration is better than implementing in silos. And we’ve had a real hard time in the field of PHE in proving that—proving that if you do integrated programming, you’re going to get more bang for your buck than if you don’t.”**

— Elin Torel, Director for International Programs, Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island

Monitoring and Data Collection

Standardized reporting is essential to support comparisons across different PHE programs. A consistent reporting approach supports better communication and, as was demonstrated by the BALANCED Project in the Visayas Region, can encourage program scale-up.<sup>35</sup> By building sound monitoring and evaluation activities into the pilot, the IPOPCORM team also generated early evidence needed to convince sponsors and stakeholders to buy into a broader scale-up plan.<sup>36</sup>

The USAID PHE Framework,<sup>37</sup> used by Conservation International Philippines and other program managers, is one robust monitoring framework that has supported systematic data collection. The Health Policy Project developed the tool to help define the interactions between PHE interventions and to show synergies that can result from an integrated approach.

Monitoring and evaluation has also been used as a building block for community empowerment, creating greater community

understanding and advocacy. The IPOPCORM initiative monitoring approach,<sup>38</sup> for example, involved communities in monitoring and evaluation training activities themselves. They used data-gathering tools, such as a participatory coastal resource assessment, and transformed facts and figures into concrete steps to help ensure environment protection. Data that communities collect through participatory approaches are believable, useful, and meaningful to them.

PHE Program Impact

PATH Foundation Philippines was the first agency to conduct a rigorous evaluation of PHE that demonstrated the benefit of integration coastal resource management and family planning approaches for sustainable impact.<sup>36</sup>

Through a comparative, quasi-experimental study at three IPOPCORM sites, evaluators found coastal resource management alone to be generally unsuccessful in maintaining biodiversity or reproductive health outcomes. In addition, while the results showed a similar change in contraceptive prevalence between the integrated sites and reproductive health-only sites, reproductive health-only sites were unsuccessful at changing environmental outcomes. When implemented together, however, the IPOPCORM approach generated significant impact and positive trends for reef benthos (i.e., organisms promoting reef growth, reef fish, seagrass, and mangroves) and positive reproductive health outcomes.<sup>39</sup>

As part of the PHE interventions, communities changed their fishing and coastal resource protection practices. Fish catch increased and coral reef conditions improved. Improvements in coral and mangrove conditions were also attributed to the effects of protective management by collaborating peoples’ organizations. The same institutions managed reproductive health activities that enabled contraceptive access and a significant

decrease in the average number of children born to women in the study area.

Results of this study illustrated the importance of reproductive health interventions for long-term coastal resource management.<sup>40</sup> Other data showed reductions in poverty among youth participating in integrated reproductive health and coastal resource management programs.<sup>38</sup> IPOPCORM also found that a “stewardship” model integrating health and conservation concepts was more effective than providing only reproductive health information to young people.<sup>39</sup>

In another evaluation conducted three years after the Integrated Population Environment Program ended, participating villagers demonstrated more knowledge of family planning based on the indicators in the Family Planning Knowledge Scale than non-participating villagers. Several important factors were found to influence the degree of benefits, including the level of participation in integrated projects and how NGOs implemented these projects. There were also several non-project-related factors

that may have influenced the scale of impact, underscoring the need to tailor strategies based on specific contexts and even the personal characteristics of different participants.

Additional studies outside of the Philippines have provided evidence that including family planning and maternal child health in holistic community development programs can help strengthen individual, household, and community resilience, particularly where there are unmet needs for such services.<sup>41</sup> PHE projects have also been found to contribute to youth development.<sup>42</sup>

Promoting Peer-to-Peer Exchange

PHE is more than a development approach in the Philippines—it encompasses a network of experts and advocates working toward a common mission. This network was actively cultivated through activities to promote the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and success stories. The sharing of real-life program examples from government-community collaborations has both reinforced and encouraged new partnerships toward sustainable development.

Image credits: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. (left and right); Dovie D. Lozada (middle)





The USAID-funded South-to-South Exchange on Integrated Population-Health-Environment,<sup>28</sup> for example, was designed by the BALANCED Project to engage government executives, such as mayors, chiefs, and governors, and NGOs. It created opportunities for leaders from 10 countries to see through an in-person “study tour” how local stakeholders in the Philippines implement integrated PHE approaches.

The growing PHE community has exercised other unique approaches to encourage sharing between implementers, including

nonmonetary incentives to acknowledge and reward volunteerism. In Bantay Dagat, for example, after learning that disruption to upland and coastal habitats can negatively impact ecological processes in coastal waters, members of the marine-protected area management committee and other local implementers became PHE advocates. Their commitment was further reinforced through ongoing recognition and involvement, such as through collective and individual awards, statements of achievement, and opportunities to share their experiences.<sup>13</sup>

**“The composition of the [PHE Network in the Philippines] has become much more diverse, which is great, because that’s an understanding of the phenomenon that we need to be involved with the different sectors. The involvement of a national government entity such as the Commission of Population is really a good change which I have seen that bodes well for the continuity as well as the agility. The second change, and this is a positive change also, is the recognition that we need key decision makers at the national level in congress, senate, and other areas where high-level decisions are being made about our work for population, health, and environment. We have a much greater consciousness to be able to do that. Because when we started in 2000, it was more of a network which did not really look at advocacy at the national level, just implementation at the municipality and city levels—so local government units. So that’s changed. Now there is a recognition that we need a framework at the national level. There’s also something which I’ve seen in terms of the aspect of resilience. We did not speak much about resilience before as an outcome of PHE, but the recognition of resilience is really important progress along the way for PHE.”**

— Naida Pasion, Chief Business Development Officer, Save the Children Philippines

### Establishing Long-Term Commitment

Securing trust and commitment have been key components for the success and longevity of many of the PHE programs in the Philippines. The integration of environmental and family planning offers

an effective entry point for community-based approaches that keep equity and human well-being at the center.

Projects such as IPOPCORM and the Alternative Advocacy Project, for example, found that by establishing a network of champions and inter-provincial decision makers, they were able to encourage

support and greater commitment among government leaders.<sup>43</sup>

Peer education volunteers have also been effective at building trust and support as they have performed interdisciplinary roles, such as counseling on a range of PHE messages in community settings.<sup>9</sup> Conservation International demonstrated through the

Healthy Families, Health Forests project that fostering community agents of change was effective for PHE programs. They worked with local government agencies and NGOs to train a group of local health workers known as “barangay health workers” who served as health care providers, trainers, and educators for environmental protection.<sup>22</sup>

**“Leadership is key to be able to propel the work of PHE. Over time, it was obvious that when leadership was not as committed, there was less accomplishment compared to when there’s really a dedicated, committed leadership. Because with leadership comes resources, and that’s when you will be able to grow and bring in people to do the work. Second is the commitment of individual organizations. There are the organizations that kept on, like PATH Foundation Philippines and the others who have been there over time . . . I would also say that it was critical to have local government commitment and leadership. None of the programs that demonstrated how PHE worked would have been successful without the local government units’ commitment. Up until now, for example, we would still see them in the areas where we have started programming. They’ve kept the work throughout this time. These are key areas that really made the PHE work go forward.”**

— Naida Pasion, Chief Business Development Officer, Save the Children Philippines

### Making the Case for PHE

Early projects, such as those led by Conservation International, have demonstrated the importance of “making the case” for PHE, particularly at the community level. This was achieved through increased documentation of and advocacy for PHE project results and experiences, as well as by further supporting barangay health workers as community change agents.<sup>22</sup>

Other early PHE projects, such as IPOPCORM, successfully made the case to local governments as a pathway to scale. Project staff advocated for PHE with local government executives and environmental and coastal resource management stakeholders, contextualizing reproductive

health within coastal resource management plans. Through this positioning, environmental task forces and other stakeholders gained a better appreciation for how reproductive health can contribute to conservation and food security.<sup>44</sup>

Local decision makers often lacked awareness of the dynamics that drive consumption pressures, particularly “population momentum,” or the continuation of rapid population growth even as fertility rates decline. The Alternate Advocacy Project found that after learning about the “youth bulge” in the Philippines—a demographic trend that is anticipated to drive continued population growth and challenge sustainable development and food security—local policymakers were much more inclined to



support reproductive health initiatives as they supported coastal management.<sup>13</sup>

The Alternate Advocacy Project also found it was effective for integrated coastal management projects, which were working to govern the impact of human activities on coastal and marine ecosystems, to incorporate information about population momentum into their awareness-raising activities for local decision makers. Simple graphics showing the population pyramid and “youth bulge” in the under-15 age group helped illustrate future mounting pressures on natural resources and underscore the need to integrate reproductive health strategies into the coastal management agenda.<sup>13</sup>

**“The PHE approach is cost-effective. The integration of population and development that POPCOM is promoting in their ongoing project should be shared with everyone, especially the congress. Congress doesn’t always think of integration, but the local government, the public, and development agencies should understand that this is a cost-effective approach. They should add funds for PHE programs and projects.”**

— Rio Magpayo, Local Advocacy Manager, Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development

### Seeing is Believing: Firsthand Exposure to PHE Experiences

One of the most effective ways of cultivating PHE champions and project support has been to expose local chief executives to successful PHE projects and create opportunities for them to directly engage government counterparts who have seen the firsthand benefits.<sup>13</sup>

