From 2013-2015, governments, civil society and communities have come together to define the next generation of global development goals—the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within this framework, there is global consensus on the need for integration across sectors, placing sustainability at the core, striving for universal peace, and leaving no one behind. As the Secretary General outlined in the Zero Draft of the Outcome Document for the UN Summit to Adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the SDGs are “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity.”

As we move from global goal setting to national and local implementation, we must look to the global development approach known as Population, Health and Environment (PHE) as a good example of how models of integrated development provide a strong reference point for achieving the SDGs.

The PHE approach improves access to sexual and reproductive health services in hard-to-reach and underserved areas, while empowering communities with the knowledge and tools needed to manage their natural resources in ways that conserve critical ecosystems, contribute to better health outcomes, and expand livelihoods – all key components of the SDGs. PHE programs in remote rural areas demonstrate that integration lowers opportunity costs for beneficiaries compared to stand-alone interventions. Conceptual linkages between human well-being and ecosystem health are better understood when presented in one educational package, alongside related, integrated services. A multi-sectoral approach promotes broad community buy-in, encourages dialogues, deepens understanding and sustains behavior change. Achieving these benefits depends on engaging communities, especially women, in all aspects of program design, implementation, and assessment. It also requires ongoing local coordination and engagement by environmental conservation, health and community development groups, and effective project management.

Today, progress on sustainable development is increasingly being threatened by destructive extraction of natural resources, weak health systems, and the inability of women to participate fully in society. The resulting high rates of disease, maternal and child death, and destruction of natural environments undermine efforts to create healthy and thriving communities. The urgency and interconnectedness of these challenges require integrated solutions such as those provided by the PHE approach.

“Integrated funding streams are a best buy for climate resilience.”
—Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator

The Rockefeller Foundation – Lancet Commission on planetary health concluded that human activity is “jeopardizing Earth’s natural systems and health of future generations.” Calls are growing for different disciplines to work together as part of the SDGs for a more integrated approach to address both human wellbeing and the health of our planet.
How PHE Integrated Programs Contribute to Several Proposed SDGs

**SDG 1** End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- Increase resilience of vulnerable populations to climate change impacts. PHE programs focus on the needs of impoverished and isolated communities that are increasingly being forced to survive on dwindling natural resources. For instance, higher temperatures are severely impacting the productivity of Lake Tanganyika in sub-Saharan Africa, which provides 40% of the protein in lake shore villages. An ongoing PHE project, Tuungane, is addressing the needs of these villages holistically, by addressing health service needs, providing alternative livelihoods and improving farming practices of local fishers.

**SDG 2** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- Improve food security and nutrition in areas where communities are highly dependent on diminishing or degraded natural resources. PHE interventions in settings where dependency on natural resources is high have shown positive results from PHE programs. For example, coastal areas of the Philippines were shown to be more likely to reduce household sole dependency on fishing for income than were single sector coastal resources management interventions.

**SDG 3** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- Increase access to quality health services for populations who previously lacked services or had very poor quality services to promote healthy families, healthy communities and a healthy planet. Women who have the ability to plan their family size are more resilient to climate disruption, more likely to participate in local conservation efforts, and better able to manage resources for their families. PHE programs have, at minimum, the advancement of family planning and reproductive health services, as one of the key objectives.

**SDG 5** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- Advance gender equality through increasing women’s engagement in traditional male spheres and of men’s participation in traditionally female spheres. In Ethiopia, husbands in a PHE project were four times more likely to support use of family planning than husbands in a reproductive health-only program. Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights is fundamental to achieving gender equality.

**SDG 6** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- Improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices. The rural poor are more likely to suffer from poor drinking water and sanitation access than their urban counterparts, and newer generations of PHE projects include WASH interventions. Most PHE projects which have adopted WASH have reported improved WASH behaviors as a result.

**SDG 10** Reduce inequality within and among countries

- Mitigate inequality of access to healthcare and to the knowledge needed to manage natural resources for long-term survival. PHE is effective in serving the multi-dimensional needs of remote, highly marginalized, traditional populations where no other single-sector approach has succeeded. Using PHE programs to reach underserved populations leads to improved access to health care, uptake of services, and increased engagement in natural resources management. Modern PHE approaches are now showing early successes in using these experiences to institutionalize changes at higher levels of governance that will support long term reductions in inequality on these issues.

