

# POPULATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENT VOICES

How Communities in the Philippines Are  
Securing a Future for the Next Generation



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## ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

Our world is interconnected. These photos and stories describe an approach known as Population, Health, and Environment (PHE), which focuses on the relationship between human health and environmental health. PHE programs improve primary health care services, particularly family planning and reproductive health, while also helping communities conserve biodiversity, manage natural resources, and develop sustainable livelihoods. When these issues are addressed together, communities thrive.

This collection highlights the experiences of PHE Network members in the Philippines, showcasing communities that have embraced and benefited from PHE programs. The stories and photos are drawn from the collection of Family Planning Voices ([www.fpvoices.org](http://www.fpvoices.org)), a global storytelling initiative led by the Knowledge for Health (K4Health) Project and Family Planning 2020 and supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Special thanks to Amy Lee and Anne Kott for authoring the booklet; Sarah V. Harlan and Elizabeth Futrell for reviewing; all the interviewers and photographers for capturing the stories; Mark Beisser for design; and Joan Castro for her overall guidance and support.

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# A LAND OF NATURAL GIFTS



The Philippines is a chain of more than 7,000 islands located on the western edge of the Pacific Ocean. Rich in natural resources, much of the land is mountainous or forested.

Life in the Philippines is never far from the sea. The Philippines has one of the highest population density rates in coastal Asia, with an average of 337 people per square kilometer.<sup>1</sup> For generations, Filipinos have made a living as fishermen. Those who live inland work on farms that produce rice, bananas, sugarcane, and pineapples. Some families fish during one season and farm during another.



A local woman walks next to damaged rice terraces in Maligcong, Philippines.

# A DELICATE BALANCE



This way of life is changing, however. Growth in urban areas is driving high demand for natural resources. Forests are disappearing as a result of logging, mining, and development.

Fish catch is dwindling due to overfishing, destruction of fish habitats, and pressure on coastal resources caused by population growth.

***This collection of stories highlights the voices of individuals impacted by population growth and environmental degradation. The stories also showcase the experiences of communities that have embraced and benefited from programs that integrate Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) services.***

Farmers work on a sustainable rice farm below the Mayon Volcano in Legazpi City, Philippines. ►





**Alpios “Jojo” B. Delima**

Secretary, Sanggunian Bayan Municipality  
of Ubay, Bohol  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Amy Lee**

Photographer:

**Gerald James Cabal**

I came into the municipal government of Ubay in the late 1990s. Later on, I came upon a USAID-sponsored project called FISH [Fisheries Improved for Sustainable Harvests]. I started to get acquainted with marine biologists—some were scientists, some from the military, U.S. Navy, Peace Corps, USAID. All sorts of people I got exposed to. It was a life-changing experience. It changed how I viewed the world. I was educated as an economist and ended up working in marine conservation! It exposed me to concerns that are highly relevant to where I live and what we do.

Resources are finite. They don’t grow [indefinitely]. But the people using those resources multiply greatly over the years. I grew up at a time when we just give away fish. But right now, it’s a very expensive commodity. I remember about a year ago, my son was eating barbeque. There was this old lady who asked, “What are you cooking?” He said chicken. The old lady said, “Chicken is a poor man’s meal.” Because fish now in Ubay is expensive. It is a rich man’s meal. Chicken is much cheaper than fish. Reality has changed over time. In Bohol, we are fish eaters, not meat eaters. We’d generally rather eat fish and vegetables than chicken and pork. Obviously, seafood is not only loved in Bohol, but also loved everywhere. The demand for that business is creating havoc for us, along with conservation concerns that we have. It’s something that we need to address. People at the local level can do something about it. We can curtail and stop the ongoing scenario from happening.

I love it here. It’s what I call home. So I need to preserve it. I need to do something about it. As an advocate, or Boy Scout, or crusader maybe. I want my family and my kids to enjoy what I’ve eaten before, what I’ve seen before.



**Helen Minguez**  
Municipal Health Officer  
Concepcion, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewers:  
**Amy Lee, Lawrence Castro**

Photographer:  
**Dovie D. Lozada**

When I was small and living on the island, there were lots of fish, an abundance of fish catch, and only few people living on the island, unlike now. Our population grew so fast. Now when I go to the island, there are just so many people. The data from our local government unit shows that only 20% of couples are using family planning methods. Our coastal resources are not like how they were before. Based on what the fisher folks are telling us, fish catch is dwindling. I believe that with the PESCO-DEV (People, Environment Co-Existence Development) program of Save the Children done 17 years ago, the PHE [population, health, and environment] framework was very good at addressing not only the program on coastal resource degradation, but, at the same time, our issues of population and health.