Through the Ridge to Reef Project,<sup>45</sup> for example, implementers fostered public-private partnerships for integrated coastal management and reproductive health by supporting “exposure visits” for local government and NGO leaders to see successful PHE project sites.<sup>13</sup> PATH Foundation Philippines, through IPOPCORM, also brought local executives to visit Thailand to learn from their experiences securing policymaker endorsements for a bill promoting condom use for AIDS prevention.<sup>44</sup>

The Alternative Advocacy Project specifically cultivated a cadre of champions for integrated coastal management and reproductive health, or “ICM-RH champions,” by organizing site visits to existing PHE learning areas for local executives from selected coastal areas. This fostered learning between existing and emerging PHE leaders.<sup>13</sup>

### Aligning PHE Priorities With Government Priorities

Another effective strategy for building sustainable PHE program support has been to align project efforts with local government concerns and priorities. By adopting metrics and frameworks that are consistent with local government plans, projects have ensured that evidence generated also demonstrates how this approach can support local goals and objectives.<sup>27,46,47</sup>

The BALANCED Project found that aligning its vision with that of the local government also helped persuade local chief executives to adopt integrated PHE programs. This involved linking PHE to the achievement of stated priorities, including food security, poverty, and the alleviation of climate change impacts.<sup>48</sup>

When working with local governments, it is also important to recognize local needs. In an Alternative Advocacy Project evaluation, for example, there was less interest in technical assistance and more interest in visible

support, such as investment in infrastructure and medical supplies, which could help in a re-election.<sup>25</sup>

In another example, by linking the project to existing government frameworks, IPOPCORM was able to leverage significant resources from local sources (US\$800,000 over six years), while also helping local government units implement their coastal resource management agendas.<sup>36</sup>

PATH Foundation Philippines has focused on working within national-level frameworks that support integrated approaches while allowing for local innovation and flexibility. They used a framework for sustainable coastal resource management developed by the country’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture to promote reproductive health in coastal resources management efforts in the municipality of Candijay, in the Bohol Province. Candijay then sanctioned the integration of family planning in its coastal

resource management framework, becoming the first local government unit in the country to approve a five-year coastal plan doing so, and becoming a “champion community.”<sup>49</sup>

**“Working with mayors was critical. Because [in our PHE program] the mayors of the barangays got an award. And then the other mayors who were involved were like, ‘Why is he getting an award? I want an award too.’ So that served as a way to motivate them. It also put in place financial accountability measures, where at the local level, all local budgets must have a certain allocation for women’s empowerment, women’s leadership. And those programs we were doing through a PHE lens.”**

— Roger-Mark De Souza, Former Technical Director of Population, Health, and Environment, Population Reference Bureau



Image credit: Gerald James Cabal



“One of the unique things about the Philippines is that in 1992, they had a major devolution of authority from the central level to the provincial and municipal levels. One of the sectors that was decentralized was environment. Health remained centralized. We knew that it was very important for us to work specifically with municipal mayors and with local government units, because they were the stewards of the environment. They had the authority, and that’s where the resources were. We had to look into these governance issues. If we had not, we would not have come up with the right mechanisms to promote and implement PHE.”

— Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

Stakeholder Mapping at All Levels

To build effective champion networks, project planners and implementers must carefully consider the landscape of decision makers and build appropriate relationships and trust. An Alternate Advocacy Project evaluation found, for example, that it was extremely important to speak directly with the barangay captain. The barangay captain can inform

programs to reflect actual community life and be key champions for success.<sup>25</sup>

Recognizing the hierarchies in a community has also been a key to success. In many communities, the municipal government is the ultimate decision maker and determines what the barangay can or will do. Careful advocacy at the national level is important but ensuring local buy-in is also essential.<sup>25</sup>

“I would [recommend] working on committing organizations, not just individuals within the organizations. There could be individuals who are very strong, but if there’s no continuity in the organizations, that’s not going to continue. So it’s important that support is institutionalized in organizations, not just individuals. Whole organizations must support PHE.”

— Naida Pasion, Chief Business Development Officer, Save the Children Philippines



SUCCESS STORIES  
Securing Commitment

Securing support in an environment resistant to acknowledging the importance of reproductive health can be a daunting task. Yet various project case studies have demonstrated the potential to convert local executives.<sup>44</sup>

The mayor of Candijay, Mayor Monina Camacho, one of the largest municipalities in Bohol, Philippines, for example, was strongly against the sharing of reproductive health and population messaging as part of coastal regional management meetings. She noted that the Catholic Church is against contraception and feared condom promotion would encourage promiscuity among her constituents.

After direct outreach and an eventual study tour to community-based sexual and reproductive projects in Thailand for mayors and NGO leaders, the participants, including Mayor Camacho, were convinced of the value of integrating population and natural resource management approaches. Mayor Camacho and NGO partners eventually signed a memorandum of understanding to ensure the implementation of community-based reproductive health and coastal conservation activities. Through the project, coastal community volunteers were then trained to deliver reproductive health information and contraceptive methods, and Mayor Camacho became a strong advocate and champion of integrated approaches.<sup>44</sup>

In *PHE Lessons Learned from the BALANCED Project*,<sup>48</sup> the authors share additional best practices and lessons learned from their efforts to build buy-in and policy support for PHE as part of a holistic development approach. The project focused on building understanding among local chief executives and leaders as well as improving project implementation capacity among national and local governments and stakeholders.

The project conducted ongoing outreach to policymakers and key stakeholders. They were invited to project orientation meetings that informed them about PHE and specific project interventions, study tours to expose policymakers to seasoned project sites, regional meetings on PHE and community-based distribution and peer-educator systems, and various advocacy meetings. The project also organized municipal government memorandums of agreements and understanding to support PHE activities.

These advocacy efforts were fruitful, helping ensure the allocation of funds for family planning supplies in 15 local government units, adoption of PHE into six coastal regional management plans, and the passing of a PHE ordinances in multiple municipalities, thereby establishing sustained support from a PHE council in each site.



## Working With Faith-Based Groups

Opposition from the Catholic Church has been a barrier to family planning and reproductive health in the Philippines, where more than 80 percent of the population is Catholic.<sup>50</sup> The Church fought against the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 fiercely, denouncing politicians who supported it and declaring it as a “threat to life.”<sup>51</sup> Even after lawmakers finally passed the bill following a 14-year battle in Congress, church groups filed petitions challenging the measure’s constitutionality, sending the debate to the Supreme Court where it was upheld.<sup>52</sup>

In some areas, Catholic clergy and allied church groups have actively tried to impede community-based family planning activities by pressuring volunteer peer educators to quit. Church groups also threatened to cancel education scholarships for children

whose parents volunteered to be couple peer educators.

Despite these barriers, studies have shown that nearly 70 percent of people believe the government should fund all means of family planning, including 200 faculty members at Ateneo de Manila University, a Catholic institution.<sup>53</sup> Some groups have engaged faith-based groups directly in family planning programs in the Philippines, including PAI.<sup>54</sup> Demonstrating how reproductive health is an integral component of coastal management and food security has also helped deflect criticism from the Church toward family planning and conservative rural residents.<sup>13</sup>

Organizations have engaged other faith-based groups directly as well, such as in Mindanao where program staff found it helpful to work with Muslim leaders. Community mobilization activities to engage local government units and civil society were able to gain broader support by first garnering support from Muslim religious leaders.<sup>55</sup>

**“Integrated messaging is where can you make some traction. What we found when we started working in in Philippines is that people were feeling very self-conscious about using family planning because the Church is saying, ‘You should let God decide how many children you have.’ And through our integrated messaging, the message that we were trying to convey is that, if you think about birth spacing—thinking about if you want to have children and how many you’ll have—if you link that to the natural resources available, and you think about how many children can your environment support, you’re doing something that’s good for everybody. If you are doing birth spacing, you’re doing a service to whole community. So you go from [framing the issue] as the individual shame to something that is good for everybody.”**

— Elin Torel, Director for International Programs, Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island

## Framing PHE Within the Larger Context

Clear messaging around the added value of conducting PHE work has been essential for garnering support from diverse stakeholders. Close coordination with multiple health and environmental resource management partners has helped shape messaging and tailored proof points for diverse stakeholders. Involving members of the target audience when designing PHE information, education, and communication (IEC) activities, or communication strategies intended to affect positive behavior changes in each community, has been an effective practice. Early involvement enables pre-testing of messaging to ensure they are persuasive, easy to understand, and culturally appropriate. This process can also help program managers identify the preferred messengers and information sources for target groups.<sup>13</sup>

**“Communication is important always. Setting out key messages, clarifying specifics, and pushing for integrated knowledge.”**

— Ramon San Pascual, Executive Director, Health Care Without Harm

### Emphasizing Food Security and Community Well-Being

PHE program staff found during the IPOPCORM initiative that placing reproductive health in the broader context of environmental management and food security was also an effective way to “make the case” for voluntary family planning to community audiences, helping illustrate the tangible impact of unintended pregnancies. The most persuasive IEC messaging has

created a sense of mutual obligation in communities to protect their coastal resources and plan their families to ensure future sustainability.<sup>13</sup>

