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Lessons From the First Generation of Integrated Population, Health, and Environment Projects

By John Pielemeier

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How can isolated fishing communities reverse the double-edged sword of declining fisheries and growing families? And how can upland farmers better feed their families without destroying forest cover and increasing erosion?

An assessment that I led for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) found that an integrated approach to these issues—one that simultaneously addresses conservation, family planning, and health needs—is providing successful models for action from the Philippines to Madagascar.[1]

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A Push Forward, Then a Setback

The early years of the new millennium were good ones for population-environment (PE) and population-health-environment (PHE) initiatives, led by the creation in 2000 of the Packard Foundation's Population-Environment Initiative and by the initiation in 2002 of USAID's Population-Health-Environment Program.[2]

Both initiatives allocated money for family planning and reproductive health programs in areas where population growth threatened biodiversity or endangered species. Both programs funded community-based field projects that designed integrated methodologies to simultaneously achieve goals in different sectors. These programs built upon the experiences of a modest number of PE field projects that had been funded in the late 1980s by the Summit, Hewlett, MacArthur, and Turner foundations.

The Packard and USAID programs gave PE a timely push forward in countries such as the Philippines and Madagascar, supporting enough new pilot projects to allow us to judge whether this integrated approach could be successful in a variety of ecosystems and in different regions of the world. By 2003, 11 field projects were underway from Asia to Africa to Latin America, providing PE services in approximately 45 communities.

But the stock market downturn of 2000-2003 intervened. The major reduction in investment resources led several foundations, including Packard, to reduce or eliminate funding for PE activities.

While USAID has continued funding PHE programs, the gradual reduction and eventual termination of Packard's PE Initiative in 2005 meant that the overall worldwide level of PE funding in 2005 was substantially lower than in 2000. Many promising programs are in danger of shutting down, and there are almost no new resources available to expand PE/PHE programs.

According to both the results of complex operational research and the views of NGO practitioners, integrated PE and PHE programs added substantial value over sites with either just population or just environment activities.