Our couples who accepted family planning methods had increased. When the program started, it was just 28%; now we have 80% contraceptive prevalence rate. We didn't used to have marine-protected areas, because people were not aware that they had to protect resources. Now we have nine functional marine-protected areas. Those are some of the impacts the program had. Although the program ended in 2004, we were able to sustain it, especially with the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) program, which was one of the components of the PESCO-DEV project. We were able to sustain it until now.

# BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Many Filipinos are taking note of how family planning, coastal management, economic prosperity, food security, and disaster preparation relate to each other—and to the future of their communities.



A family carries harvested vegetables in the Philippines.



## [ Learning from the Past ]

The Philippines frequently experiences extreme weather events. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and typhoons, averaging 20 a year, are the most catastrophic events, with floods and landslides causing massive casualties.<sup>2</sup> On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan—known as Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines—made landfall. The storm surge caused more than 6,300 deaths and displaced more than 4 million people, affecting close to 15% of the nation's population.



**Milliard Villanueva**

Mayor  
Concepcion, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

We want to make sure that children's rights, survival, protection, development, and participation are being practiced here in Concepcion. My idea is developing these children, guiding them into a direction in which we want them to go so that by the time they grow up, there will be no children in conflict with the law. They will become responsible, mature adults, eventually. That is how I see this child-centered development.

[For example], after Typhoon Haiyan, we realized that [our] children are vulnerable to disasters. We help develop them into a resilient group, wherein they can protect themselves during disasters. So they could also conduct themselves as a group, as children, in coordination with our BCA [Barangay Children's Association] program.

Our [youth camp] has plenty of topics. We invite resource persons [to share their knowledge] on health, ecological management, and leadership. Of course, we also have a program for responsible sexual health, because one of our problems now is teenage pregnancy. We would like to address that. And camping, and assembling them together, is an effective way of making them aware of these responsibilities.



**Victoriano M. Zulueta**

Barangay (District) Captain  
San Andres, Oriental Mindoro  
The Philippines

Interviewers:

**Amy Lee, Lawrence Castro**

Photographer:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

A tsunami occurred in 1994. Because we live on the coast, many people died. After the tsunami, there were typhoons and floods. We implemented programs to protect our coastal area, including replanting of forests and mangrove reforestation. It's a shield for our village. So now all of the people living here are planting a variety of shieldings suitable for the coastal area.... We observed that conservation was a big help, and it will improve our nutrition. We know that the mangrove forest will help fish lay eggs. If you protect that, then someday our rivers and seas will also be improved. And we will catch plenty of fish.

Family planning is also big help here. [Here] there are 5 kids to every family. But there was this family with 12 kids, but the couple was still young. By implementing a family planning program, if the couple will listen and understand what it means, it would be a great help.... It's hard for the father and mother who have so many children.



## [ Local Advocates ]

Local leaders are taking charge, recognizing how conservation efforts help communities become more resilient to natural disasters.



**Francisca A. Daniel**

Barangay Health Worker  
San Andres, Oriental Mindoro  
The Philippines

Interviewers:

**Amy Lee, Lawrence Castro**

Photographers:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

I first became a community leader for a people's organization for fisher folk women. Then I became the Marine Protected Area management chairman. After that, I became a barangay [community] health worker (BHW), so I was in conservation before health and family planning. I was invited to become a BHW. I felt that it was my duty; it's a service that I can give. I see the need for health workers, and I feel that I can do it.

I have enjoined women to do conservation work with mangrove planting. I was able to mobilize women to be part of conservation. That's such a proud moment. I tell them, "Come and join us!" That's it! Conservation is for both men and women. There shouldn't be one gender that's taking charge.