---


---

What Can You Do?

Key components to include in the creation and implementation of the post-2015 Development Agenda:

- **Accelerate the equitable distribution of life-saving commodities** for women and children’s health to isolated, ecologically fragile and underserved areas of the world;
- **Commit to community-centered and bottom-up problem-solving** through inclusive citizen dialogue and political empowerment that includes women; and
- **Support research** to improve implementation and measure the true impact of integrated programs aimed at sustainable development.
Two decades ago, pioneering and smaller-scale PHE programs sprung up in response to calls to action from groundbreaking UN conferences such as the Rio Summit, the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women. At the turn of the Millennium, a robust community of practitioners and policymakers emerged and expanded the PHE model across the world to share best practices, and patch together various sources of funding to refine the approach. Some donors created dedicated funding streams to support these projects but only for a limited time period. Nonetheless, salient programs have been sustained for decades, and the community of practice continues to grow.

Blue Ventures is a marine conservation organization whose mission is to rebuild tropical fisheries with coastal communities. It recognizes the inextricable links between poor health, unmet family planning needs, food insecurity, environmental degradation and vulnerability to climate change. In response to these interconnected challenges, it has developed a holistic approach integrating reproductive health services with marine conservation and coastal livelihood initiatives. Blue Ventures started incorporating reproductive health services into its fisheries management initiatives in southwest Madagascar in 2007. Since then, it has expanded this program to serve a total of 20,000 people across 50 villages in the Velondriake and Belo sur Mer areas. Exploring the connections between different themes enables Blue Ventures to broaden its reach, for example, getting men talking about family planning and involving women in fisheries management. As a result of this program, the contraceptive prevalence rate in the Velondriake area increased more than fivefold from 10% in 2007 to 55% in 2013. Overall, it is estimated to have averted over 1,125 unintended pregnancies to date among a population of 20,000. Community members report being empowered to plan and better provide for their families; thus improving food security, allowing women to play a more active role in fisheries management, and boosting the sustainability of local conservation efforts.

Pathfinder International is currently implementing the Health of People and Environment-Lake Victoria Basin (HoPE-LVB) project (2011-2017) in partnership with several local environmental and health partners in Uganda and Kenya. HoPE-LVB project sites include parishes on two islands within Lake Victoria in Uganda’s Eastern region, and strategically selected communities in Siaya and Homa Bay Counties in Kenya, reaching about 100,000 people in the first years of the project. HoPE-LVB was designed for scale-up from the start. Project themes include fisheries and land management, wetlands protection, youth engagement, alternative income generation, women’s empowerment, health systems strengthening, and specific activities to promote maternal health and family planning. Early efforts focused heavily on the strengthening of existing community health systems and behavior change communication, as well as advocacy to position the project within the Lake Victoria Basin Commission of the East African Community. The Commission has provided excellent partnership support in disseminating and promoting project results to all Lake Victoria Basin countries and has now adopted PHE as one of its key approaches to promoting sustainable development in LVB. In the first three years of the project, almost 500 households modeling exemplary behaviors for PHE integration were recruited as “PHE model households” and conducting peer-to-peer education on sustainable natural resource management as well as timely health-seeking behaviors for pregnant women and newborns. Learn more about the HoPE-LVB project at www.pathfinder.org/HOPE
Building Resilient Communities: the PHE Way

The diagram below, developed by Pathfinder International and DSW, shows how the PHE approach works to achieve outcomes. The SDG era demands inter-disciplinary, practical, locally relevant and long-lasting solutions. PHE strategies parallel the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goal agenda, emphasizing integration, human rights, climate change adaptation, women’s and youth empowerment, and sustainable livelihoods. Stepping out of sectoral comfort zones and forming cross-sectoral partnerships, even beyond national borders, would reap great benefits for human, ecosystem and planetary well-being.

NOTES:
The infographic can be downloaded at http://www.pathfinder.org/our-work/topics/population-health-and-environment-phe.html