



**POPULATION  
INSTITUTE**



© Pathfinder International

## **Population, Health, and Environment (PHE): Investing in integrated approaches to development**

In a world increasingly threatened by environmental degradation, integrated approaches are needed to cope with climatic changes, deforestation, desertification, shrinking wildlife populations, unsustainable farming practices, and the collapse of fisheries. Livelihoods in impacted communities are being destroyed. Many of those communities are already among the poorest in the world, and because they lack access to essential health care services, including voluntary family planning, they suffer from high rates of maternal and child mortality.

If they are to survive and prosper, these environmentally impacted communities need help, but not just any kind of assistance. They need a holistic, carefully integrated approach that addresses all their critical needs, not just one.

### **Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) Projects**

For more than two decades now, Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) projects have been crafting solutions that enable communities to respond to environmental challenges, while also delivering essential health care services, including access to rights-based voluntary family planning services. This integrated approach starts by talking with women and men in the community about the challenges they face and working with community leaders to craft solutions that will protect livelihoods, promote better health, and contribute to environmental sustainability.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other donor agencies have supported PHE projects in communities across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, often in partnership with health and conservation organizations. Increasingly, foreign governments, the private sector, and communities themselves are taking the lead in designing and supporting their own PHE projects. While models of PHE vary greatly, they all take a cross-cutting, multi-sectoral approach that empowers communities and relies on their active support for new initiatives.



© Pathfinder International

## TANZANIA: THE TUNNGANE PROJECT

The Tuungane Project, a joint initiative of The Nature Conservancy and Pathfinder International, works to improve access to family planning, reproductive health services and improved water, sanitation, and hygiene while simultaneously empowering communities to address challenges related to livelihoods, food security, and the environment. Supported by USAID and other donors, the project covers multiple remote villages around Lake Tanganyika, engaging health care providers, farmers, and fishers. The results are promising: more than 1,200 fishers and other stakeholders have joined Beach Management Units to share sustainable fishing practices, and the region has experienced a 550% increase in women giving birth in health facilities, which is key to reducing maternal mortality.<sup>1</sup>



© Garth Cripps/Blue Ventures

## MADAGASCAR: BLUE VENTURES

When the marine conservation organization Blue Ventures first started working with fishing communities to support the development of “Velondriake” (meaning “to live with the sea”), Madagascar’s first locally managed marine area, they learned that many in the community had significant unmet health needs that were interfering with their ability to participate in environmental stewardship efforts. In 2007, Blue Ventures first integrated health interventions into their fisheries management initiatives, and since then, have partnered with health organizations to expand those integrated approaches to more than 45,000 people in 75 communities along Madagascar’s west coast. In addition to strengthening livelihoods and improving food security, Blue Ventures’ integrated approach has improved maternal health by averting an estimated 4,500 unintended pregnancies.<sup>2</sup>

## THE VALUE OF PHE’S INTEGRATED APPROACH

Two decades of PHE project experience have demonstrated that the whole can be greater than its parts. Studies indicate that when environmental projects, such as conservation or reforestation, are designed and implemented alongside improved access to health services, including family planning, the results can have a synergistic impact. When communities are involved in the project design, the PHE approach helps to improve community understanding, build consensus, and promote community buy-in.<sup>3</sup> In Madagascar, an evaluation of multiple project sites of USAID’s Environmental Health Project found that sites employing an integrated approach saw stronger outcomes in childhood nutrition, contraceptive use, and tree-planting efforts.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, a comparative study of the Integrated Population and Coastal Resources Management project in the Philippines documented greater rates of contraceptive use and improved conditions of coral reefs at PHE project sites relative to single-intervention sites.<sup>5</sup>



