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MAKING THE LINK: POPULATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENT

“Rwanda faces great challenges, many of which are related to the complex relationships between population trends, poverty, and environmental conditions.”

Stanislaus Kamanzi,
Minister of Natural
Resources, Rwanda
(2009)

Why PHE Linkages Matter

The connections between population and the environment are complex, contextual, and sometimes controversial. The development of population programs in the 1960s was largely due to concerns about the world's growing population and its possible environmental impacts. Population growth, however, is a product of millions of individual reproductive choices and, fortunately, today's efforts in population and reproductive health focus first on couples' childbearing desires and women's family planning needs.

Nonetheless, the scale and complexity of today's social, economic, and environmental challenges demand another look at population, health, and environment (PHE) relationships and a better understanding of these cross-cutting issues. PRB views PHE relationships as the diverse ways that changes in population and health, including population growth, migration, demographic composition, births, deaths, and disease, influence environmental change and how environmental change affects population and health. In some areas, for example, families experience diminishing farm size, inadequate food security, insufficient fuel for cooking, and limited access to family planning. In other areas, local governments struggle to provide water and sanitation for a growing number of urban households. Environmentalists face the challenge of conserving biodiversity in the context of continued loss of habitat to encroaching farms and other land use by humans. Demographic trends impact local environments, affecting people's health and well-being. Addressing these interlinked PHE issues necessitates integrated approaches that can simultaneously improve access to health services including family planning, improve livelihoods, and sustain the natural resources and biodiversity upon which people depend.

Lessons Learned

For more than a decade, PRB has worked with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to better understand and communicate about PHE. This work has helped broaden support for population and family planning policies and programs among audiences beyond the health sector. Today, a growing network of health, environment, and development groups is working together to integrate delivery of health, livelihood, and environment education and services to underserved communities and to advocate for voluntary family planning as part of a holistic and sustainable approach to community development. PRB's experience has taught us that:

- When environmental, agricultural, and rural development organizations understand how population and health factors relate to their own goals, they can effectively advocate for and integrate the delivery of family planning services into their activities. These organizations can deliver desired services to populations who are beyond the current reach of the health sector and can help advance family planning as a health, development, and environmental priority.
- Global population growth doesn't motivate local action, but support for PHE can be galvanized if decisionmakers have concise, nontechnical information that clearly explains local PHE relationships and frames solutions around meeting community needs while sustaining the environments upon which they depend.
- Champions should be identified, nurtured, and networked. Advocates and practitioners already working in PHE are often unknown to the larger population, reproductive health, and environment communities. Building the capacity of these champions to communicate effectively, share experiences, and strategically identify policy audiences can give them a greater voice.

- Focused PHE events can capture the attention of policymakers and journalists. PHE conferences in the Philippines and Ethiopia have brought a higher profile to PHE links and family planning advocacy and have helped develop the policy-to-practice exchange necessary for policy change.
- PHE groups that unite diverse organizations and PHE champions foster collaboration and sustainability and help maximize resource use. With minimal support, these groups can promote PHE through evidence-based advocacy, materials, events, and study tours.

PRB's Comparative Advantage

PRB's is an internationally recognized leader in understanding and interpreting complex population, health, and environment data and research and communicating that information to nontechnical audiences. PRB's PHE program has been at the forefront of such work in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, bridging the gap between international organizations and field-based PHE efforts and helping advocates and practitioners reach diverse policymakers with their program results, lessons learned, and policy recommendations. PRB has focused on developing long-term partnerships to establish networks, build capacity, and nurture champions; together, these efforts have ensured that PHE knowledge, support, and technical expertise reach the institutions and people with the greatest need.

The BRIDGE (BRinging Information to Decisionmakers for Global Effectiveness) Project, funded from September 2003 through September 2010 by USAID's Bureau for Global Health, contributed to improved health, population, and nutrition policies and programs through effective policy-learning activities. BRIDGE disseminated information on priority health and population issues to policy audiences; worked with news media to enhance the quality and quantity of coverage of key health and population issues; and strengthened the capacity of individuals and institutions to use data and research effectively in disseminating information to policy audiences.

Outstanding Results

Under the BRIDGE project, PRB has created a network of nearly 200 researchers, practitioners, advocates, and policymakers in East Africa to raise awareness about PHE linkages, share experiences, and collaborate on policy and program solutions that expand support for family planning while conserving the environment.

- **Building capacity for PHE champions.** PRB trained more than 50 PHE practitioners from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in policy communication, and we continue to provide technical assistance and support. These PHE champions are now able to more strategically and effectively communicate with diverse policy audiences.
- **Training media to cover PHE issues.** PRB's work with more than 45 journalists from influential news organizations in East Africa, the Philippines, and the Caribbean to increase their knowledge, skills, and interest in reporting on PHE and reproductive health has resulted in more informed coverage of these issues in local media.
- **Establishing networks for sustained action.** PRB organized the first regional conference on "Population, Health, and Environment: Integrated Development for East Africa," in 2007 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Prior to the conference, PRB held workshops on coalition building and improving PHE media coverage. The conference led to the establishment of an East Africa PHE Network and country working groups that are reaching new policy audiences in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda with messages about the importance of an integrated response to PHE, including family planning.



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POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

1875 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 520
Washington, DC 20009 USA

202 483 1100 **PHONE**
202 328 3937 **FAX**
popref@prb.org **E-MAIL**