The Population-Health-Environment (PHE) approach to community development links interventions in voluntary family planning and reproductive health services with efforts to conserve biodiversity, manage natural resources, and develop sustainable livelihoods.

PHE is a means of extending services beyond existing health care and development assistance systems because PHE projects often work in extremely remote communities. Over the last decade, interest in the integrated PHE approach has spread across many sub-Saharan African countries, expanding its use. At the same time, greater emphasis in the development community on sustainability and multisectoral approaches has garnered increased attention to the promise of PHE. Today, the number of organizations implementing PHE projects is increasing, the share of donors supporting PHE is rising, and interest in this approach is growing among decisionmakers at local, national, and regional levels.

Activities
Over the last five years, the Population Reference Bureau's IDEA Project has been a leader in expanding support for the PHE approach in sub-Saharan Africa. IDEA has convened implementers and champions to share best practices and lessons learned, helped them raise the profile of PHE with established and potential new donors, and built individual and institutional capacity through skills training, technical assistance, and partnerships to produce informative and innovative print and multimedia materials.

IDEA has trained PHE champions, implementers, and members of the media to communicate effectively to decisionmakers about complex population-health-environment links and solutions, and supported these groups to expand the base of support for population and reproductive health policies outside of the health sector. By doing so, IDEA has been instrumental in bridging the gaps between projects, country PHE networks, and policymakers.

In addition, IDEA has produced policy briefs and multimedia materials on the connections among population, family planning, and other development sectors—such as climate change and food security—to build support for population and family planning among a multisectoral audience. IDEA materials have reached decisionmakers around the globe, reinvigorating conversations about family planning and its benefits to the environment.

Through IDEA, the PHE community of practice has grown larger and stronger, reaching more decisionmakers with more messages through more channels than individual champions working alone. By expanding the PHE community through monthly e-updates for the Africa PHE network, periodic PHE meetings and conferences, and advocacy support to country PHE networks and regional initiatives, IDEA has been at the forefront of PHE expansion in sub-Saharan Africa.

Results
IDEA conference raises profile of the PHE approach and forges new partnerships. IDEA convened more than 150 PHE implementers, advocates, and donors at the 2013 International Population, Health, and Environment Conference to learn from each other and discuss future directions for the integrated PHE approach. The conference also engaged nontraditional audiences—including maternal health and family planning advocates—to examine the relevance of the PHE approach to their work in other development sectors. Opening remarks from Ethiopia’s minister of environment and forestry emphasized the importance of family planning and integrated approaches for achieving Ethiopia’s environment and development goals.

About the IDEA Project
With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, IDEA—Informing Decisionmakers to Act—increases support among policy audiences for effective health and population programs around the world. By increasing the flow of accurate, understandable information about population, family planning, and reproductive health to policy audiences, IDEA enhances efforts carried out by civil society, the public sector, the development community, and donors. IDEA develops materials on priority issues in cutting-edge formats; trains and supports media to influence policy change; builds the communications capacity of institutions, researchers, and advocates; and nurtures communities of policy champions.
The conference, supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the USAID East Africa Regional Office, forged new partnerships and raised the profile of the PHE approach within the larger development community.

Multimedia presentation energizes new support for PHE integration. “Population, Health and Environment Working Together,” a multimedia ENGAGE presentation developed by IDEA, explains how the PHE approach works to improve health, livelihoods, food security, and natural resources worldwide. The presentation has been viewed by donors, decisionmakers, and policymakers at national and subnational levels, and is used by organizations like the United Nations Foundation and Sierra Club as part of trainings for population-environment grantees and advocates. This ENGAGE presentation has introduced new audiences to PHE and generated financial support from new donors for PHE projects.

IDEA provides significant technical support to Lake Victoria PHE projects. IDEA was a key technical resource in forming an innovative partnership to integrate family planning and maternal health service delivery with sustainable natural resource management in the Lake Victoria Basin. USAID and multiple foundations jointly fund the Health of People and the Environment in the Lake Victoria Basin (HoPE-LVB) project, developed by Pathfinder International and partners. IDEA worked closely with HoPE-LVB project staff to meet with district and national officials, community groups, and the media, building stakeholder support at multiple levels; strengthened the capacity of personnel who communicate externally about the project; and helped produce materials such as fact sheets and presentations used in many of those communications. Finally, IDEA also provided data-collection assistance, enabling HoPE-LVB staff to communicate valuable midterm results to policymakers and donors and build solid community support for the project.

In 2012, authorities in Uganda’s Wakiso District worked with HoPE-LVB to address environment and population challenges, specifically drafting laws to curb forest degradation. The following year, a presentation by the project director to the Kenyan ministries of Health, Environment, Water Resources, Planning, and East Africa Community Affairs resulted in the formation of a Regional Policy Steering Committee on PHE by the Lake Victoria Basin Commission, the organization representing Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi that manages Lake Victoria.

IDEA supports PHE Ethiopia Consortium as a national PHE champion. With support from IDEA, the PHE Ethiopia Consortium has played a critical role in raising the profile of the PHE approach among policymakers within Ethiopia and internationally. IDEA supports the Consortium to directly engage with high-level policymakers through one-on-one meetings, PHE project site visits, and periodic policy dialogues. These engagements have led to the expansion of the PHE approach in Ethiopia and requests by policymakers for PHE Ethiopia’s multisectoral policy work. Today, the PHE Ethiopia Consortium is seen as a national and regional leader and an example of the success country networks can accomplish in raising the profile of the PHE approach among key audiences.

Lessons Learned and Looking Forward

Concise, nontechnical information empowers leaders and decisionmakers beyond the health community with a better understanding of the connections among population, health, the environment, and development and builds a broad multisectoral base of support for family planning.

Periodic policy dialogue that brings together policymakers, champions, researchers, and implementers mobilizes support for increased investments in integrated PHE approaches and can result in scaling up the approach.

Efforts to connect PHE implementers with regional and national PHE networks and global advocates are creating a global PHE policy community with a stronger collective and coordinated voice that can influence national development plans and the international development agenda.

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