IPOPCORM, for example, helped broaden family planning access, as well as food and livelihood security, among low-income, rural, coastal citizens. Community members noted in program feedback that it was comprehensive and “fit within their lifestyle.” Effective framing helped community members recognize “the necessity of limiting family size to achieve food security and improve their family’s welfare.”<sup>9</sup>

Across various USAID-supported PHE programs, food security has been a unifying theme that helped demonstrate the need for integrating population and fishery management goals and objectives. In the Fisheries Improved For Sustainable Harvest project (2004–2010), for example, messaging that emphasized the interdependence of human health and wellness and the marine environment was found to resonate with communities and encourage behavior change.<sup>13</sup>

### Moving Beyond Silos

Synergistic messaging and approaches have been found to align with community priorities more than single-sector messaging alone, such as reproductive health and family planning.<sup>19</sup>

Surveys conducted among local chief executives, for example, indicated the majority were concerned about food security, poverty alleviation, and the impact of climate change. By showing how PHE addresses all three of these issues, program managers were better able to garner the attention and support from local mayors for integrated activities, particularly among those who might be



hesitant to support family planning programs outright.<sup>13</sup>

IPOPCORM's unique IEC strategy, for example, may have contributed to greater acceptance among communities than conventional approaches. In the reproductive health-only intervention sites, family planning was promoted as a means to improve women's and children's health. In the coastal resource management-only intervention sites, conservation was promoted as a method to ensure coastal resource sustainability, which mainly benefits fishers. However, in the integrated sites, messaging encouraged people to both protect their coastal resources and plan families to maintain food security, something that benefits the entire community. Linking family size to sound environmental management and, ultimately, food security, helps people recognize the benefits of smaller families for individual and community well-being.<sup>19</sup>

While integrating reproductive health activities as part of coastal resource management leads to concrete and sustainable environmental impacts, integrating coastal resource management messaging into reproductive health activities helps provide a comprehensive and acceptable rationale for coastal residents to discuss and embrace the benefits of family planning.<sup>18</sup>

### Ensuring Local Ownership for Sustainability

**“One of the most effective ways of sustaining and keeping PHE alive is to have committed and well-trained PHE champions to advocate at both national and local levels.”**

— Jacky Robel, Division Chief for Planning Evaluation Division, Philippines Commission on Population and Development

**“Local governments may need some technical inputs from national agencies, but my belief is that in the end, PHE is a local, ‘bottom up’ approach. It cannot be dictated from the top, but the action must be local.”**

— Dr. Juan Antonio Perez III, Executive Director of the Philippines Commission on Population and Development

**“PHE is possible, doable... [However], once the program ends, institutionalizing it is a bit of a challenge. Even if the municipal council passes ordinances [on PHE] but the mayor will not follow it, it will still then be futile. Institutionalization can be achieved but the problem is when the administration changes.”**

— Felimon Romero, Protect Wildlife Tawi-Tawi Site Coordinator

**“Some of the local leaders are still there. And we still tap them and continue to tell their stories about PHE... What worked well was that we did not only focus on the local chief executives, but we also worked with the other leaders in the communities. So we continue to be partners with them. Because elected officials leave, but the chiefs of the agencies—the planning officers, the health officers, the environment officers—are still there, and they’ve been trained. So you’re able to sustain PHE work, even if the leaders have changed. We continue to engage them as well. That’s a big part of sustainability.”**

— Joan Castro, Executive Vice President, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.





**“Having a sort of leadership development and champion approach does create a sense of ownership—rather than just education or enforcement. Thinking about fisheries management—we know that just going through an enforcement approach is both expensive and it’s not sustainable in the long run. So I feel like the way the PHE approach is built on champions is really important. I’ve been always impressed, when I work in the Philippines, that there is a real sense of pride and ownership and volunteerism in the communities. So if people buy into it, they become real champions.”**

— Elin Torel, Director for International Programs, Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island

**“I think engaging the local community and the local government in PHE activities... this is the most effective way to achieve local ownership and sustainability because once the project or program ends, the one who will continue it anyway will be the local community and the LGU. The funds are with the local government so they can continue the project depending on how they embraced the PHE integration.”**

— Rio Magpayo, Local Advocacy Manager, Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development

**“The PHE approach does not stand only on enhancing the capacity of national governance and policy. Advocating for national policies alone doesn’t ensure that those national policies will be efficiently adapted on the ground. So the PHE approach focuses also on enhancing the capacity of local governance to implement national policies.”**

— Maria Corazon De La Paz, Chairperson, Board of Balay Rehabilitation Center

### Importance of Local Ownership

Despite the challenges of establishing local PHE ownership, building strong partner linkages has been key to program success. With an “end goal” of sustainability in mind from the start, projects can involve health and environmental partners from the very *beginning* of a program. This involves finding and building local PHE champions who can lead toward sustainability, long after a project ends.

One key approach has been to support “convergence meetings” to engage stakeholders from the public, NGOs, and private sectors in discussions about how to institutionalize PHE in local and regional governments, sustain the gains made, and expand the approaches through other ecosystems or sectors.<sup>13</sup>

### Working With Local Government Units

Establishing strong working relationships with local government and health officials is essential to the success of any project. As noted earlier, one successful strategy has been to align project aims with government development plans and objectives.<sup>19</sup> To further support sustainability, it has been important to also institutionalize coastal resource management and PHE into local government frameworks and plans. This helps prioritize policies favorable to PHE and encourages ongoing progress.

In addition to integrating PHE into government frameworks, by increasing the capacity for local government units to use evidence-based approaches for community mobilization in their integrated coastal management programs, projects like

PESCO-Dev were able to encourage longer-term sustainability.<sup>13</sup> By using Appreciative Community Mobilization, a capacity-building process to ensure project sustainability, participants were able to identify population, health, and environmental factors affecting their communities and catalyze PHE activities. Results from an environmental assessment and previous health research were incorporated into the process, building trust and informing a collective vision for the municipality.<sup>21</sup>

### Strengthening Government and Champion Capacity

Strengthening local capacity in “experienced-based advocacy” has enabled communities and local partner organizations to better influence policy. This was evidenced by the success of PESCO-Dev, which led to the passage of 87 resolutions in support of reproductive health and environment programs in northern Iloilo.<sup>13</sup>

Exposing local government units and environmental NGO staff to existing PHE models was one of the ways PESCO-Dev enhanced their understanding of the connections between environmental stewardship, population growth, community health, and economic sustainability and grew their interest and capacity to work

collaboratively on integrated programs with local communities.<sup>13</sup>

IPOPCORM also worked to support barangay development councils, people’s organizations, and other local institutions to plan, implement, and manage integrated community-based activities as well as formulate annual work plans and budgets. By enhancing project management and work planning capacity, these partners were better able to leverage government funds and maintain and expand their community PHE programs.<sup>13</sup>

PESCO-Dev also focused on strengthening civil society’s capacity to advocate with local governments for development policies that were more supportive of linking coastal resource management and reproductive health as a means to achieving food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development in the coastal zones.<sup>13</sup>

Champions from local government units that had successfully steered PHE resolutions were then supported to share their experiences with mayors from seven adjacent municipalities in northern Iloilo. The champions then assisted their peer mayors to similarly mobilize funds and adopt and implement PHE activities.<sup>13</sup>

**“Having a champion helps a lot. Someone who has power and is influential in the community. Local chief executives who have a good record also helps. But of course, knowing the dynamics is important. If the people working on PHE leave, priorities can change also. Some places are still implementing PHE because they haven’t changed their leadership. They bring the institutional memory, and bring with them the PHE approach in programming. Those who changed municipal health officers had more problems with sustainability. If there’s no one inside—no champion who knows how to integrate PHE—even if there’s a pot of money, they often go back to doing the programs in silos.”**

— Norma Pongan, Former Senior Program Manager, Save the Children





Image credit: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc.

**“One of the things that made this work in the Philippines was the local ownership, and there were components of it that were decidedly local. For example, one of the things they launched was a ‘Ms. PHE’ competition. It was a PHE beauty competition, which was a big thing in the Philippines, and the platform was PHE. We did a lot of street theater for example, which you see in other geographies, but the Ms. PHE platform was so ‘pinoy,’ so typical.”**

— Roger-Mark De Souza, Former Technical Director of Population, Health, and Environment, Population Reference Bureau

### Ensuring Community Participation

To support local ownership and sustainability, PHE programs have worked thoughtfully to identify and engage local environmental and community development organizations, local government units, and self-created “people’s organizations” that represent distinct groups within the community, such as small farmers and fisherfolk.

