

Policy & Issue Brief

Population, Health & Environment (PHE) approach: A strategy in addressing Climate Change, natural resources degradation and food insecurity¹

How vulnerable is the Philippines to Climate Change impacts?

The climate is changing. In addition to natural causes, harmful human activities have a lot to do with it. Effects of Climate Change include sea level rise and increase in temperature. Wet season is expected to become wetter, dry season to become drier. The Philippines is one of the countries most vulnerable to Climate Change impacts. Based on projections, a 1-meter sea level rise will affect 64 provinces covering about 800 coastal municipalities.

What is the effect of Climate Change on our economic development?

About 20 typhoons visit the Philippines every year. A few of them bring in devastating winds and rains. They are expected to become worse due to Climate Change. The Philippines ranks among the Top 10 countries in the world whose economic activity is most at risk. In 2009 alone, two weather disturbances killed 600, disrupted the lives of 7 million people and resulted in infrastructure and agricultural losses worth P30 billion².

What is the impact of Climate Change on food security?

A 1-degree increase in temperature will result in 10 percent decline in agricultural yield mainly due to droughts. Among the major crops affected are rice and corn. Warming will also cause bleaching of corals (that support fisheries). These will result in limited supply and rise in food prices. Already, municipal fishermen are now catching fewer fish.

How will Climate Change impact people's health?

With less food on the table, people's health will definitely be affected. Local governments will also have a tougher fight against vector-borne illnesses. Disease-carrying insects are expected to proliferate because of the warming weather. Already, government hospitals find it hard to cope whenever there is a dengue outbreak.



Children, as well as women and the elderly, are most vulnerable to Climate Change impacts.

Which is the most vulnerable sector to Climate Change impacts?

The poor, especially women, children and the elderly are most vulnerable. Most of them are in coastal areas where more than 62 percent of the country's population resides. Upland dwellers – about 20 million of them – are also vulnerable as our forest areas continue to be destroyed.

Is Climate Change and degraded natural resources the only cause of people's economic hardships?

Increased population pressure on natural resources is a major reason for the decline in fisheries and destruction of coastal and forest areas. It was estimated in 2002 that to keep pace with the current rate of population growth, fish stock must increase by 30 percent by 2010.

Do local government planners give due attention to population factors?

It is widely acknowledged that high rate of human population density and growth in the Philippines drives unsustainable patterns of upland and marine resource use. But population factors are often overlooked in conservation and in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programs. Most –

¹ This paper was prepared by PATH Foundation Philippines, a not-for-profit organization (www.pfpi.org)

² Philippine Daily Inquirer, Oct. 14, 2009

if not all -- environment/natural resources (ENR) plans simply propose technical solutions to ENR problems. The population issue is given little attention. To attain sustainable development³, planners/implementers should strike a balance between the needs of the environment and the people.

What is the population/health/environment (PHE) approach?

The PHE approach recognizes the interrelationships of population, health and environment issues – one affects the other. Rapid population growth threatens our natural resources because too many people will have to depend on them. With dwindling natural resources – the main source of food and livelihood – economic and health conditions of communities will suffer, making them more vulnerable to the effects of Climate Change and natural disasters.

As these concerns are interlinked, an integrated strategy – one that responds simultaneously to population/health/environment and Climate Change challenges -- is required.

What is the role of family planning/reproductive health (FP/RH) in PHE?

Providing FP/RH information and services to those who need them⁴ is a key component of PHE. FP/RH information and services complement ENR management efforts, helping sustain conservation gains and in making environment/natural resources and the people more resilient to Climate Change and natural disaster impacts.

An FP/RH program promotes responsible parenthood and planning the number of children. What it tries to achieve is provide the services and the various choices so that a mother and her spouse/partner would attain their goal in spacing children. This allows a mother enough time to recover her health (after pregnancy and child delivery) and take care of her child, for the child to grow healthy and become a productive member of the community.

Has the population/health/environment (PHE) approach been tested in the Philippines?

There are several PHE projects implemented with local governments, like those spearheaded by the PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. (PFPI). In 2001-2007, PFPI did

a study in three Palawan towns to test whether there would be a significant improvement in both coastal resource management (CRM) and human reproductive health (RH) outcomes by jointly delivering these interventions versus delivering them separately. Results of the study⁵ indicate, “the integrated CRM+RH intervention generated higher impacts on human and ecosystem health conditions compared to CRM-only or RH-only interventions.” The improvements in the coastal resources resulted from protective management by communities, which also managed activities that increased access to FP/RH information and services. This resulted in “a significant decrease in the average number of children born to women in the study area.” Other trends showed “a significant improvement in income among young adults.”⁶ The increase in income would enable these communities to cope with future environment and Climate Change challenges.

Is supporting PHE initiatives a good investment for local governments?

While population is one of the factors in computing the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) that a local government unit (LGU) will receive, such amount may not be enough to meet economic, social, health and infrastructure needs of a big number of constituents. With a high population, an LGU has to have more livelihood/employment opportunities, more roads, more housing programs, more clinics/hospitals and more schools. With Climate Change, the government has to invest even more to “climate proof” infrastructures and capacitate the community to be resilient.

What can local governments do?

LGUs should respond to an expressed need of their constituents and support a local FP program as a key part of a holistic approach to attain their environmental conservation and Climate Change Adaptation-Disaster Risk Reduction objectives and overall development goals.

Some municipalities have enacted ordinances to create PHE councils. The council’s main task: ensure that PHE issues are addressed at the same time and integrated into their development plans (i.e., Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Waste Management Plan, Marine Protected Area Management Plan) and that necessary budget is allocated.



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Commission on Population



League of Municipalities of the Philippines

³ Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the future generations’ ability to meet their own needs.

⁴ In the 2008 NDHS, 54 percent of respondents (women of reproductive age) said they did not want another child (at the time of the survey). In fact, the survey found out that among those interviewed, 1 in 3 births were unplanned.

⁵ D’Agnes et al. (2010) Integrated Management of Coastal Resources and Human Health Yields Added Value: A Comparative Study in Palawan (Philippines). *Environmental Conservation* 37 (4): 398–409

⁶ To reduce dependency on natural resources, communities’ alternative livelihoods are supported under the PHE approach