


The BALANCED Project



Research Brief: Assessing the Benefits of Integrating Family Planning and Environmental Management Activities—Lessons from the Philippines

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For more information contact:

Coastal Resources Center

University of Rhode Island
Narragansett Bay Campus
South Ferry Road
Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882, USA
Tel: (401) 874-6224
Fax: (401) 874-6920
Email: balanced@crc.uri.edu

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Cover (upper) Photo Caption: Crowded village in Binudac, Palawan, Philippines

Cover Photo Credit: Path Foundation Philippines Inc.

Cover (lower) Photo Caption: Community-based distribution center, Ubay, Bohol, Philippines

Cover Photo Credit: Path Foundation Philippines Inc.



Research Brief: Assessing the Benefits of Integrating Family Planning and Environmental Management Activities – Lessons Learned from the Philippines

This brief summarizes a study conducted in the Philippines by [R. Pollnac and K. Dacanay \(2011\)](#), which assessed the benefits of an integrated population and environment (PE) project implemented in the Visayan region of the Philippines. More importantly, perhaps, this study also investigated what factors contributed most in obtaining benefits from this integrated PE approach. The authors found that the level of participation was a key determinant of benefits. Other factors found significant in determining degree of benefits included type of nongovernmental organization (NGO) activities, context factors inherent to a community (e.g., population size and density) and individual characteristics of those who participated.

Introduction

Over the past decade or more, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and private foundation donors have supported a number of project initiatives that promote the integration of health and family planning into conservation initiatives. Commonly known as Population-Health-Environment (PHE) projects, they are designed to simultaneously improve communities' access to family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH) services, while improving natural resources management (NRM) in ways that help secure livelihoods and conserve the critical natural resources upon which humans depend. PHE approaches are most often implemented in areas of high biodiversity and serve populations living in or around remote conservation areas that often are highly dependant on those resources for their livelihoods. These same populations also have poor delivery of and access to health services. Poor health may affect their ability to engage in good conservation or resource use practices. Another common assumption of and justification for PHE projects is that integration of FP, health and environmental management activities results in "value-added" benefits. Value-added refers to synergistic results whereby greater environment and human welfare outcomes are achieved by taking an integrated multi-sector versus a single sector approach. Examples of benefits and synergies include: building trust in communities and buy-in to conservation activities; addressing unmet need for family planning and slowing population growth of remote, underserved communities; empowering women; reducing operational costs or reducing pressure on natural resources (Oglethorpe *et al.* 2008).



Garbage littering the waterways harms marine animals and spreads disease to humans

A growing body of anecdotal evidence—and to a lesser extent quantitative empirical evidence—supports the position that integrated projects create synergies and add value (D'Agnes *et al.* 2010; Kleinau *et al.* 2005). The "Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development" (BALANCED) Project, funded by USAID through a cooperative agreement with the University of Rhode Island, PATH Foundation Philippines and Conservation International, conducted additional research that tested this value-added hypothesis and is summarized below.

Research Design and Methods

This research differed from other studies in several ways. First, it was performed approximately three years after the project ended with the goal of assessing sustainability of changed perceptions and behaviors as a result of project activities. Also, it used a quantitative approach by randomly sampling over 2,000 individuals in 52 randomly selected project and non-project villages. Integrated PE¹ project villages

¹ The Population Environment (PE) approach was implemented in these sites originally, which is why the term PE is used.

in this case had NGOs implementing both reproductive health/family planning (RH/FP) and coastal resource management (CRM) activities or they implemented FP activities and coordinated w/ other projects doing CRM with integrated messaging. Non-PE project villages may have had both FP and environmental management project activities, or just one or neither of these. However, in cases where there were both FP and CRM activities, the activities/projects had not been designed as integrated across these sectors and were not operationally coordinated. Indicators used in the study included several measures on family planning, individual perceptions of resource management practices, perceptions of change in resource conditions, as well as integrated measures that assessed individual perceptions of linkages between human population pressures and natural resource conditions—the latter being important as perceived linkages between the two sectors is considered likely to influence individual practices in the two sectors. The study looked at impacts at the community-scale and at the level of individuals—those that participated in project activities versus those that did not. The study also looked at the degree of integration of RH/FP activities as a potential factor influencing impacts. Definitions and methods of scoring the population (reproductive health) and environmental indicators used in the evaluation are described in detail in the technical report [Pollnac and Dacanay 2011](#) found at www.balanced.crc.uri.edu.