Through IPOPCORM, program managers identified that stewardship of coastal resources and human health largely occurs through local institutions and community action plans.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that greater community participation in integrated PHE projects can therefore lead to greater impact, both in terms of family planning knowledge and environmental outcomes. While there are existing PHE frameworks to follow, tailoring strategies based on the location, context, and even personal

characteristics of different participants is important for enhancing community participation.<sup>35</sup>

Communities engaged in PHE projects have also become proponents for sustained activities, even after the projects end. As part of its family planning activities, for example, IPOPCORM provided a series of trainings for select sari-sari (“convenience”) store owners in the sub-villages to become community-based distributors for family planning. These owners were trained on family planning and reproductive health, community resource management, and their linkages to food security. These distributors, as well as couple peer educators, later sought to continue providing family planning information and services to the community even after IPOPCORM ended. They also led their own coastal cleanup efforts, demonstrating ownership over environmental stewardship.<sup>38</sup>



## Strategies for Engaging Communities



### PRIORITIZE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS.

Through IPOPCORM, PATH Foundation Philippines identified community organizers. If none existed in a priority area, they recruited NGOs from a neighboring island with similar community organizing experience to expand their operations into the project site.<sup>36</sup>



### OFFER SMALL PERIODIC INCENTIVES.

IPOPCORM found a variety of incentives to be effective, ranging from opportunities to participate in technical training sessions, to priority consideration for microcredit, service recognition events, and certificates from the barangay development council or mayor’s office. Even T-shirts and shoulder bags with the project logo were found to distinguish volunteers as change agents and serve as functional resources for carrying educational materials, contraceptives, or other project supplies.<sup>36</sup>



### USE EXISTING TOOLS.

The Participatory Marine Protected Area Management Effectiveness Assessment Tool, with a PHE addendum, has been a successful tool for engaging communities and informing marine management programs with a PHE dimension.<sup>13</sup>



### USE QUALITATIVE METHODS.

Facilitated focus group discussions have helped communities examine the local effects of human populations on the environment. When considering the impact of empirically based demographic projections on their environment, discussions have informed a local planning process to outline immediate actions for local resource conservation and to improve local livelihoods.<sup>56</sup>



### MEET THE COMMUNITY WHERE THEY ARE, AND ADDRESS EXISTING BIASES.

A project evaluation survey found that while respondents were familiar with family planning and reproductive health concepts and understood the linkage between population and environmental degradation, a pronounced gender bias revealed that men largely viewed family planning as a “regulatory” issue rather than a choice or option that should be prioritized. Any successful intervention would therefore need to address male-dominated perceptions.<sup>25</sup>



### INVOLVE COMMUNITIES IN DEVELOPING MESSAGES.

Another factor to facilitate local ownership has been to involve communities in the process of identifying and articulating the benefits of integrated PHE approaches for people in their communities, the environment, and the country. Once collaboratively identified, these identified benefits were integrated into



educational messages and materials, ensuring the community perspectives were appropriately reflected.<sup>13</sup>

### DEVELOP RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS.

The BALANCED Project found that reciprocal agreements can be a win-win for the project and the community. When communities sign a commitment to undertake conservation actions in return for support for livelihoods initiative, “both the people and the environment stand to benefit.”<sup>48</sup>



### INVOLVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT, FROM START TO FINISH.

The participation of community members in everything from data collection to the implementation of project activities has helped ensure messaging, project design, and resulting policies are relevant and useful for the communities themselves.<sup>36</sup>



### USE PARTICIPATORY ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION APPROACHES.

Consultations, community organizing, and community education through cross-site visits can help raise community awareness and knowledge about the importance of environmental stewardship and health issues.<sup>40</sup>



### TRAIN PEER EDUCATORS.

A method of peer education training called Appreciative Community Mobilization has helped catalyze PHE actions at the community level, as evidenced by the PESCO-Dev Project, which resulted in increased use of family planning and household participation in environmental protection efforts.<sup>13</sup>

“There needs to be flexibility in the [PHE] approach, even in terms of the kind of interventions that are offered. We need to work with the communities, for them to be able to identify what the highest priority needs are and the ways that the interventions should be structured and delivered. This is really critical and of course creates a challenge when thinking about scale-up, but those are the conversations that need to happen within PHE communities—the PHE approach works best when effectively tailored to meet what the community defines as their own needs.”

— Kathleen Mogelgaard, Independent Consultant, Former University of Michigan Population and Environment fellow with the Population Reference Bureau



Community-Based Distribution

PHE projects in the Philippines have empowered coastal communities to make decisions about their reproductive health by providing basic information through peer educators and affordable modern contraceptive methods through community-based distribution.

Through various training programs, IPOPCORM created a network of peer educators trained to address both reproductive health and environmental conservation. Adolescent peer educators, for example, learned how to promote the concept of stewardship—both for the environment and their own sexuality. Adult peer educators served in a similar capacity, sharing information about family planning and safe sex practices with

other community members, while also discouraging destructive fishing methods such as using dynamite and poisoning with cyanide.<sup>9</sup> Community members would visit potential clients, such as neighbors and friends, and share interpersonal communication about family planning and reproductive health. These clients could then obtain contraceptive supplies through a community-based distribution system at local convenience stores.

Community-based distributors also became involved in advocacy. Distributors advocated to barangay council members for the continuation of community-based distribution after the close of IPOPCORM, and as a result the barangay captain allocated funding for the purchase of family planning commodities so that operations could continue.<sup>38</sup>

Working With People’s Organizations

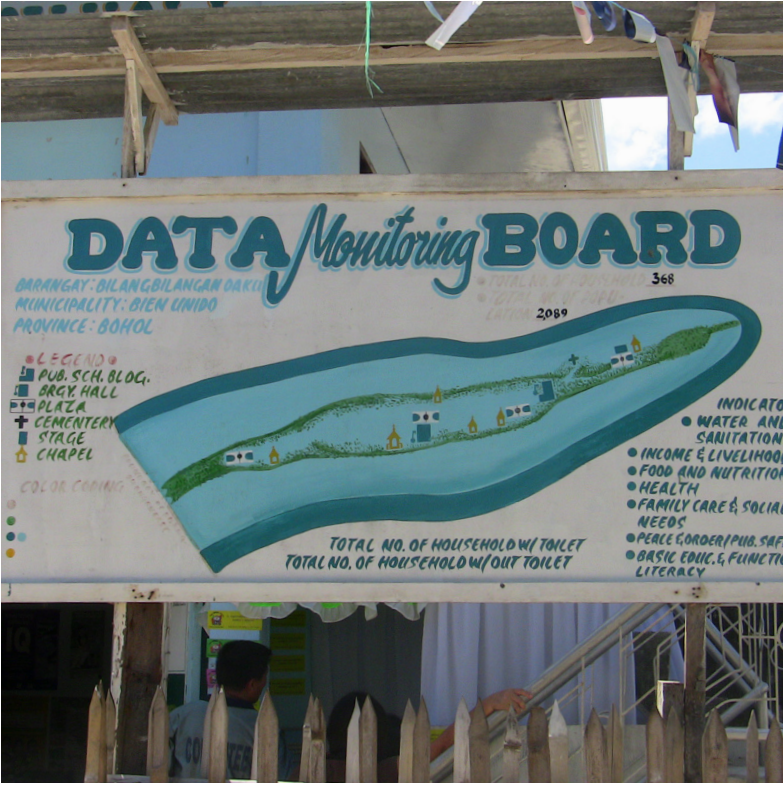
Recognizing the importance of local buy-in, IPOPCORM heavily engaged people’s organizations to support the integration of reproductive health and family planning initiatives. This was done by strategically involving members as peer educators and community-based distributors, thus growing support for family planning acceptance within these communities.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to engaging individuals from people’s organizations, IPOPCORM also strengthened the institutional development of the relevant groups, such as coastal resource user groups and women’s associations. The project cultivated their advocacy communication skills and encouraged their active participation on the barangay development councils. They helped the organizations set realistic objectives and facilitate small doable actions to link coastal resource management and reproductive health activities.<sup>13</sup>

Strengthening Partnerships at All Levels

PHE programs in the Philippines have worked with the government at all levels, ranging from local barangays to POPDEV at the national level. PHE projects have worked with diverse government institutions, including non-health government groups like the National Economic and Development Authority. They have collaborated with governments to establish initiatives and engaged community organizations to build support and carry out programs. Academic institutions have also been involved to help increase the evidence base for PHE.<sup>8</sup>

While the decentralized nature of the Philippines government structure can be challenging, it also provides opportunity by bringing development closer to the



communities most affected. In some cases, it can make service delivery more efficient—such as the delivery of health services. It has also enabled creative integrated development approaches that are responsive to community challenges, such as seen in the Healthy Families, Health Forests Project in Luzon.<sup>58</sup>

To overcome some of the challenges of a decentralized government, close coordination among different agencies is essential for program integration and to encourage closer ties between the government and NGOs. Exceptional coordination and collaboration among partners responsible for the fisheries management and the reproductive health components of the Fisheries Improved For Sustainable Harvest project, for example, ensured the sound integration of activities and underscored the importance of addressing long-term factors, such as food security.<sup>13</sup>



**“Our community-based initiatives have thrived up to this point. Even if the project ended in 2006, if you go back to the same communities they’ll remember the integrated messages. They’ll remember that there was the community-based distribution system that was established—a family store selling pills and condoms. So those are the things have been sustained. And you talk to the health workers that you’ve trained previously, even you haven’t seen them for more than a decade, they’ll remember what IPOPCORM is all about. When you talk about the lessons learned, they are the ones talking about the integrated approach of PHE. So I think it worked that we had champions. We had peer educators, and we had health workers. There are actions like community-based distribution, that provided services, which thrive even to this day. Even without funding, you’ll go back and you’ll hear that initiatives—the seeds we planted—are still there...”**

— Joan Castro, Executive Vice President, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

Image credit: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc.

Image credit: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc.



