

[BALANCED]

Promoting & advancing integrated population, health, and environment approaches

BALANCED PHE Champion



Credit: PFPi

Children gather on the shore in Cuaming, where PHE programs are promoting pro-environment and pro-health practices

PHE CHAMPIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES:

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Marine Ecosystems and Improved Livelihoods

This document highlights seven men and women who are committed to promoting Population, Health and Environment (PHE) approaches in their

communities in order to improve human well-being in the Philippines. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-supported Building Actors and Leaders for Advancing Community Excellence in Development (BALANCED) Project encourages the adoption and promotion of PHE approaches in communities located in areas of high biodiversity that are threatened by population pressures.

The BALANCED Project highlights men and women who are PHE champions and advocates for integrated

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Credit: PFPI

A crowded coastal village in the Philippines



Credit: WWF/PHE

A woman and child collect fish

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health, development and conservation approaches that seek to improve access to family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH), improve natural resource management (NRM) and improve community health and well-being in two bioregions in the Philippines.

Since 2010, USAID/Philippines has supported the BALANCED-Philippines Project, which works in two geographic areas: the Danajon Bank (DB) Marine Bioregion in Bohol and the Verde Island Passage (VIP) Marine Biodiversity Conservation Corridor. These are key marine biodiversity areas that are priority areas for conservation.

The goal of BALANCED-Philippines is to build the leadership and implementation capacities of national and local governments and stakeholders to respond in an integrated manner to interrelated population, health and marine environmental issues.

Toward this end, the University of Rhode Island (URI) Coastal Resources Center (CRC), PATH Foundation



Population, health and environment linkages

Philippines Inc. (PFPI) and Conservation International Philippines (CIP) have worked closely to implement integrated health and conservation activities in the Philippines as part of the BALANCED-Philippines initiative. The stories that follow showcase PHE champions that played a key role in the BALANCED-Philippines Project activities.

MICHAEL DENNIS MENDOZA, ADULT PEER EDUCATOR

GILBERT BULAN, BANTAY DAGAT MEMBER

Working Across Health and Conservation Sectors in the VIP



Credit: PFPI

Bantay Dagat on patrol in a MPA

In the Philippines, sea patrols — or Bantay Dagat (BDs) — are volunteer community members, usually fishermen, who serve a very important purpose in overseeing all municipal waters and marine protected areas (MPA). Having a BD provide rights-based voluntary FP information and services to people in coastal areas would have been unthinkable three years ago. Today, with the implementation of the BALANCED-Philippines Project in the Lubang Island in the Occidental Mindoro Province located in the VIP bioregion, people seek out the BDs not only for advice on marine conservation and fisheries management, but also on family planning.

Lubang Island (population 43,108) is composed of two municipalities — Lubang and Looc. These municipalities share the same culture and traditions, as well as the common vision of a healthy and prosperous island. Because of this, CIP and PFPI are promoting marine conservation and fisheries management in collaboration with FP and RH activities in the twin municipalities referred to as the Lubang Island Group.

The BALANCED-Philippines Project began working on the island in July 2010. Upon the recommendation of Fishery Officer Michael Dennis Mendoza, also a master trainer for the BALANCED-Philippines Project, the Lubang Island's adult peer educators (PE) and community-based distributors (CBD) were joined by three BDs during the project orientation. In Michael's words, "I saw that a lot of fishermen have many children, and if only they would practice family planning, they would potentially have smaller families. By having smaller families, they perhaps would put less pressure on fishing resources and meet their daily food needs. In this way, they

could have healthier families and ensure a better life. When the weather is bad, such as during the rainy season, you can see that they have a hard time putting food on the table. With the participation of the BD members in the orientation (and in the Project), they could serve as project leaders in their respective areas."

Gilbert Bulan, a BD member, was at first skeptical about attending the orientation. He could not see the connection between population and health and the environment and how this relates to his job. After his participation in PHE training sessions, however, Gilbert learned about the importance of individual action and how one person acting as a PE can make a significant difference in his community. Gilbert is now one of the staunchest supporters of the integrated PHE approach.

The BDs and adult PEs worked together to integrate PHE messages into the municipality's management plans and extend coverage of the PHE approach throughout Lubang. Michael, as the LGU coordinator for the Lubang BDs, also formally declared that henceforth the adult PEs would not only provide health information and FP services, but would also help implement the coastal resources and fisheries management plans of the municipality of Lubang. Likewise, the BDs will include issues of family planning and health in their work as marine conservationists. Gilbert and Michael agree that family planning plays a big part in the lives of people in their coastal communities. An adult PE, serving as a BD, can help disseminate PHE messages, especially to other men/fisher folks.