**Harold Alfred Marshal**

Regional Director, Commission on  
Population (PopCom)  
Region 6, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

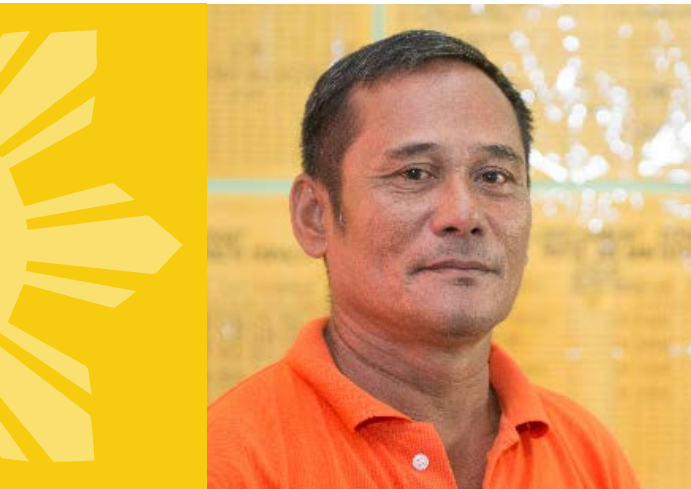
In 2011, the Commission on Population funded a project located in the mangrove forest of Kalibo Aklan in partnership with a people's organization. It was called KASAMA – Kalibo Save the Mangrove Association. They saw that if you protect the mangroves, the mangroves protect you. That's where they get their sustenance, their livelihood. We came up with a project on integrated population, health, and environment in that area. We provided advocacy work on responsible parenthood and family planning, because in that area, they usually have large family sizes. And when you have large family sizes, you provide for more mouths to feed.... Then we also looked into how they interact with the environment. We were wondering if we could come up with a project that would minimize incidences of malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, and violence against women and children, and help couples achieve their desired family size.

It's very difficult changing the mindset of people. They know family planning. They know responsible parenthood. They know the perils of teenage pregnancy and malnutrition. But that would take a backseat to their more urgent needs, such as finding their day-to-day sustenance. Protecting the mangrove forest was quite easy to sell, because that's where they get their food. But responsible parenthood and family planning—especially family planning—is quite difficult for them to prioritize.



## [ Planning for the Family ]

By the year 2050, the population of the Philippines is expected to grow from the current 100 million to 148 million.<sup>3</sup> Many individuals see family planning as a way to reduce the strain on the environment and to improve the health and economic prosperity of Filipino families.



**Cristobal Bagasina**

Family Planning Peer Counselor  
Humayhumay Health Office  
Humayhumay, Bohol  
The Philippines

Interviewers:

**Sarah V. Harlan, Jeffrey Licardo**

Photographer:

**Gerald James Cabal**

We share our stories with people. Life is really hard. We notice that people understand easily. We integrate coastal management and family planning. We also work to protect the sanctuary, because if you have more children, you cannot provide them with fish. But if you only have limited children, you can provide everything. You will have a whole bag of fish, and it can be divided [among] only three or four children.

We guide them to go to the distributors for condoms, pills, and other methods. The people are happy with us. We help the families.

We keep telling the people, “We are not telling you not to have more children, but you should be responsible parents.”



**Marissa Hinacay**

Community Health Outreach  
Worker  
Humayhumay, Bohol  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Amy Lee**

Photographer:

**Gerald James Cabal**

I am a nurse by profession. I started working as a community health worker in 2001 with the IPOPCORM (Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management) project. I was there for three or four years with the coastal communities. At first it was a very hard job, especially in Bohol, which is a religious province. Family planning was not acceptable during that time. People in the community are aware of the situation. It is so difficult to meet the needs of large families. Consider coastal communities, who are very dependent on fish catch. When they have five children, it's very hard for them to feed their children with a small fish catch. About 70% of Filipinos rely on fish for protein, so if the fish is not available, there will be protein deficiencies in the children. During that time, I realized that integrating population, health, and environment in coastal [communities] is very important.

[I worked with] a wife who had delivered her second child. The husband came to bring the ice box and saw that his wife was bleeding. Later, he went to my house and asked if he could have an SV [vasectomy with a scalpel]. I was so shocked! An SV here is very rare, because men are afraid of having a vasectomy. I referred him to a doctor in Talibon. When men decide [to get a vasectomy], you should refer immediately, because they can change their minds any time, even in the operating room. I saw him almost every day after [the procedure] and would ask how he's doing. And he told me, "It's okay ma'am. We are having a small business making fish bowls." I'm so happy I make referrals and can change their lives. I may not be rich with money, but in terms of public service, maybe I'm a millionaire!



## [ It Takes A Village ]

Wives and husbands, educators and youth, environmental advocates and family planning practitioners alike are working together for the future of their communities.