**“There were these barangay development councils—that’s a village development council that was mandated that every village had to have one—and these organizations [people’s organizations, women’s organizations, and youth organizations] had to have 25 percent membership in these councils. It didn’t always turn out that way, when we looked at the composition in these councils. And people didn’t know they had a right to be involved. We did a lot of legal literacy and educated them about the devolution and their rights to hold places on these councils. And that was a big social mobilization because we then helped these groups get active on the councils, and we helped the councils develop annual plans and budgets. There were development funds available at the municipal level for these councils, but they had to put together a plan and apply for those funds. Otherwise they didn’t get any funding. So we did a lot of work helping the development councils get organized to develop their plans. And we brought PHE into the planning process. And that was so critical. We were able to help them to leverage funds from the municipal government to implement their PHE projects and activities, and to sustain them.”**

— Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

**Public-Private Partnerships**

PHE projects have helped facilitate public-private partnerships and multisectoral participation in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of sustainable PHE activities.

By involving small-scale *sari-saris* (“convenience stores”) in the social marketing of family planning products like pills, condoms, and emergency contraception, IPOPCORM established a rural network of more than 900 community-based distribution points. These privately run stores significantly increased family planning access in the project areas, and more than 18,000 couples purchased their family planning products from these outlets. As a result, fertility and unwanted pregnancy rates

declined in the areas where the program operated.<sup>36</sup>

**Accreditation of Associations and Federations**

When peer educators and community-based distributors organize into barangay associations that are federated at the municipal level, these entities can serve as a link between the NGO and the community as well as partners of the rural health units. When peer educators and community-based distributor associations and federations are accredited at the barangay level and municipal levels, they also become eligible to receive funds from the government and other agencies. This has supported sustainability and increased the likelihood that PHE activities continued after projects end.<sup>38</sup>



**SUCCESS STORIES**  
Sustainability

Municipalities engaged through the IPOPCORM initiative have helped sustain a community-based distribution network for family planning. These municipalities helped secure commodities, funding, and training, contributing to sustained PHE gains.<sup>9</sup>

IPOPCORM also held policymaker forums to build consensus for mainstreaming the IPOPCORM approach into the Siquijor Provincial Development Plan in 2007, which was a significant step toward assuring the continuity of the program for years to follow.<sup>43</sup>

PESCO-Dev had a significant impact, both in terms of health and environmental outcomes and in reshaping policies in support of PHE. For example, the barangay health workers in the project area shifted from their traditional tasks to become effective communicators for family planning and environmental resource management. Despite the official conclusion of the project, the local government unit of Concepcion also continued serving as a PHE model for the Western Visayas region.

**“Initially, the challenge was to get buy-in. The other challenge was community mobilization and organizing, and getting the PHE volunteers to the household level. From our experience on the ground, barangays in Concepcion still talk about PHE—because there was a lot of community organizing that was done. Every day, our staff would travel from Iloilo City to communities—going to households, meeting with the volunteers. It was a very intensive program. This is why they still remember the PESCO-Dev Project now, and why we have kept implementing PHE. It could be the other way around. If we had just done the municipal approach [staying in the large cities] and not getting into the community—maybe we would’ve had different results.”**

— Norma Pongan, Former Senior Program Manager, Save the Children



## Ensuring Local Ownership: Health Families, Healthy Forests

As part of the Healthy Families, Healthy Forests,<sup>22</sup> Conservation International Philippines worked with and supported the capacity of many partners and collaborators to enhance local ownership and project sustainability. This included local government units, barangay health workers and midwives, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Municipal Health Office, PHE Network, PROCESS Luzon, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, and a Community-Based Forest Management project officer.

To establish sustainable access to family planning services, Conservation International Philippines worked closely with partners to establish community-based distribution centers in strategic areas. The project worked with local government units to provide contraceptive supplies at the start, but then established a “revolving fund” so that family planning users could purchase the commodities for a small price, and the funds continue to grow over time. This funding approach helped ensure commodities would be available to users at an affordable price even after the project ended.

The project also worked to strengthen capacity for community-based decision making. It supported Filipino project managers to develop tools that could help them assess the impact and manage the effects of a growing human population on the local environment. Participants in the

Building Action for Stability in Communities workshop, for example, gained a better understanding of how demographic and environmental data could help them understand population dynamics, including resource consumption patterns, the clearing of natural areas, and location of new houses and farmland.

Working with Indigenous people to secure their rights was also part of Conservation International’s PHE approach. Throughout the six-year project, staff in the Sierra Madre Biodiversity Corridor worked in collaboration with three Community-Based Forest Management people’s organizations, the Indigenous Agta People, the local government unit, and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, to convert the Agta’s Certificate of Ancestral Domain “Claim” in Baggao to a “Title,” thereby officially delineating the Agta people’s ancestral lands.

Members of the Special Provincial Task Force, Conservation International, and the local NGO PROCESS Luzon then provided technical assistance and some logistical support for the realization of the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan. This is considered the basis for plans of Indigenous communities for the sustainable management and development of their land.<sup>22</sup>

## Scaling Up PHE

**“I don’t think you can have a national PHE program, because it’s so individualized. We started at the grassroots level and then worked up to cover an entire municipality in the biozone. And then we’d try to get the whole province involved in PHE. Siquijor was a province where we had 100 percent coverage . . . Starting at the lowest levels to make sure that you can implement the integrated components, and then scale up to cover maybe several villages, and then a whole municipality. Scale-up starts even in the first couple of years to test whether the approach is feasible and can be replicated.”**

— Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

### Context of Scaling Up PHE in the Philippines

Despite many successes, PHE champions have faced difficulty securing sustained investment and buy-in from local government units. PHE projects began to dwindle as major donors began shifting their focus to single-sector programs seen as more urgent, such as HIV/AIDS. This shift was linked to other obstacles with local government units, such as administration changes following governmental elections every three years, which forced advocates to start over in their efforts to build support and funding.

Programs like PESCO-Dev and IPOPCORM were successful in using scale-up strategies to broaden their reach and expand the scope of national policy advocacy, such as the establishment of the national PHE Network, which signified the development of a collaborative effort for PHE in the Philippines. The documentation of PHE approaches through policy briefs, case studies, datasheets, and independent assessments were integral drivers in scale-up success. For example, a datasheet outlining national, regional, and provincial

trends and data for 15 PHE indicators was released in the wake of a tragic landslide in 2006 that killed about 1,800 people in Leyte Island, eastern Philippines. Given the context, local media used the datasheet to link data to natural disaster and community planning. Policymakers, in turn, used similar datasheets and policy briefs to help create a “PHE cluster” within the president’s cabinet, highlighting the interconnected data trends and advocating for policies and programs in response. Intermediary actors such as the Population Reference Bureau provided technical expertise and knowledge from PHE implementation in other countries, and those engaged with the PHE Network also helped lay the groundwork for scale-up and sustainability.

**“Having the PHE national network helped a lot to sustain PHE initiatives in the Philippines.”**

— Jacky Robel, Division Chief For Planning Evaluation Division, Philippines Commission on Population and Development



**“I think the establishment of a network was incredibly valuable. Before the establishment of the network, there were kind of piecemeal projects, community-based projects that we could define as PHE. But the institutions implementing these projects were not yet connected to each other. They did not necessarily have a broader advocacy and communications agenda. By establishing the network and common identity, they could work together to identify advocacy objectives to come up with common messaging on what kind of work they were doing and what they felt was important. And just to develop a lot of esprit de corps within the members of that network and to share lessons learned—that was really valuable.”**

— Kathleen Mogelgaard, Independent Consultant, Former University of Michigan Population and Environment fellow with the Population Reference Bureau

### Framing PHE for Scale-Up

The framing of the PHE approach to local partners, international stakeholders, policymakers, and communities acted as another element of scale-up that built success. The diffusion of PHE as an innovative approach encouraged community adoption of PHE strategies. Program managers in the Philippines advocated that PHE programs were innovative, highlighting the success of pilot programs and new inputs and benefits that had been integrated into the approach. This helped to overcome hesitancy or disinterest from communities, in some cases overcoming religious barriers to accepting the PHE approach. In other instances, local partners sought to document the benefits of the approach, and to present the benefits in systematic and simple, doable actions. Others advocated to ensure programming and financial support from stakeholders outside of the Philippines, such as the headquarters of major NGOs. PHE was also framed as a multifaceted advocacy tool for reproductive health. Advocates for natural resource management improvement in communities could use the PHE approach, driven by communities’ requests for reproductive health, public health, and livelihood services.

PHE’s connection with poverty alleviation, disaster mitigation, and food security further enabled activists to develop multipronged approaches and build on grassroots movements, joint advocacy campaigns, and relationships of trust.

### Importance of Champions

The growing voices of PHE champions, such as local and international politicians and scientists, also provided a path for scale-up. People like Concepcion Mayor Dr. Raul Bantias and Jordan Governor Felipe Hilan “Nene” Nava, who spoke knowledgeably about PHE and had already earned respect and credibility from the community, encouraged audiences to listen to their messaging that PHE was beneficial for communities. Dr. Angel Chua Alcalah, globally recognized for his marine-protected area research, emerged as a PHE champion from the environmental community in the Philippines. Similarly, marine biologist partners with USAID’s Fisheries Improved For Sustainable Harvest project began speaking about the importance of linking population issues with a fisheries management approach.