Findings

The tables below show whether there were statistical differences between:

- PE-project and non-PE project villages
- High and low levels of cross-sectoral integration in project villages
- Individuals who participated versus those that did not in project villages

Where there are no differences indicated (0), it means there was no value-added benefit for that indicator. Positive (+) or negative (-) differences on scores demonstrates a positive or negative benefit.

Some single sector benefit was found at the community scale. The research found only one indicator—family planning knowledge—with positive value-added benefits (Table 1), but the size of this difference was quite small. However, it should be noted that project villages did not have any indicators with significant negative benefits. While some funders have been reluctant to support integrated PHE approaches, believing that a focus on multiple sectors can "dilute" the impact that would have been achieved had all resources been focused on just one sector, this study found no basis for such concern.

Table 1: Impact at the Community Level			
Sector/ Indicator Type	Difference between Project and Non-Project Villages		
	+	--	0
Reproductive health			
Positive changes in family planning attitudes			X
Family planning awareness ²			X
Family planning knowledge scale ³	X		
Contraceptive use scale			X
Environmental management			
Perception of change in empowerment, compliance & impacts on resource			X
Perception of improved access and control of resources			X
Integrated			
Understanding of linkages between population & environment			X

+ = Positive impact or higher scores for project villages

-- = Negative impact or lower scores for project villages

0 = No statistically significant difference between project and non-project villages

² This indicator measures respondents' perceptions concerning reproductive health and resource management issues.

³ This indicator measures respondents' knowledge of the number of existing family planning methods and other relevant information for each method.

Some single sector benefit was found due to integration. Higher levels of integration are also assumed to result in greater synergies and benefits (Oglethorpe *et al.* 2008). This hypothesis was tested by grouping project sites into those that had high levels of cross-sectoral integrated RH and environmental management activities versus those that had low levels of integration. The results shown in Table 2 indicate positive differences due to integration on one of the environmental management indicators. The size of this difference was small, however. As with the community-scale analysis, there were no negative impacts as a result of integrated activities. These findings suggest that further research testing this hypothesis is warranted.

Table 2. Impact of Degree of Integration			
Sector/Indicator Type	Differences between High Integration and Low Integration in PE Project Villages		
	+	--	0
Reproductive health			
Positive changes in family planning attitudes			X
Family planning awareness			X
Family planning knowledge scale			X
Contraceptive use scale			X
Environmental management			
Perception of change in empowerment, compliance & impacts on resource	X		
Perception of improved access & control of resources			X
Integrated			
Understanding of linkages between population & environment			X

+ = Positive impact or higher scores for project villages

-- = Negative impact or lower scores for project villages

0 = No statistically significant difference between project and non-project villages

Project participation mattered. Table 3 shows results regarding the impact of project participation on individual knowledge, practices and perceptions. Individuals who participated in the project were more likely to change their perceptions, awareness and behavior towards family planning and environmental management compared to those in project villages who did not participate. While these results were statistically significant, the differences were small. However, it shows some value-added benefits across both sectors among individuals that participated.

Table 3. Impact at the Individual Level			
Sector/Indicator Type	Difference between P-E Project and Non-Project Participants		
	+	--	0
Reproductive health			
Positive changes in family planning attitudes	X		
Family planning awareness			X
Family planning knowledge scale	X		
Contraceptive use scale	X		
Environmental management			
Perception of change in empowerment, compliance & impacts on resource			X
Perception of improved access & control of resources	X		
Integrated			
Understanding of linkages between population & environment			X

+ = Positive impact or higher scores for project participants

-- = Negative impact or lower scores for project participants

0 = No statistically significant difference between project and non-project participants

The fact that comparisons of individual participants and non-participants in project villages showed benefits on more indicators than the larger-scale analysis led the researchers to investigate which specific factors influenced higher results at the individual level. The low level of participation of village residents (13 percent) is the likely reason that the individual differences had little impact on village-level scores. This also indicates a low level of diffusion of project-introduced innovations (family planning, environmental management and integrated concepts, practices and knowledge) from project participants to other village residents. It suggests higher participation levels and/or different types of activities may be needed to reach critical mass or threshold levels whereby practices and knowledge diffuse from project to non-project participants.

Different NGOs had significantly different impacts from one another, suggesting that NGO capacity and management style played a major role in the level of project impact. The researchers also found large and statistically significant differences between villages associated with different implementing NGOs, suggesting that differential NGO project implementation processes might impact project outcomes. This is illustrated in Figure 1 where mean values for three impact indicators show large differences for different NGOs.

