



THE BALANCED PROJECT: INTEGRATING POPULATION AND HEALTH INTO MARINE CONSERVATION

Introduction

“Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development” (*BALANCED*) is the focus of a new global program supported by the US Agency for International Development’s Office of Population and Reproductive Health. The project, which is implemented by the University of Rhode Island’s Coastal Resources Center (URI/CRC) and its partners—PATH Foundation Philippines Inc. (PFPI) and Conservation International (CI)—seeks to advance the use of effective population, health and environment (PHE) approaches worldwide by:

- Building capacity through peer-to-peer mentoring, south-to-south exchanges, and innovative learning techniques.
- Synthesizing knowledge and state-of-the arts (SOTA) practices in population-health-environment (PHE) integration and disseminating that knowledge to key audiences.
- Facilitating implementation and scale-up of field-based PHE initiatives in areas of high biodiversity, particularly in East Africa and Asia.

The project also offers a variety of tools and approaches that can help bring leadership and technical capability in transformational PHE approaches to the six Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) country governments, while at the same time accelerating the achievement of specific CTI goals and objectives.

BALANCED and Coastal Resources Management

CTI is a regional effort of six country governments to conserve vital marine resources in a unique and threatened ecosystem—Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. CTI’s overall goal is to improve management of biologically and economically important coastal-marine resources and associated ecosystems that support livelihoods of peoples in the Coral Triangle.



All six countries in the Coral Triangle are rich in marine biodiversity but socio-economically diverse. The majority of the countries have a very young age structure, with more than 60 percent of the population under 30 (Cincotta & Leahy, 2007). The high momentum of these populations guarantees continued growth for decades to come and potential civil unrest and

instability if governments are unable to meet increasing demands for education, employment and basic services. While Indonesia and the Philippines have higher development rankings than the other countries, all the CTI countries have levels of extreme poverty amid stressed environments. The two factors of growing populations and increasing need for improved coastal resources management (CRM) calls for an integrated approach in the CTI.



The goal of PHE programs is to simultaneously improve access to family and reproductive health (FP/RH) services, while also working with communities to improve natural resources management in ways that improve health and livelihoods, and conserve the critical ecosystems upon which humans depend. Health and conservation organizations come together to implement PHE approaches, which are coordinated and integrated, seeking to achieve a common goal. One method of integration is the manner in which these projects are implemented on the ground—that is,

often using the same field staff, agents or community volunteers to perform health, development, education or environment activities.

The PHE approach fits strategically within the CTI framework, since it is transformational in nature, aims to build capacity within local institutions at all levels, and fosters public-private partnerships. Illustrative examples of benefits from the PHE approach include:

- Quantitative research suggests that integrated approaches to population and coastal conservation yield higher **impact** on both human and ecosystem health outcomes compared to single sector interventions, and at lower cost. (Castro & D'Agnes, 2008; Peilemeier *et al*, 2007)
- Synergistic approaches mirror people's daily lives and are **more acceptable** compared to sectoral management approaches (Castro & D'Agnes, 2008.)
- Integrating across population, health, environment, agriculture livelihoods, microcredit, and livelihoods brings **better benefits** than addressing them in a single sector fashion (Peilemeier *et al.*, 2007.)
- Decreasing human-induced pressures on resources and providing alternatives to environmentally destructive practices are crucial for long term **sustainability**.
- Added benefits of integrating across PHE sectors include **reaching non-traditional audiences** such as engaging men in family planning decisions, including more women in CRM/Natural Resources Management and reaching underserved communities in remote, biologically significant areas (MEASURE/Evaluation, 2007.)

The BALANCED project offers tools and approaches that can help CTI countries reach their goals. Some examples of potential areas of collaboration include:

1) Human Capital Development

- Some CTI partner organizations already have training facilities and courses to transfer know-how in conservation action planning to CTI country leaders and program managers.

- BALANCED can offer complementary training in PHE integration for coastal mayors and other front-line stewards of the environment that attend such trainings.

2) MPA Established and Effectively Managed

- Organize study tours for CTI country decision makers to gain first-hand information on PHE approaches to fisheries/coastal management for improved food security.
- PHE Learning Sites already exist in the Bohol Marine Triangle region where communities are actively involved in MPA co-management while simultaneously implementing alternative livelihood strategies and community-based family planning activities that are helping reduce food insecurity and poverty in coastal communities.

3) Ecosystem Approach to Management of Fisheries & Other Marine Resources

- Reproductive health (RH) management is another transitioning measure that can reduce fishing effort in the long term through fewer births and smaller family size. BALANCED can help to identify entry points for incorporating family planning and adolescent reproductive health management into fisheries and marine resource management agendas.
- BALANCED could enable country-specific development planning processes by providing assistance with analyses of PHE dynamics at the site and identification of appropriate interventions and interlinkage mechanisms.



4) Climate Change Adaptation Measures

- PHE project experience with livelihood diversification and other non-climate change stresses on marine/coastal environments are germane to this objective and strategy. BALANCED could help with the development of country-specific plans and adapt existing CTI model projects to use PHE approaches that build social resilience into climate change adaptation strategies.
- BALANCED could also help with explaining to decision makers about how population growth is a stress on marine/coastal ecosystems and how PHE is a resilience adaptation strategy.

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