CECELIA B. ZULUETA

Preparing the Youth as Future Stewards of PHE

“Pagkatapos kong makadalo sa PFPI Bohol study tour... naging bahagi na ng aking gawain sa Munisipalidad ng Baco ang PHE approach.” (After attending the PFPI Bohol study tour, PHE has become part of my activities in Baco.) – Cecilia B. Zulueta

Cecilia B. Zulueta, the current Administrator of Baco Technical Vocational School (BTVS) in Oriental Mindoro, participated in a PFPI-led study tour to Bohol in May 2008. Oriental Mindoro is an island in the VIP, one of the Philippines’ key marine biodiversity areas and a priority for conservation. A significant portion of the population is under the age of 25, so reaching youth with messages about protecting the environment and their health is critical in this highly threatened ecosystem.

The study tour was designed to enable participants from other project sites to meet, interact with and learn from the local government units (LGUs), the PEs, the CBDs and the community members about how the integrated PHE approach is being implemented in the province.

During the study tour, Cecilia had an epiphany regarding the significance of the integrated PHE approach. She saw the crucial value in working with youth. Today, she is one of Baco’s staunchest advocates of PHE. She is promoting the PHE approach in her school. Her years as an outstanding Municipal Planning and Development Officer (MPDO) have certainly helped prepare her for the new advocacy role. As an MPDO, she established a POPSHOP, which sells FP commodities and is managed by the LGU in Baco. She even mobilized her own resources to allocate funds for this enterprise.

Cecilia and the BTVS teachers have adopted the BALANCED-Philippines Project training modules on how to train youth — those still attending and those out of school — on PHE. The out-of-school youth in Baco comprise up to 47 percent of the population ages 13-16 years old. In June 2012, casting an even wider net in order to reach more of her target population, Cecilia established Bantay Kalusugan ng Kabataan at Kalikasan, (Youth Health and Environment Watch) or BK3. With support from the BALANCED-Philippines Project, members of this group helped Cecilia disseminate PHE messages about spacing births for healthier families, using marine resources sustainably and protecting the VIP environment for future generations.



Credit: PFPI

A youth peer educator workshop

The youth meet regularly on the BTVS premises with the adult PEs as their mentors. Under this program, students are trained in mangrove planting, vegetable/herbal medicine gardening, theatre arts and leadership skills. BK3 provides the out-of-school youth with five months of schooling and income-generating projects, such as rug-making.

At present, there are 25 members of the BK3. Building on Cecilia’s success with the BK3 group, the BALANCED-Philippines Project helped organize similar youth groups with the same functions as those of BK3 members in various barangays in Baco — Pulantubig, Alag and Puerto Galera — and in Lumambayan in nearby Barangay San Teodoro.

Cecilia has endured hardships in soliciting continuing support from private individuals and institutions so she can keep the BK3 multi-purpose livelihoods center open. Yet, she remains undeterred. She even envisions the center serving as a pasalubong center (souvenir shop), where the youth can sell their products and earn money while promoting PHE. Cecilia says all her efforts involving PHE are for the benefit of the youth. “They are the future stewards of the population, health and environment.”

BELARMINA “BELLY” ANZALDO

Promoting PHE as a Way of Life in the Municipality of Calatagan, Batangas Province

At 52, Belarmina “Belly” Anzaldo is a barangay health worker (BHW) who has spent most of her life helping families to lead healthy lives. She lives in Calatagan municipality, Batangas province in the VIP. “We all have a purpose in life. Mine is helping people take better care of their health so they can enjoy life and live it fully,” she mused.

Belly works with the BALANCED-Philippines Project, which addresses the interlinked issues of population, health and the environment in 13 VIP municipalities including in Calatagan (population 53,386). The Project has been implementing coastal resources management (CRM) activities since early 2011. Belly serves as a PHE resource person and the leader of a cadre of 26 PEs. In collaboration with local community members and LGU officials, she has fostered a vibrant network of PEs to introduce family planning and to promote sustainable environmental behaviors. Today, every barangay in Calatagan has an active PE.