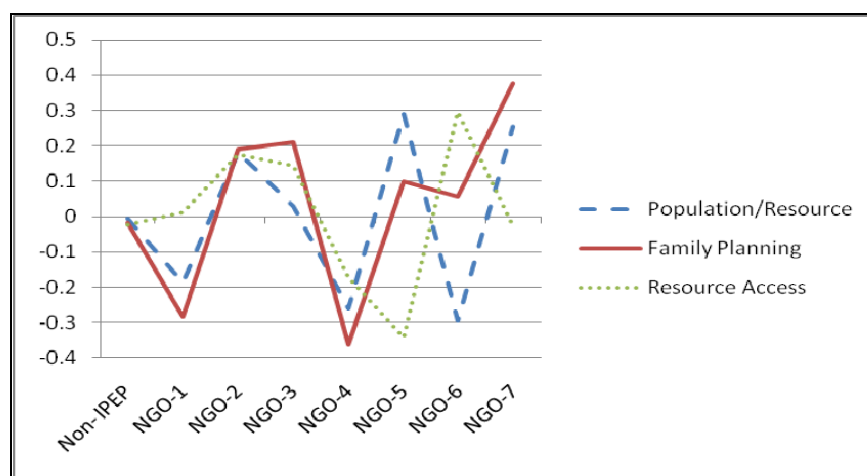


Figure 1. Mean values for three impact indicators by NGO

The individuals most likely to participate in the project were: single, had few children, less education, and lived in places where the project had been relatively more active compared to other places. Since the researchers found that individuals who participated in the project (e.g., attended meetings, joined committees, etc.) manifested higher impact indicator scores than non-participants, they examined factors influencing project participation. The analysis indicated that single individuals, those with fewer children and those with a lower level of education were more likely to be project participants. In addition, participants living in a village where the NGO activity scale was greater were also more likely to be project participants.

External factors that relate to increased participation of individuals in projects include: high population density, high levels of integration in project activities. Factors that relate to decreased participation include: high percentages of Catholic residents, large population. While some individual level variables are associated with project participation, other research has shown that community context also impacts this important variable. Therefore, the researchers analyzed whether a number of community context variables influence participation. It demonstrated that participation is greater where village population density is greater, and where there are higher levels of project activity integration. There is less participation in communities that have larger percentages of Catholic residents and where the overall village population is larger.

In summary, important findings of this evaluation are that value-added benefits resulting from integrated PHE approaches can be achieved under certain conditions. Key factors influencing the degree of lasting

value-added benefits include the level of participation in integrated projects and how NGOs implement these projects. In addition, there are several non-project related factors at the community scale and of individual participants that may also influence impacts. This suggests the need to tailor strategies based on place-based context and personal characteristics of different participants.

Recommendations

While this was only one study in one part of the world, in order to strengthen value-added benefits of PHE projects, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Promote high levels of participation, as this is key to lasting results. One strategy might be to select target areas where it is easier to reach a greater number of participants (e.g., communities with higher population density). If larger, less dense communities must also be targeted, implementation strategies will need to be tailored with special attention given to increasing participation rates and acknowledging that some communities may need additional project resources to achieve similar results—e.g., larger, more geographically dispersed communities may need more peer educators per community or more training and outreach events.
- Recognize individual differences in target populations, which means that interventions need to be tailored to different groups of people. Some types of individuals may require specialized or more intensive interventions to attain similar results. For example, married women with larger family sizes may require special childcare arrangements to attend meetings. Or, they may need door-to-door interventions, as they may not have time to attend meetings due to a heavy burden of household chores.
- Provide careful oversight of implementing NGOs to ensure there is quality implementation—including the use of appropriate, site-specific implementation strategies and approaches to encourage increased transparency of how and why project decisions are made; and the use of more participatory processes. Activity reports should clearly indicate how activities and strategies were used to: 1) encourage participation, 2) produce transparency of decisions as to how and why specific activities were selected, and 3) enhance the degree of integration across the different sectors. Reports should also provide detail on training and other activities that can enable better post-project impact evaluations.
- Finally, the field of PHE would benefit from more research on key factors influencing lasting impacts of such integrated initiatives. This should include more research on: 1) how the degree of integration influences impacts, 2) how different implementation strategies influence the degree of value-added results, and 3) what levels of participation or what types of interventions create more auto-diffusion of perceptions and good practices within a community.



Community health center workers

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The background features a collage of textures. The top half is a solid orange color. Below it is a horizontal band with a pattern of orange and green leaves. The bottom half is a light green background with a blurred image of green foliage. A dark green vertical bar is on the left side.

Coastal Resources Center

University of Rhode Island
Narragansett Bay Campus
South Ferry Road
Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882
USA

Tel: (401) 874-6224

Fax: (401) 874-6920

Web: www.crc.uri.edu