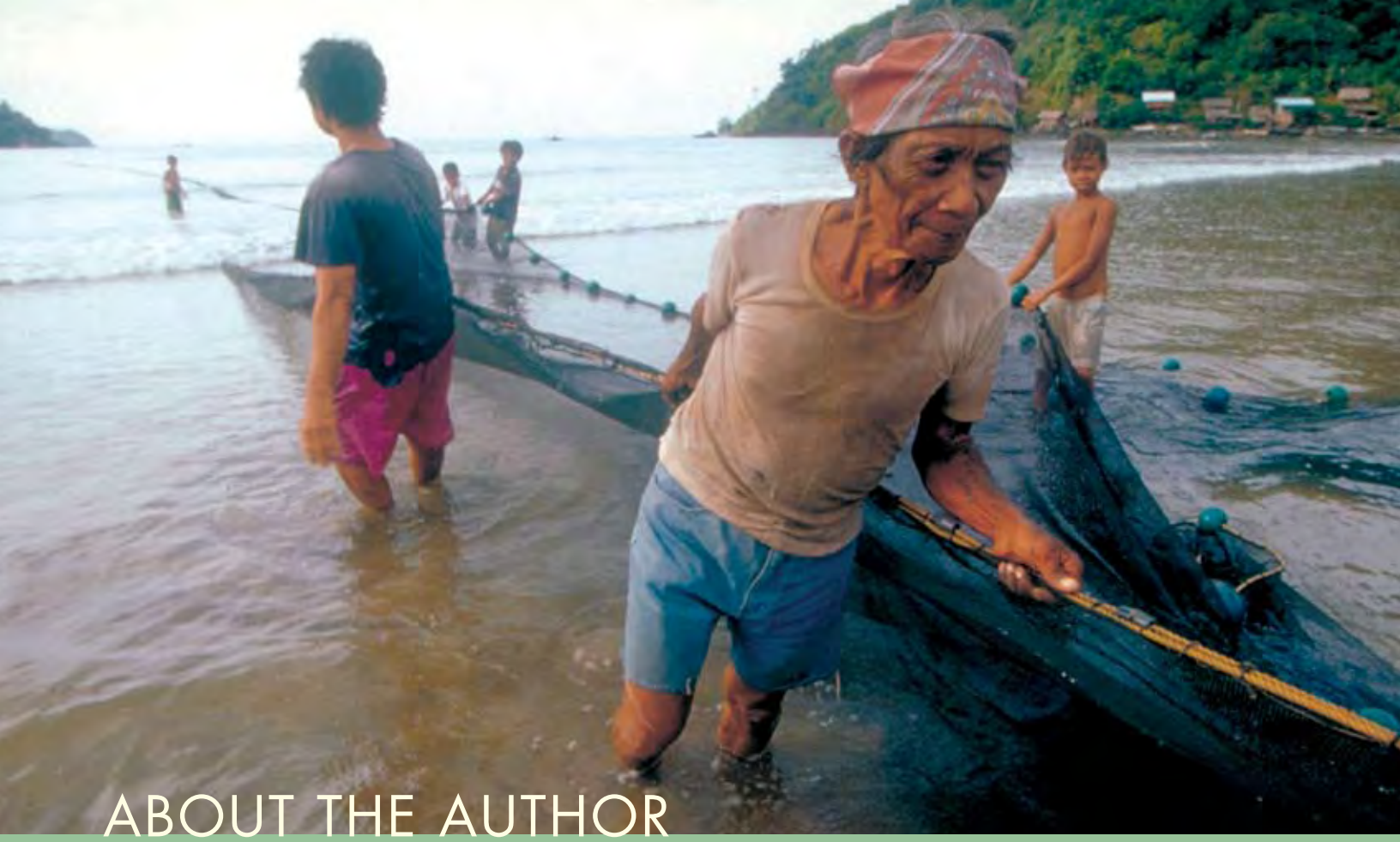
USAID and Packard Assessments

In 2005, the Packard Foundation's board of directors called for a program assessment of its $16.5 million PE Initiative to determine what it had accomplished. The initiative supported field projects in the Philippines, southern Mexico, Tanzania, and Madagascar that integrated conservation and family planning at the community level within areas of high biodiversity. Through separate grants, the Packard Foundation program had also supported efforts to develop PE leadership, increase advocacy for PE, and improve awareness of PE linkages.

USAID, which had co-funded some of the Packard projects and separately funded others, asked that the assessment include its projects in the Philippines and Madagascar. USAID also concentrated its PHE projects on biodiversity hotspots—often in national parks and protected areas—focusing on the communities that live in and around them. These field projects were commonly located in regions where population, health, and conservation indicators were worse than national or even provincial averages.

This assessment examined 11 field projects and 45 field sites, evaluating the "first generation" of PE and PHE field projects. In addition to the traditional program evaluation topics—whether the program funds were used well and the projects successful and sustainable—we also tried to answer the major underlying questions raised by critics of PE/PHE programs:

- Do integrated PE/PHE projects have better results than "stand-alone" population and "stand-alone" environment projects?
- Is there really any value added by using a two- or three-sector integrated approach?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Pielemeier is an international development consultant. During his 22-year career at USAID, he served in many positions, including USAID mission director in Brazil, USAID/Washington office director for South Asia, and as a special assistant in the office of the USAID Administrator. As an independent consultant, he has worked for USAID, the Global Environmental Facility, and the United Nations, among others. He has led teams evaluating programs that include World Wildlife Fund's Latin American program; UN capacity-building activities in Brazil's environmental sector; global USAID-funded child health, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis programs; and environmental trust funds in Indonesia, Jamaica, Brazil, and the Philippines.

Fish have always been a mainstay of the Philippine diet, but human population growth has resulted in an over-harvesting of fish, and the supply of fish has dropped dramatically; Visayas region of central Philippines. © Liz Gilbert/David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Courtesy of Photoshare

A health worker discusses breastfeeding with a mother in Madagascar. © Lisa Folda, Courtesy of Photoshare

Projects Were Inexpensive and Met Most Objectives Within 36 Months

This assessment found that almost all of the integrated projects met most or all of their anticipated objectives within 9-36 months. The projects were also inexpensive, costing between $5 and $9 per beneficiary per year. And operational research showed that integrated projects also produced reproductive health and environmental outcomes superior to those of single-sector interventions.

Through the assessment, we learned a great deal about the details of PE projects, how they are best planned and best managed, and where they are most appropriate. We found that the integrated approach appeals strongly to clients, who do not compartmentalize their lives in single sectors; to local political leaders; and to implementing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Other major conclusions included:

- Inexpensive community mobilization techniques can mobilize rural communities and provide significant program results within 1-2 years. For example, the Champion Community approach in Madagascar, which is based on locally defined needs and encourages competition among communities, mobilized strong community participation in 10 sites to achieve clearly defined, multisectoral targets within a one-year period.[3]

- Health- and environment-based NGOs can adapt to successfully implement two-sector (PE) or three-sector (PE plus health) community initiatives. In Madagascar, the Madagascar Green Healthy Communities program worked primarily through health NGOs that learned to provide environmental services.[4] In the Philippines, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc. worked primarily through environmental NGOs that learned to provide family planning and health services.[5]

- The model used for program integration (whether one NGO does both population and environment with the same staff or with different staff members, or two NGOs work in a coordinated fashion) is less important to project success than a series of other factors—experience, leadership, acceptance of the PE concept, and acceptability within the community.

Satisfying the Skeptics?

According to both the results of complex operational research—which compared integrated program sites to single-sector sites—and the views of NGO practitioners, integrated PE and PHE programs added substantial value over sites with either just population or just environment activities. The assessment identified additional value in three areas: family planning and health; coastal resource management (CRM) and natural resource management (NRM) efforts; and program cost-savings and efficiencies.