**“I think that the best way to promote PHE is to localize it. Because it’s at the local level where we see the most evidence and the most impact of PHE integration. PHE can generate effective impact in countries which have devolution policies, such as the Philippines. And our first-generation [PHE] projects can be models for the replication of [PHE] interventions. So, until such time that we can come up with a demonstrative project or policy at the national level, then we can promote it at the national level. But at this point, I think in the region, particularly in Asia, we can promote PHE integration in the devolution setting.”**

— Lolito R. Tacardon, Deputy Executive Director, Philippines Commission on Population and Development

**“I want to see the realizations of PHE in local communities and its impact on national policy formulation because there is still no proposal of a PHE law or policy that can be adopted nationwide or by the whole country.”**

— Rio Magpayo, Local Advocacy Manager, Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development

### Donor Engagement

Increasing donor interest in PHE in the Philippines provided the necessary funding for PHE expansion and solidified its legitimacy as a development intervention. The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, USAID, the Australian Agency for International Development (now known as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), and International Development Research Center of Canada all made significant investments in community-based PHE Projects in the Philippines.

**“PHE is not a straight process. You can’t come up with one guideline or policy to say, ‘This is the checklist for PHE.’ You need to understand the context of the area. It’s hard, but it’s possible to integrate from siloed programs. In working with government agencies and donors, you need tools. You need the experience. You need champions to tell their stories. You need to have the evidence to be able to show that it works. And that was how we were able to get a buy-in with the [USAID] mission—both health and environment—to be able to implement the BALANCED project. We had those critical items, so they were convinced. They then invested to implement BALANCED in key marine biodiversity areas.”**

— Joan Castro, Executive Vice President, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.





Creating a “Buzz”

Various events garnered media attention, thereby increasing media interest in PHE programs. From 2004 to 2006, more than 200 print, radio, and television stories disseminated PHE-related stories. Prestigious awards and noteworthy conferences created a buzz around PHE that morphed into an environment ready to hear more, learn more, and invest more in programs and activities that linked the ever-present population crisis with environmental concerns.

Finally, the growing support and sustained successes put the Philippines at the forefront of PHE internationally, and the country began to emerge as a model for PHE implementation in the mid-2000s. This meant hosting activist study tours to the Philippines, gaining international participation in the Second National Conference on PHE in March 2006, and organizing workshops bringing together PHE implementers from different countries to foster cross-team collaboration and capacity strengthening.

Meeting the Needs of Underserved Groups

An analysis of the history of PHE in the Philippines would be remiss if it excluded a look into how marginalized groups were reached, or not reached, by program efforts. On remote island barangays, the geographic landscape, electricity and gas shortages caused by volatile weather conditions, and limited access to transportation created challenges for members of rural communities. Programs observed low adoption of family planning in these areas due to the lack of health stations in some villages. In some cases, villagers were discouraged from visiting stations in the next barangay or rural health unit.

Addressing Needs Holistically

Programs adapted to the needs of such underserved groups by establishing peer education programs and addressing needs holistically. IPOPCORM used peer education programs focused on local stewardship, which proved to be highly effective, with the goal of increasing family planning and safe sex practices while also decreasing destructive fishing practices.

The following PHE programs used holistic approaches to reach underserved populations:

- **Sierra Madre Biological Corridor Project.** Addressed basic health and family planning needs of underserved populations living in remote biological corridors and buffer zones of protected areas both to offset opportunity costs for conservation effort and to improve human health and well-being.
- **Integrated Coastal Resources Management Initiative.** Incorporated livelihood and financial literacy programming such as microcredit for small business development schemes and helped with marketing links so that impoverished families can afford to refrain from destructive, though cost-cutting, environmental practices.
- **Population, Poverty, and Environment Project.** Committed to three to five years or more in impoverished communities and provided inputs that went beyond integrated coastal management and reproductive health and addressed the needs of indigent households for access to appropriate technology, training, microfinancing, and marketing links.

Addressing Livelihoods

In regard to livelihood development, several programs implemented PHE in concert with other activities related to food security, entrepreneurship, and access to credit.

“The population growth of the country is about 2.5 percent, but in Tawi-Tawi the population growth is about 5 percent, almost double . . . Also, in terms of the poverty levels, we know that Tawi-Tawi is one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines. And the coastal villages—the fishermen especially—are the poorest of the poor. One reason they were in that condition was because of poor resource management. Also, they had so many children. So in terms of their economic condition, they were marginalized in the country.”

— Felimon Romero, Protect Wildlife Tawi-Tawi Site Coordinator

Operating under the understanding that many of their PHE beneficiaries depended on coastal waters for their household income, the IPOPCORM approach needed to offer alternatives to sustain livelihoods if they wanted to suppress destructive income-generating practices. In the BALANCED Project, entrepreneurs received technical support including technical and entrepreneurship training, business planning, seed grants, and facilitated access to credit.<sup>48</sup> This support encouraged beneficiaries to use and manage natural resources in different ways, by producing new products and moving up the value chain, which benefited from existing market demand. IPOPCORM service delivery projects also invested in small-scale microcredit programs that enabled coastal dwellers to avoid overfishing and instead engage in environmentally friendly projects such as beekeeping, natural hog-raising, seaweed cultivation, and mud-crab fattening.<sup>13</sup> By mid-2008, 1,860 households had received startup loans averaging about US\$120, and 95 percent had repaid their loans.<sup>19</sup> This microcredit approach offered safety nets for poor fishing households that might have otherwise suffered while waiting two to three years for fish sanctuaries to regenerate.

Rural Communities

Extremely rural communities represent a major underserved group in the Philippines. The following programs were successful in

reaching these populations:

- **Conservation International Philippines PHE Project.** To reach underserved groups in a very rural area (Sierra Madre Biodiversity Corridor in northern Philippines), the program trained local agents to deliver supplies to clients in outlying areas. This program worked in one of the most remote, biologically diverse areas of the world.<sup>22</sup>
- **BALANCED Project.** The project trained community-based distributors as extension workers of rural health units, making family planning services more accessible to those living in rural and geographically isolated communities. The presence of community-based distributors and peer educators in every project barangay, in addition to a wide coverage of IEC activities, led to more family planning users visiting community-based distribution outlets and increased the overall average contraceptive prevalence rate. PHE peer educator and community-based distribution systems increase access to family planning.<sup>48</sup>

Involving Young People

Youth as Change Agents

With young people (ages 10 to 24) making up nearly 30 percent of the population, PHE interventions in the Philippines found that this cohort could play a critical role in the link between reproductive health



**“I’m acting as the regional director of MIMAROPA [Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan], which is basically a rural area. That’s why I pushed the integration of PHE as one of the recovery strategies that should be implemented in the MIMAROPA Region, because I see the impact of this health crisis within the socioeconomic context on the informal sectors such as farmers and fisherfolk who are struggling with their livelihood. So there will be some impact on the environment, especially when it comes to their livelihood. The environment will be pressured due to lost income of the people . . . So the relation to PHE is very prominent and very important in this rural area within the context of the COVID-19 crisis.”**

— Lolito R. Tacardon, Deputy Executive Director,  
Philippines Commission on Population and Development

and coastal resource management. With appropriate training and mentorship, youth (ages 15 to 24) in coastal communities served as peer educators who facilitated behavior change in their communities. IPOPCORM, for example, educated youth on the concept of stewardship and linked it to PHE—the need to be a steward of one’s body and of one’s environment—which proved effective.<sup>13</sup> The EMPOWER Project provided youth with information about food security issues, along with PHE education, aiming to cultivate sexually responsible individuals who cared for their local environment. The barkada (“buddy”) system encouraged youth to collaborate under this mission in groups, similar to peer pressure, which made it more popular.

As pro-health, pro-environment young people began emerging as community leaders and peer educators, parents and older peers supported them and encouraged further investment in volunteerism for the PHE mission.<sup>13</sup> Involving parents of young peer educators thus became an EMPOWER Project strategy. The BALANCED Project also partnered with youth organizations and local government units to organize a waste management program in Hilongos called Green Valentines, which used the message: “Love Green, Think Green, Live Green.” This campaign involved community cleanup

activities, tree planting, and photo/painting contests that gained involvement of 500 men and women.<sup>59</sup> PHE implementers saw that these approaches stirred up enthusiasm among youth, and thus continued to plan youth-driven cleanup drives and PHE-focused youth camps.<sup>38</sup>

### Empowering Youth as Leaders

A critical lesson learned from PHE implementation experience in the Philippines is that youth are an integral, untapped resource. Programs should therefore provide leadership training and necessary opportunities for youth to manage coastal resource management activities or livelihood programming, act as integrated coastal management change agents, and deliver IEC messages in their communities. Through such efforts, youth can also become economically productive members of society. Supporting learning exchanges between experienced youth peer educators and younger or newer recruits in coastal communities and adapting and applying existing IEC messages and materials will promote dual stewardship responsibilities for youth. Beyond these smaller initiatives, programs should create opportunities for youth to be at the forefront of community action, including working with government

and NGO agencies. The EMPOWER Project was successful in this regard, with youth-to-youth learning opportunities in coastal resource management and adolescent reproductive health.<sup>13</sup> This youth-driven effort enabled youth peer educators to establish environmentally friendly microenterprises that encouraged them to stay in their communities and become the next generation of environmental stewards.

