

Advocating for People & the Planet

The Integrated Population, Health & Environment Model

Population, Health and Environment, or PHE, is an integrated development approach that links family planning, health and conservation. PHE recognizes the interconnectedness of people, their health and their local environment. It connects the reproductive health of individuals (both men and women), the health of communities living in remote biodiversity-rich areas, and the health of the natural environment, upon which all life depends.

PHE projects are most desirable in areas with threatened ecological landscapes and where population density results in environmental pressures, with high rates of poverty, poor health indicators and few, if any, government services.



Young women in rural Ethiopia. [Photo: Suzanne York]

PHE is an approach that fosters healthy communities and environments. It is a holistic strategy with the potential to make a big difference for people and the planet.

The Components of PHE:

Population: in the United Nations' report *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision* world population is predicted to reach 8.5 billion by 2030 and 9.7 billion by 2050.

Health: access to healthcare and voluntary family planning services is especially critical for women. Globally, 225 million women lack access to the contraceptives they need and want. Addressing this need and reducing the rate of maternal and child mortality should be a global priority.

Environment: the world is facing serious natural resource and environmental challenges. Often the best solutions to environmental problems are local and based on traditional knowledge.

PHE: Global Highlights

There are numerous PHE programs that are successfully empowering people and communities to address their needs for education, healthcare, and sustainable livelihoods, as well as to manage their natural resources to better protect the environment.

Uganda

Uganda is a country experiencing a high rate of population growth and grave threats to its biodiversity. The Ugandan organization Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH) has been successful with conservation efforts, and they are also helping local Ugandans meet their basic needs such as health care and alternative livelihoods. The organization was founded by Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, a wildlife veterinarian who saw first-hand how the transmission of diseases

between humans and wildlife threatened the success of conservation programs.

The mission of CTPH is to promote gorilla conservation by enabling people, wildlife and livestock to coexist by improving health care in and around Africa's protected areas. The organization has successfully integrated family planning within national park communities by focusing on wildlife health and community health. They also empower people through information technology projects.

CTPH runs a PHE program at Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, a place considered to be a biodiversity hotspot. Bwindi is home to almost half of the world's 880 critically endangered mountain gorillas. The park is surrounded by poor communities experiencing rapid population growth. It is a model that, if applied

more widely, could reap big benefits for the communities elsewhere in Uganda and surrounding countries.

Madagascar

In southwest Madagascar, Blue Ventures (BV) works with local communities to conserve threatened marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods. The organization has long understood that there is a connection between population growth, poor natural resource management, environmental degradation, lack of healthcare, and food insecurity.

In the Velondriake area, a region where the majority of people rely on coastal and marine resources for their livelihoods and with a total fertility rate of 6.7 per woman, BV is addressing marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods with a rights-based approach. Along with these initiatives, BV provides health services to 50 villages through a network of local women trained as community-based distributors of contraceptives. The network serves as a source of information on voluntary family planning services.

As part of its PHE framework, Blue Ventures has created projects on sustainable fisheries management, locally-led marine conservation, aquaculture enterprises, community education, water, sanitation and hygiene programs, and maternal and child health services.

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, some of the biggest issues facing the local communities

are high population pressure (due to large family size and few family planning services), health problems (especially high maternal mortality), poverty, and environmental problems (namely soil erosion and deforestation). The Guraghe Peoples Self-Help Development Organization (GPSDO) operates in the country's southwest, where it focuses on reproductive health education and community-based family planning programs, integrating issues related to sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation.

GPSDO provides family planning services to its targeted communities by training voluntary community health workers. Volunteers work closely with government health extension workers to provide education about voluntary family planning and reproductive health. The organization also raises awareness on these issues through a youth outreach program and by working with religious leaders and elders.

Philippines

More than 60 percent of Filipinos live in rural coastal communities and rely on fishing as a livelihood. Implementing successful initiatives that help people cope with climate change and environmental problems—such as the devastating Typhoon Hainan—is critical.

The Philippines has a high rate of population growth (the current population of nearly 100 million is expected to double in size by 2080),

with low access to reproductive health services and great poverty and inequity. Path Foundation Philippines, Inc. (PFPI) has been a pioneer in PHE work. Its projects have improved access to family planning and reproductive health services in key regions of high biodiversity. PFPI has increased community awareness and support of family planning and conservation as a means to improve health, food security and natural resources. The organization has also increased incentives for coastal and marine conservation among coastal fisher households and women's rights activists, and those concerned about stabilizing population growth.

Looking Ahead

PHE projects have not yet been implemented on a large-scale. But PHE programs are achieving some impressive results, and this holistic, integrated, multi-sectoral approach is a key solution to empowering people and protecting the planet.

The aim of PHE projects, as stated by Pathfinder International, is to improve access to reproductive and other health services for vulnerable populations (in rural) and ecologically threatened areas, while at the same time empowering these communities to manage their natural resources in ways that benefit their livelihoods.

The time is now to scale up PHE projects around the world. In the face of increasing climate extremes, for which most communities are not prepared, helping people become more resilient is critical.

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