## PHE's Integrated Approach Has Other Distinct Advantages:

### THE ABILITY TO REACH REMOTE AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

PHE projects have been successful in bringing services—particularly health and voluntary family planning services—to communities that were historically underserved. This is often the case when the project is implemented by a conservation organization that has established trusted relationships with remote communities. The resulting goodwill can help facilitate the introduction of health services into existing conservation efforts in underserved areas. In PHE project sites that were part of the BALANCED project in Tanzania and the Philippines, for example, a key result was reduction of the distance people needed to travel to access family planning services, primarily through the training and support for community-based distributors and health extension workers.<sup>6</sup>

---

### GREATER PARTICIPATION OF MEN IN HEALTH ACTIVITIES

Community mobilization that comes from the delivery of a coherent, connected set of conservation and development activities can help to break down traditional gender roles in the health and natural resource management sectors. In Kenya, a Greenbelt Movement/FHI 360 project integrated family planning messages into its “Green Volunteers” community education program, reaching men who might not otherwise have been exposed to such information. Focus group research confirmed that this enabled couples to talk more freely about their family planning choices, and it motivated some women and men to seek services as a couple.<sup>7</sup>

---

### GREATER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The PHE approach has also enabled more women to engage in natural resource management (NRM). In rural settings, while women frequently farm and fish, and are the primary gatherers of wood and water for their families, they often lack opportunities to gain new skills or take on community level decision-making in natural resource management. Increased female involvement in non-traditional NRM activities—including beekeeping, goat raising, fish ponds and other livelihoods activities—was reported as a key result of Conservation International's Healthy Families, Healthy Forests projects in Cambodia, Madagascar, and the Philippines.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, community surveys conducted at BALANCED project sites in Tanzania showed that both men and women felt more empowered to participate in conservation activities.<sup>9</sup>





## The PHE Approach Is Needed Now More Than Ever

PHE's integrated approach can be applied to a variety of development challenges. Holistic solutions that empower women and men, reach the most vulnerable, and address multiple challenges can help communities adapt to climate change, enhance food security, and address public health threats.

Improved access to and use of rights-based voluntary family planning strengthens the resilience of women, families, and communities, enabling them to contend better with these shocks and stressors.<sup>10</sup> The PHE approach to environmental challenges has a lot to offer to a world increasingly threatened by severe droughts, catastrophic flooding, extreme weather, and rising seas.

- 
- 1 <https://www.pathfinder.org/projects/tuungane/>
  - 2 <https://blueventures.org/conservation/approach/phe/>
  - 3 Yavinsky, Rachel Winnik, Carolyn Lamere, Kristen P. Patterson, and Jason Bremner. 2015. "The impact of population, health, and environment projects: A synthesis of evidence," Working paper. Washington, DC: Population Council, The Evidence Project.
  - 4 USAID. 2007. *Issue Brief: Healthy People in a Healthy Environment in Madagascar: Better Results Through Integration*. <http://www.ehproject.org/PDF/phe/madagascar-brief2007.pdf>. See also: Kleinau E et al. 2005. Healthy People in a Healthy Environment: Impact of an Integrated Population, Health, and Environment Program in Madagascar. USAID: Environmental Health Project.
  - 5 D'Agnes L et al. 2009. Integrated management of coastal resources and human health yields added value: a comparative study in Palawan (Philippines). *Environmental Conservation*; 37(4):398-409.
  - 6 Coastal Resource Center, PATH Foundations Philippines, Inc., and Conservation International. 2013. PHE Lessons Learned from the BALANCED Project. BALANCED Project Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 5, September 2013.
  - 7 FHI 360/PROGRESS Project. 2013. Integrating Family Planning into Other Development Sectors. Durham, NC: FHI 360.
  - 8 Conservation International. 2009. Healthy Families, Healthy Forests: Improving Human Health and Biodiversity Conservation. Conservation International project report.
  - 9 Coastal Resource Center, PATH Foundations Philippines, Inc., and Conservation International. 2013. PHE Lessons Learned from the BALANCED Project. BALANCED Project Newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 5, September 2013.
  - 10 Population Reference Bureau. 2015. Building Resilience Through Family Planning: A Transformative Approach for Women, Families, and Communities. Policy brief. <https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/sahel-resilience-brief.pdf>