**“The advice I would give to organizations that want to start up PHE is for them to give priority to young people—not only to involve young people, but to build their capacity to do experimentation, because it’s going to benefit them if PHE works. So it’s essential to engage young people—15 to 25 is a really high-priority group. And we learned a lot from conservation folks about how they promote stewardship of the environment with young people—making them feel proud and giving them a role in environmental protection. On health, you don’t really have the stewardship concept. So we took that concept and the strategies they used in the environment sector and applied that to get young people to think about becoming stewards of their bodies. And that worked great. They embraced that. And they loved being peer educators. And some of those peer educators became supervisors and outreach workers, and they would mobilize and mentor more young people. In PHE, you’ve got to have mentors.”**

— Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor,  
PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.





### Holistic Programming for Youth

The IPOPCORM initiative used strategies to engage youth in PHE activities while simultaneously developing other skills related to communications, arts and creativity, self-confidence, and general professionalism. In the Central Visayas Region, youth benefited from peer education on PHE, participated in coastal cleanups, and volunteered as community distributors for family planning commodities. The Olango Youth Community Theater Group organized community theater events with skits about adolescent sexual and reproductive health and family planning choices. IPOPCORM used theater and artistic activities as a strategy for social and behavior change around family planning. Because the community health outreach workers who facilitated these activities were mostly young professionals, they found it

easy to relate to youth. In turn, both of these groups strengthened their leadership, self-confidence, and communications skills. Through anecdotal evidence, they found that these strategies brought about behavior change for youth who became more motivated to deliver community messages, and data showed that teenage pregnancies declined over time.<sup>38</sup>

## Addressing Gender

### Effects of Gender Biases on Programs

In an Alternate Advocacy Project evaluation, surveyors asked respondents how they defined family planning, and their general perception toward the concept and adhering programming. The surveys revealed stark differences in how men and women

understand population issues and hold biases on family planning. Men were found more likely to see family planning as a regulatory method of controlling families, rather than a choice or option. Many men also expressed that population issues were not clear to them, which resulted in a failure to prioritize and link population concerns with major development issues and shape policy response.<sup>25</sup>

### Focus on Women in PHE Programming

In the Philippines, women experience the double burden of poverty and the effect of gender discrimination that marginalizes them from participation in local government units and other community leadership activities. The IPOPCORM approach, and other PHE interventions, sought to involve women through the family planning component of coastal management activities. The synergy of family planning and reproductive health services with marine environmental education and management activities in the PHE approach was effective in reaching women. Such gender sensitive programming helped increase female participation in community management boards and governance structures and empowered them to share equally in the management of resources they depended on for livelihood.

PHE programs that realized women's influential role in climate change resiliency were successful in reaching women through an integrated approach. For example, the IPOPCORM initiative focused on increasing women's engagement in conservation efforts, combined with microcredit programming to improve livelihoods. The per capita income of women and fishers increased at IPOPCORM sites, indicating the integrated approach's poverty reduction potential.<sup>19</sup> Fishing communities in the Philippines suffer from declining fish catch, depleting potable water, and poor health, and these

burdens are magnified for women. Low household income and food insecurity can drive women to engage in multiple jobs and work longer hours to supplement the family income. Many PHE projects in the Philippines have addressed women's rights and participatory family planning, helping women to identify coping strategies and become more empowered in all areas of PHE, from livelihoods to health and family planning.<sup>60</sup>

### Male Involvement

In addition, PHE activities sought to involve men in the process, supporting the idea that male partners play a role in family planning decisions. Male partners were encouraged to join sessions to emphasize that they could take part in traditionally "female" issues such as birth spacing and reproductive health.<sup>36,61</sup> In the BALANCED Project, activities targeted not just the mothers, but also the husbands and children to equip them with knowledge on nutrition, breastfeeding, vaccination, and family planning. The IPOPCORM approach trained couples to act as peer educators and engage with other couples for open conversations on reproductive health and fishing practices. Male peer educators took advantage of long hours at sea to deliver the same messages to other fishermen.<sup>19</sup>

**"I think one approach from the Philippines that could be easily adapted [to other countries] is men's involvement—increasing men's involvement in environmental stewardship and increasing their involvement in family planning."**

— Jacky Robel, Division Chief For Planning Evaluation Division, Philippines Commission on Population and Development



Image credit: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc.



## Integrating Programs

**“For those who want to start a PHE program, I advise them to learn from the experiences of practitioners in the field [especially from] those from the local government units and the local communities doing PHE integration. It is from there where you will understand more clearly on how integration is being done and why it is cost-effective. Not all [local government units] are practicing integration. So look at those who are reachable and interested.”**

— **Rio Magpayo, Local Advocacy Manager, Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development**

### Community-Based Programs

Integrated programs have had a greater positive effect on human and ecosystem health than single-sector programs—and at lower total cost.<sup>19</sup> However, there are a number of challenges associated with integrating programs among communities—from a need for additional technical assistance, to commodity security, to opposition from certain groups (for example, fisherfolk, who feared that closing certain waters to fishing would reduce fish catch and increase familial hardship). To address this multitude of challenges, it is important for PHE implementers to do careful strategic planning and engage in multidisciplinary interventions that cross sectors and mirror the livelihood strategies of low-income households and communities.<sup>13</sup>

PHE programming has contributed to the expansion of and reach of family planning

programs, particularly in remote areas where health care access is limited.<sup>34</sup> In these settings, it is important to offer community-based distribution for family planning. To do this, PHE projects secured approval from local governments through memorandums of understanding.

At the community level, it is also important for PHE programs to go beyond the provision of services to include a livelihood component that directly influences consumption and coastal resource management and addresses the underlying needs that drive overfishing and provides alternative means for income.<sup>13</sup> These programs should also integrate a variety of community members, as integrated approaches benefit from programs that expand the role of youth, women, and fishers in village development, protected area management, and peer education.<sup>19</sup>

**“Microcredit is essential—because you can train people on how to do a new skill or activity, but they don’t always have the means to get it off the ground. We didn’t always have the resources to fund it, but we would link them with other agencies. So we made connections and we helped people make linkages with other programs.”**

— **Leona D’Agnes, Former Technical Advisor, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.**

### Integrated Communication Campaigns

Through the Healthy Families, Healthy Forest project, Conservation International found that integrated communication campaigns—delivered through outreach groups, radio spots, campaigns, film festivals, photo essays, skits, and theater groups—played an important role in engaging a variety of audiences and supporting positive behavior changes. The messaging and materials were tailored for each context and leveraged monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness.<sup>22</sup>

The World Wildlife Fund and Save the Children found that the widespread dissemination of education materials, such as an integrated calendar linking PHE activities, also helped enhance PHE messaging. The calendar included information on family planning methods, key dates for vaccinations, family planning counseling, tree planting, coastal cleanup, and coastal resources monitoring.<sup>14</sup>

### Building Multisectoral Partnerships

Truly integrated programs require the support and coordination of many multisectoral partners. Conservation International, for example, determined that hygiene and sanitation infrastructure would be critical for protecting water resources and worked with community members to link agricultural practices with community health. This approach, which helped improved food security and nutrition, would never have been possible without strong multisectoral partnerships.<sup>22</sup>

Multisectoral networks have also been extremely important for pursuing complementary approaches that maximize limited resources. Having strong partnership with local government units, for example, helped the BALANCED Project to strengthen coastal resource management and PHE advocacy beyond project sites.<sup>48</sup> A strong

working relationship between NGOs and the local governments benefited the communities as well as the institutions involved.

A growing coalition of PHE supporters around the world have helped expand support for the approach and fostered innovation. In the Philippines specifically, a national PHE coalition, including mayors and program managers, has enabled innovative solutions to become politically attractive and feasible. By presenting evidence and encouraging dialogue, the coalition, formed in part by the Population Reference Bureau, brought skeptics “on board”—not only as partners but as champions of the integrated approach.<sup>49</sup>

### Integrating PHE as Part of Coastal Resource Management

IPOPCORM program staff determined that coastal resource management—or planning, implementing, and monitoring for the sustainable use of coastal resources—provides an understandable context for coastal residents to understand the role of people in environment, food security, and family welfare. In this context, family planning is recognized as something that provides social, economic, and health benefits, while also reinforcing the sustainability of gains made in coastal resource management.

IPOPCORM identified a particular opportunity to mainstream family planning and reproductive health into integrated coastal management agendas in regions where young and fast-growing populations will continue to challenge biodiversity and coastal resources, such as where at least 40 percent of the population is under the age of 20. This concept was reinforced by the Population, Poverty, and Environment Project, which used existing biodiversity conservation, demographic, and socioeconomic data to identify intervention sites that would generate the best return on investment for



poverty alleviation.<sup>13</sup>

The BALANCED Project found that marine-protected areas, or ocean areas set aside for long-term conservation, were particularly well-suited for introducing PHE approaches. PHE framing helped underscore how the degradation of natural resources is a threat to the people who are directly dependent upon them.

The BALANCED Project also designed interventions to strengthen sea patrols, known as Bantay Dagaing, in these areas. This included updating protection plans, training on biophysical and socioeconomic

monitoring methods, mentoring, and strengthening the patrol networks. Using the participatory Marine Protected Area Management Effectiveness Assessment Tool, with a PHE addendum, the project enabled local government units and people’s organizations to design integrated programs that included population and reproductive health elements.<sup>13</sup> A set of questionnaires answered by stakeholders during a workshop assessed protection area governance according to enforcement, implementation, and maintenance. The results informed plans to improve future management.<sup>62</sup>



**SUCCESS STORIES**  
Integrating Reproductive Health  
and Coastal Resource Management

By capitalizing on existing, agreed-upon costal resource management structures, frameworks, and strategies, PHE projects have been able to successfully integrate reproductive health as an additional strategy to support sustainable practices.