A key component of the PHE approach is providing access to voluntary FP services and commodities through CBDs. Again, Belly, with her community-wide network as a BHW president, helped with identifying individuals to be trained as CBDs and with providing the actual training. As a pill user for the last 15 years, she is obviously an avid proponent of birth spacing and access to FP methods. “Smaller families seem to have lesser problems,” she said.

Belly also became convinced that environmental conservation is critical for healthy families, having witnessed the degradation of once bountiful natural resources in their communities. She saw how a steadily growing population and people’s careless actions took a toll on the natural surroundings. As a fisher folk, she personally experienced/witnessed how people resorted to destructive fishing methods to meet the basic needs of their families. Fortunately, Calatagan has been recognized as one of the VIP municipalities with local policies and programs on environmental conservation.

Their MPAs have been awarded as one of the best managed MPAs during the first provincial awards in 2013, while their BD team has been identified as one of the strongest teams in the province. Calatagan was also among the MPA finalists for this year’s national MPA awards. Belly believes that improving access to FP/RH programs complements the strong



Credit: PFPI

A peer educator communicates with a client

environmental governance of the LGU. Belly advocates that “If couples practice family planning, they are also securing a healthy environment.”

Together with rural health unit (RHU) and community leaders, Belly currently assists in the oversight of 26 adult PEs and 25 CBDs who together have so far reached 2,572 people with FP/RH counseling. She reports her accomplishments to the RHU.

Meanwhile, Belly says with conviction: “People and communities should be aware of PHE. It should reflect their actions, their decisions in life until, hopefully, it becomes a way of life.”



Credit: PFI

A midwife mentors a community-based distributor

MAYOR RONALD G. TIROL, BUENAVISTA, BOHOL

Increasing Access to Family Planning in Bohol

Not long ago, only modern natural FP methods were available in the predominantly Catholic municipality of Buenavista (population 27,031) in Bohol province. It took a young and open-minded local chief executive, Mayor Ronald Lowell G. Tirol, to see the wisdom in promoting and making accessible to couples ALL modern FP methods and trusting that families could decide for themselves which FP method is best.

Working with the BALANCED-Philippines Project, Mayor Tirol came to see the integrated PHE approach as a means to address the issues of malnutrition, rapid population growth and illegal fishing in his municipality. It became clear to him that large family size affects the nutrition of the family members, especially in this area where 46 percent of the population relies on fishing as their main source of livelihood.

The more he pondered these issues, the more he was convinced that adopting the integrated PHE approach in Buenavista would help improve the quality of both people's lives and the area's marine resources.

Mayor Tirol noted that while his LGU regularly allotted a budget for family planning, the population growth rate continued to rise. He then found out that the annual budget of P100,000 allotted was designated solely for modern natural FP methods. The other modern methods were excluded from the budget,

according to the members of the Sangguniang Bayan (SB). With deft negotiation and dialogue with SB members, Mayor Tirol was able to convince them to support the BALANCED-Philippines Project starting in March 2012. As a result, the SB allotted P30,000 as the LGU counterpart for the purchase of FP commodities, specifically pills and condoms, to support the CBD system in the municipality as part of the RH component of the PHE intervention. The CBD system helps to ensure that the sale of pills and condoms to those who needed them would be readily available.

At the same time as the FP initiative, Mayor Tirol gave increased attention to the threats to the marine ecosystems in Buenavista, one of the priority marine biodiversity areas in the Philippines. Fish abundance is low in the area, and fisher folk face many challenges to feeding their families, in light of illegal and destructive fishing practices, sedimentation, increasing erosions and loss of fish habitats. Mayor Tirol worked with local authorities to implement alternative livelihood activities concentrated in MPA areas including seaweed farming and seaweed processing. He also spearheaded efforts to strengthen enforcement by the BD. Many of the community members participated in both the FP and conservation activities of the BALANCED-Philippines Project and see the value in addressing multisectoral issues with a common message of promoting both healthy families and healthy marine ecosystems.

ROGELIO ANGCO, BARANGAY CAPTAIN OF CUAMING

Addressing Population Growth in a Remote Community in Bohol

The island barangay of Cuaming in the municipality of Inabanga in Bohol province is approximately nine nautical miles and an hour-and-a half boat trip from the mainland. Visitors to this remote, geographically isolated and depressed area will immediately notice the large number of young children milling around on shore. Average family size in this island barangay (population 3,092) is seven, with an average of five children per household (total 580). However, married women express the desire to postpone their first birth and space their pregnancies.

