

Sustaining People & Places

Population Health and Environment

Study Tour - Philippines



Twelve staff members and volunteer activists from U.S. conservation organizations traveled to the Southeast Asia to observe how communities are addressing their needs for healthy natural resources, sustainable livelihoods, education, health care and family planning through innovative integrated programs.

The Scene and Setting

The more than 7,000 islands that make up the Philippines' are a study in contrasts. Postcard tropical coastlines and lush forested hills exist next to urban slums and deforested slopes. There is extreme wealth and a modern business sector alongside grinding poverty. Rapid population growth in recent decades – the number of Filipinos doubled since 1975 to 86 million – affects everything from tangled city traffic to a sluggish economy; difficulty in providing basic public services to dramatic impairments to coastal fishing, clean water supplies and productive croplands. The fledgling democracy is lively and has taken root in both far-flung municipalities and the national congress. Yet the concerns about corruption or political instability are never far off.

An innovative approach to addressing the needs of people and the planet.

Since 2000, the Philippines has served as a laboratory for programs that integrate Population, Health and Environment (PHE) components. Citizens, government officials, local and international NGOs and donors support PHE programs in a variety of community initiatives. The programs are based in the idea that an integrated approach will result in better outcomes than if the areas of population, health and environment are pursued alone.

The Study Tour group visited community projects in urban, coastal and forest areas. They also attended the Philippines 2nd national PHE conference, where practitioners from nine countries discussed their successes and challenges, as well as their data and their visions.

“Our problems are linked, so our solutions should be too.” Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon

Why are Population and Environment programs so important?

Integrated programs enable people to develop solutions holistically. Poverty, lack of education, high growth rates and natural resource depletion are not isolated problems. PHE programs allow people to meet immediate needs and address those of their children and grandchildren. They promote participation by men, women and adolescents alike. With continued financial and political support the approach shows promise of contributing to the vision of thriving people in a livable world.

What does PHE look like?

The projects in the Philippines and other countries are varied and diverse. You find them in urban slums, coastal fishing communities, rural areas, and tropical forests. Many started as conservation programs that realized the need to address people's immediate needs. Various communities assessed their own economic, social & environmental challenges before the programs were designed.



Local fishers monitor and work with dive operators, combining eco-tourism and a marine reserve.

Some examples of PHE project components:

- “No-fishing zones” to protect coral reefs
- Forest monitors trained as **Peer Educators** on responsible parenthood **Planting** mangroves or upland fruit trees
- Village shops selling daily items as well as **modern contraceptive supplies**.
- River or beach **clean-ups**
- **Trash collection and recycling** programs.
- **Health centers** providing primary and reproductive health care.
- **Alternative livelihoods**: small loans for seaweed farming, eco-tourism operations, making handicrafts
- **Radio Soap Operas** preformed by local actors with plots that include issues people face daily.
- **Managing or restricting hunting** of land and marine wildlife in favor of tourism.
- **Lobbying** for new laws and funding at the national and local government levels.

Does PHE Work?

While definitive answers require more time and study, project staff, community members, scientists, academics and elected leaders offered observations and data about whether integrated programs actually work BETTER than traditional, approaches.

An assessment of 6 Philippines and Madagascar projects by the Packard Foundation found

- Men are more likely to participate in family planning activities and women in natural resource management activities, when both are offered together.

- Adolescents of both genders participated more in all activities in the integrated sites.
- As women became bookkeepers and peer educators, their social status and role in decision making increased.
- Combined programs are cost-effective - saving time and money for both staff and community members.

A comparison study of six Philippines coastal projects by the PATH Foundation found

- A 12-fold increase in access to family planning.
- Fishers' and women's' incomes increased.
- Declines in sexually active teenage boys linked to positive self-image from stewardship role.
- Dynamite fishing ceased and use of sustainable fishing methods (hook-and-line) increased.

“There are many successful examples in very different contexts. PHE programs are ready for prime time.” John Pielemeier, Packard Consultant

Quotes from Community Members

- “(This approach) is more “in tune” with our life style.”
- “Just around the corner we can get family planning products that are low-cost”
- “We have no more land but there are always more people.”
- “People used to think we were doing nonsense. Now they come to us for advice.”

Quick Facts:

- ❖ ***Half the world’s population (3 billion people) lives within 75 miles of a coast. Such density threatens shorelines, estuaries and reefs, some of the most diverse and productive ecosystems on the planet.***
- ❖ ***Human activity has cleared about half of the earth’s original forest cover.***
- ❖ ***More than 1.7 billion women worldwide are between the ages of 15 and 49. Investing in their education, reproductive health, economic opportunity and political rights can spur sustainable development and relieve stress on the Earth’s resources.***
- ❖ ***The U.S. has supported international family planning programs for 40 years. Yet, since 1995, funding has fallen by more than 30% while population has grown by 800 million people.***

Participating Organizations