- Integrated projects bring several major advantages to family planning efforts: greater access to men, greater access to adolescent boys, and

positive changes in the community's perception of women (as well as women's self-perception) when they can access and control money and credit.

- Family planning efforts also benefit when packaged with the quickly perceived effects of health interventions, such as immunization and improved water quality.

- PE projects add value to environment/conservation efforts by increasing female involvement in CRM and NRM activities and organizations; increasing participation by adolescents of both sexes; and providing an entry point for integrated projects to quickly and visibly respond to the community's priorities (often in health) and gradually gain its trust.

- The inclusion of a microcredit component as part of PE programs appears to encourage even stronger community involvement in CRM and NRM activities and may increase these initiatives' impact.

- In programmatic terms, PE projects are typically both cost-efficient and cost-effective. A large number of NGOs have demonstrated that they can successfully implement integrated programs while expanding target audiences, reducing operating expenses, and fostering community goodwill and trust.

Future Directions for Integrated Initiatives

The projects reviewed by the assessment have demonstrated that field-based practitioners and political leaders, based on their personal experiences, typically become strong advocates for the integrated PE approach. However, most donors and national governments are not familiar with the positive results of PE programs and, even if they are, often find traditional sector-specific programming to be more bureaucratically convenient than integrated programs.

If integrated PE programming is to thrive rather than wither after its trial period, two key actions are required: aggressive advocacy and dissemination campaigns that highlight the successes of PE projects, and successful implementation of a "scaled-up" PE program that can affect the lives of a much larger target audience while becoming financially self-sustaining.

The Philippines offers the best venue for scaling up. The Population Reference Bureau's work to expand the application of PHE tools, as well as to increase Filipino program managers and policymakers' knowledge and understanding of PE dynamics, has an important role to play in efforts to scale up.

The lessons learned from the Packard and USAID PE programs in the Philippines and Madagascar provide insights and guidance for expanding programs in those countries, as well as for new PE programs in other countries.

There are a number of opportunities for continuing the evolution of PE programs:

- **The government decentralization underway in many developing countries may provide the opportunity to break through the reluctance of donors and central governments to support integrated programs.** Block grants are increasingly being provided by national governments and donors to decentralized government units. These "program" funds typically support the unit's development plan, which could be designed on an

Condoms are distributed at a Rwandan refugee camp in Tanzania. © Population Services International, Courtesy of Photoshare

integrated rather than a sectoral basis with support from community advocates and local NGOs.

- **Biodiversity hotspots and protected-area buffer zones are not the only areas where PE may be appropriate.** In the Philippines, PE proponents are experimenting with using PE as a framework for disaster mitigation projects and urban-slum health and sanitation efforts.

- **A wide variety of PE-type integrated programs will need to be tailored to the particular needs of local populations.** For example, HIV/AIDS has been added to some PE programs in South Africa. In upland Madagascar, improved water supply for agriculture and hygiene has been a key factor in attracting communities to participate in PE projects. The concept of integrated programs, including the key elements of family planning and natural resource management, should be viewed as a concept that will evolve into different forms in differing settings.

Overall, the results of the first generation of PE field projects strongly suggest that an integrated approach to community environment and population/health issues can provide successful outcome, even in remote areas, in a relatively short period of time, and at low cost.

And despite the difficulties of breaking away from "stovepipe" funding and the institutional aversion to integrated projects, donors and host governments alike should take a closer look at the many advantages and synergies provided by integrated PE projects. They might well agree with the assessment's conclusions that the time is ripe for scaling up these successful models to meet the livelihood and food-security needs of low-income populations. •

PRB

POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

This article first appeared on the Population Reference Bureau's website, www.prb.org. PRB's PHE Program works to improve people's lives around the world by helping program managers and decision-makers understand and address the consequences of population and environment interactions. For more information on the PHE program, please contact Roger-Mark De Souza at rdesouza@prb.org.

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Notes

1. Pielemeier, John. (2005, August). "Review of population-health-environment programs supported by the Packard Foundation and USAID." Available online at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/Pielemeier%20USAID%20Report1.doc

2. See USAID's website for more information on the Office of Population and Reproductive Health's population and environment work: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/pop/techareas/environment/index.html

3. For an overview of the Champion Community Initiative, see Seidel, Renata. (2006). *The Champion Community Initiative: Origins, principles, and potential.* Washington, DC: AED, Inc. Available online at http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/COMMChamp_1011-2.pdf

4. For more information on the Madagascar Green Healthy Communities program, see http://www.jsi.com/JSIInternet/Projects/ListProjects.cfm?dblProjectID=1658&Select=One

5. For more information on PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.'s program, see http://www.pfpi.org/ipopcorm.php

A health worker counsels a woman on reproductive health and family planning in the Visayas region of central Philippines. © Liz Gilbert/David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Courtesy of Photoshare

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Village children in Madagascar perform a song and dance to help raise money for their local health clinic. © Lisa Folda, Courtesy of Photoshare

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