Rogelio Angco, barangay captain of Cuaming, admits that with a land area of only five hectares, Cuaming risks becoming overcrowded in just a few years. At the same time, marine resources will be depleted, since 90 percent of the population relies mainly on fishing for livelihoods and sustenance.

Rogelio explains, “With less fish to catch, people resort to harmful practices, which lead to depletion of marine resources. This affects their livelihoods and leads to reduced income and less food on the table. People then are hungry, have lower body resistance, and then they can become ill or even die.”

This is the lesson that Rogelio is teaching people in the barangay with help from the BALANCED-Philippines Project. After participating in awareness-raising sessions on the integrated PHE approach in 2011, Rogelio and his team worked with the local People’s Organization of Cuaming to educate people on their role in caring for the island’s marine resources and how their stewardship is linked to their own health and well-being.

Today, the MPA in Cuaming has grown from 24 hectares to 74 hectares. Meanwhile, population growth is being addressed by PEs who provide counseling on voluntary family planning/ reproductive health to couples who want to limit the number of children or to better space their births.

The PEs refer first-time FP acceptors to RHUs for assessment. Current users who opt for the pill or condoms as their FP method of choice are referred to CBDs. The BALANCED-Philippines Project’s CBD system has made FP commodities more accessible and affordable to couples in the area.



Credit: PFPI

Typical large family gathers for a meal in Cuaming

Cuaming now has three CBDs and two PEs. In addition, a multi-sectoral MPA management body has adopted the integrated PHE approach, and an MPA management plan is in place. Perhaps most encouraging is the increased number of FP acceptors in Cuaming — rising from 213 in 2011 to 264 in 2012.

With people in Cuaming more aware of the PHE linkages, Rogelio believes they will be more vigilant in managing the environment and their health needs. “It is for their own good, and that of their children, and the generations to come,” says Rogelio.

CHIEFTAIN TONY MARIANO

Earning Support of Indigenous Peoples for Modern Family Planning

By tradition, the Indigenous Peoples (IP) of Mangyans marry young. As early as age 12, daughters are married off to a man of their parents' choice. At a young age, they usually know very little about family planning, so it is not uncommon to see Mangyan women pregnant every year, thus contributing to the high population growth rate among this IP group.

A majority of the Mangyans live in a small barangay called Tibag (population 402) in the municipality of Abra de Ilog in Occidental Mindoro Province. Health and environment practices here are slowly changing. This is thanks mainly to the efforts of their chieftain, Tony Mariano, an adult PE working with the BALANCED-Philippines Project.

Tony became a PE after attending the BALANCED-Philippines Project orientation and PE training, which taught him about the importance of planning a family and the care of natural resources. He found the training particularly relevant because he knew that IPs usually have many children, and that with high population growth comes degradation of natural resources.

Tony introduced family planning to the Mangyans in 2011. He held meetings with members of his tribal group and explained how closely spaced childbirths can affect the health of mother and child and how a large population can contribute to environmental degradation.

Today, members of his tribal group frequently approach Tony for advice on family planning. Armed with FP training, he readily and happily obliges. When he does not know the answer to a question, he consults the health center staff so he can respond properly. More people from his group are now using modern FP methods.

The positive results of Tony's efforts did not come without challenges. Initially, the Mangyans were afraid to use the pill and the condom because of perceived side effects. But, with much perseverance and patience, Tony has slowly won the trust and faith of the Mangyans in Tibag about the safety and effectiveness of modern contraceptives. Current FP acceptors in Tibag, based on records of the rural health midwife, have increased from five in 2011 to 19 in 2012.

For the indigenous peoples like the Mangyans, protecting their ancestral lands and resources means survival of their people



Credit: PFPI

A Mangyan family has a consultation at the RHU

and their culture. Mangyans have always believed that they are the stewards of their natural resources and thus they have taken an active role in protecting their land and rights for the future of their community. Through PHE approaches, their secured environment is matched with healthy mothers and children.

Tony says: “Masaya ako sa naging bunga ng aking ginawa, halos lahat na ng aking nasasakupan ay gumagamit ng mga kontraseptives nang may ngiti sa mga labi. Hindi ako nagsayang ng mga laway at panahon sa pakikipagtalastasan at pangungumbinsi sa kanila dahil nagbunga ang lahat ng ito.” (“I am happy that my efforts have paid off. Almost all that I have talked to are now using modern family planning methods — with a smile on their faces. Time spent with them has certainly not been wasted.”)