Through the IPOPCORM initiative, PATH Foundation Philippines regularly attended coastal management resource planning workshops with a local NGO partner that shared PHE updates and encouraged task force members to adopt reproductive health activities. Through long-term participation in these planning workshops, program managers were able to learn about nine coastal resource management strategies underway and identify possible “entry points” for integrating family planning and additional health interventions.<sup>44</sup>

In the Candijay municipality of Bohol, IPOPCORM leveraged the Community-Based Mangrove Forest Management Agreement and Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture, to integrate reproductive health and family planning strategies.<sup>57</sup> As noted earlier, Condijay became the first municipality to sanction the integration of family planning into their coastal resource management framework and was the first local government unit in the country to approve a five-year management plan that incorporated reproductive health within the strategy to ensure food security and coastal resource sustainability.<sup>44,49</sup>



**Fisheries Integration**

USAID Philippines has found that applying an integrated approach to address cross-sectoral development issues, such as food security and poverty alleviation, has been an important form of “constituency building” for fisheries management at the provincial and national level.

Integrated approaches, such as those implemented by the Integrated Community-Based Family Planning/Reproductive Health and Fisheries Management Project, helped cultivate new champions to reproductive health, such as fisheries managers, coastal resource management offices, municipal agricultural officers, and most importantly fishermen and their families. They simultaneously helped cultivate new champions for fishery management efforts, such as rural health units, health NGOs, and family planning outreach workers.<sup>13</sup>

The Fisheries Improved for Sustainable Harvest project demonstrated that the management of fisheries at the ecosystem level requires a multipronged approach to achieve and sustain results. This includes mechanisms to enhance production, to control access, and to improve capacity for integrating population and reproductive

health as a means for the recovery of fish stock.<sup>13</sup>

**General PHE  
Implementation Guidance**

A general PHE learning has been to develop and test policy briefs that clearly and concisely explain the factors linking reproductive health and integrated coastal management for decision makers. The Advance Advocacy Project, for example, prototyped policy briefs that articulated population and environmental dynamics in the identified region and tested it with a sample of decision makers. It then used the feedback gathered to fine-tune the content and messaging before disseminating it through several different channels to reach the intended audience, such as meetings, conferences, symposia, and web portals.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, to bring family planning and reproductive health information directly to targeted communities, it is important to provide family planning services and commodities at accessible outlets. This not only includes community-based distribution, but ongoing efforts to build a supportive policy environment within the local government units.<sup>13</sup>

Image credit: PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc.



**“I’d like to see PHE throughout the Asia Pacific region. I think that’s always been my vision, to go beyond the Philippines looking at spatially having more countries understanding and knowing what PHE is all about.”**

— Joan Castro, Executive Vice President, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

## The Future of PHE

### Expansion of PHE in the Philippines and Beyond

The integrated PHE approach has been incorporated into programs in the Philippines since the late 1990s and has reached many of its islands, municipalities, and villages. To continue and expand the benefits of PHE programs in the Philippines and beyond, communication and education on this approach needs to be prioritized, particularly with donors and governments on the reasons to invest in this approach in their context.

**“POPCOM’s tools and their techniques in integrating population, development, and environmental concerns can be adapted regionally or within the Asia region.”**

— Rio Magpayo, Local Advocacy Manager, Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development

We also need to update our approach, and adapt in the face of emerging health and environmental issues.

**“We started in 2000 with a simpler analysis of Population, Health, and Environment. As we progress, the world progresses and the science progresses. We know that is not as simple in terms of the different ways we approach the Population, Health, and Environment. Now we have climate change, and how do we embed this? So we need to be agile in terms of our approach. And there are other elements that are important now, like the [COVID-19] pandemic. So that Population, Health, and Environment model in 2000 was a lot simpler. We didn’t talk that much about climate change before. But in 2020, our model needs to be updated so our approach is agile.”**

— Naida Pasion, Chief Business Development Officer, Save the Children Philippines

As the BALANCED Project showed, it is possible for siloed projects (focused on a single sector) to buy in more to the PHE approach. To keep expanding PHE to



different sectors, it is important to sustain the dedicated community of PHE champions. Their commitment and dedication go beyond any one project and will be key to ensuring that participants from all sectors contribute to the success of PHE as a whole. PHE can continue to grow and expand to address new, emerging issues.

**“What is good about PHE is that it grows over time. The context changes as society changes and as we adapt to various challenges like COVID-19. But we continue to add value.”**

— Ramon San Pascual, Executive Director, Health Care Without Harm

**“More donors and governments will be able to invest if they get to know what the benefits of PHE are. In ten years, I want to see donors and governments adapting a more complex approach to resolving complex issues that affect people and the planet. As a practitioner, I’d like to have more youth and other sectors get involved, other people, other communities to learn more about the PHE.”**

— Joan Castro, Executive Vice President, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

Sustaining PHE in the Philippines

The Philippines’ PHE programs have involved stakeholders across varying levels and positions – from local government leaders to young community members– which was an important factor in their success. To sustain this momentum, those stakeholders will be key in continuing to institutionalize PHE into government and development frameworks.

**“The cohort of original PHE champions gives us energy to continue to sustain PHE. There’s still energy at the national level, to do PHE, to organize conferences, and so on....And it’s soft skills. It’s relationship-building. That has helped sustain PHE advocacy in the Philippines.”**

— Norma Pongan, Former Senior Program Manager, Save the Children

**“Ten years from now, I would like to see that we are still here doing integrated PHE programming, still engaging with the Local Government Units, and doing policy and advocacy.”**

— Maria Corazon De La Paz, Chairperson, Board of Balay Rehabilitation Center

**“In 10 years, I hope that integration has really been sustained...every stakeholder is able to translate the objectives of PHE into action. I think we have more heroes of PHE, more people who not just advocate but also really do pursue it in the field.”**

— Dr. Filemon Romero, Protect Wildlife Tawi-Tawi Site Coordinator

**“[The community] is sustaining PHE. It’s not because of a project, but it’s because they realize that even if PHE is complex, PHE is a way of life. It’s a way to connect to the people. It’s a way to share knowledge with the people [no matter] what field you come from.”**

— Joan Castro, Executive Vice President, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.

**“The challenge is that [those who originated PHE] are still here. We need new, young leaders who are dedicated to pursue it like us.”**

— Ramon San Pascual, Executive Director, Health Care Without Harm

Learning from the Past, Looking Ahead

PHE is a dynamic approach that can be adapted for emerging local and global issues—from climate change to COVID-19. The definition of PHE is also changing and evolving. The first generation of PHE programs in the Philippines had clearly defined family planning and biodiversity components. As PHE programs engaged with more and more communities, however, the approach continued to evolve to include livelihoods, youth issues, gender, migration issues, and more. In a constantly shifting world, PHE offers a framework for family planning and environmental conservation groups to work with a range of additional sectors and partners to holistically address the range of issues that affect the health of families and communities. The next generation of PHE champions can push this methodology even further, ensuring that multisectoral approaches are the “new normal” in this ever-changing, increasingly interconnected world.

**“The Millennium Development Goals did not seem like the greatest success, particularly in this country. But with the [Sustainable Development Goals], I think we have the opportunity to see sustainable development through activities like what PHE does coming to fruition. Maybe 10 years will be enough time to find the institutionalization of PHE either in law or in government planning or in the way CSOs [civil society organizations] and communities look at development. The integratedness will be there, with the three social issues that people are always worried about—population, health, and environment. That solution comes together and not separately.”**

— Dr. Juan Antonio Perez III, Executive Director, Commission on Population and Development of the Philippines



Image credits: Gerald James Cabal



**“I’m looking forward to making PHE a norm of doing business at the local level—particularly the integrated approach being promoted through PHE—comprehensive interventions, the integrated approaches, at the local levels. [I look forward to] engaging more institutions, including civil society organizations, to address the interconnected issues of population, health, and environment . . . We can also create more models to demonstrate PHE’s effectiveness and to scale the approach, so eventually, in 10 years, PHE would be the norm for efficient planning and government interventions.”**

— Lolito R. Tacardon, Deputy Executive Director, Commission on Population and Development of the Philippines

**“For those who are new to PHE, it’s important to be able to envision a future which we have not envisioned. Let’s not be tied down to what we’ve seen. Let’s really explore revolutionary ways of doing PHE—something that will be innovative and upend the beliefs we have now. So I challenge those coming in to look at that, rather than just be mired in the present. Let’s really envision the future.**

**Ten years from now, I’d like to see PHE as cutting edge in terms of learning, in terms of evidence building on how it works in new contexts. Ten years from now, there could be another COVID. There could be revolutionary ways of delivering reproductive health. There could be new ways of dealing with climate change, etc. But I’d really like to see PHE as a leading edge approach that defines the agenda with very strong evidence, and that we’re able to take the lessons from there and take the evidence from there and it also move forward.”**

— Naida Pasion, Chief Business Development Officer, Save the Children Philippines





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