**Janice Mosqueda**

Teacher, Former President of the  
Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual  
Health Program  
Concepcion, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

Our topics for the [Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health] camps include how to delay sexual debut of adolescents. We also want them to realize that protecting our environment is very important. That's why we have this coastal cleanup and tree planting. It's not only in our activities. We are integrating [these messages] in our lessons in school. Because I'm the ARSH (Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health) coordinator of our school. We are extending our program to the schools. We started four years ago, and we asked for the support of the school, because it's very hard for us to do our mission—our job—if the different institutions are not supportive. So we reached out to them.

We also have the participation of the teachers. We have an orientation about our program for them to understand. We also have support of the PNP—the Philippines National Police. And our elders are very concerned that we talk about sex education or all about sexual health. They think it's not good for the children – that it's not good for the youth. But we help them understand that, as young as we are, we need to really be educated on the things that are happening, especially the challenges that [our youth] are encountering.



**Melgrace C. Orbe**

Youth Chairman, Protected Area  
Pulantubig, Oriental Mindoro  
The Philippines

Interviewers:

**Sarah V. Harlan, Lawrence Castro**

Photographer:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

I advocate and teach young children not to pollute the areas, in terms of trash and destroying the mangrove. I take youth to the mangrove and explain its importance. But primarily, my advocacy is to stop pollution and trash in the community.

The challenge for me is to gather volunteers, because the youth here are all Facebook addicts, and I had a hard time convincing them to join me in mangrove planting. Some of them would ask me if they would get paid to do that. So it's some of the attitudes—recruiting volunteers to join me—that is the challenge.

For youth, after planting, we would have a good time. We go on a picnic and have some activities afterwards. Because for the youth, that's what makes them happy: to have a small gathering and have a good time. Bonding time, sharing stories about their love lives. That's my way of organizing the youth here....

We also talk about family planning at casual gatherings. I tell them that it will be difficult for young people if they engage in premarital sex. Their lives will change. When we gather informally, it's an opportunity to talk about it.



**Helen Minguez**  
Municipal Health Officer  
Concepcion, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Amy Lee**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

Personally, my heart is with ARSH [the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health program], because I would like to see young people stay away from early sexual involvement and high-risk behaviors. That's my focus and my passion. Education is one of the ways out of poverty. In the islands, when I was young, there were no professionals. Later on, people started sending their children to school to become teachers, maybe to become a doctor. My parents are fisher folks. I would like these young people in our barangay to have the kind of education to take them out of poverty. One way is for these young people to really focus on their studies and graduate. I saw how the parents were broken-hearted, disappointed, when their children were not able to graduate because of early pregnancy. I focus on [ARSH] because I want to see these adolescents graduate from school.

These adolescents also have to take care of the environment. In ARSH, not only do we have topics on responsible sexuality, but we also have activities on environmental protection, like replanting, mangrove reforestation, coastal clean-ups.

I see myself as the mother of the ARSH program and look at these adolescents as my children. What's really fulfilling is to be able to see this group of young people be the mentors. They are passing on their knowledge, their skills, to the younger generation so that this activity can go on and on. Even when I am retired, I am assured that this program will continue. To me, that's a legacy that I could leave behind.



**Emelinda Abian**

Coastal Resource Specialist  
Concepcion, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Brittany Goetsch**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

We had these executive meetings where the department heads, the focal people of the different projects in the local government units meet once a week. Because we are working as a team, we discuss the concerns, what help they need from other departments. There are concerns about nutrition and population. There are women—there are mothers, actually—who wanted to have permanent sterilization, because they feel that they already have the exact number of children they want. But still, they can not refuse their husbands, and the births are increasing, so they opt for a permanent solution. We refer them to the MHO [Municipal Health Office], and the MHO will require the midwife to visit the family that I am referring.

I just hope that PHE, the integrated population, health, and environment programming, be not only sustained here in Concepcion, but in all other coastal municipalities in the Philippines, because people really need it. I think it should not only focus on the environmental management, but we should also focus on our disaster-risk reduction and climate-change adaptation as a strategy. No matter how much you protect the resources, the nature, the environment, the habitats, there comes these big hazards, extreme events.... Policies should be strictly made and strictly enforced. Local policies should emanate from the communities, because they know what the situations are, and people should be taught how to make policies. Here in Concepcion, fisher folks are aware of the policies and the ordinances relative to fisheries, because together we formulated those policies and endorsed them to the subcommand for buy-in for adoption as an act of the municipality.



## [ Connecting the Dots ]

There are clear links between people, their health, and the natural resources upon which they depend. More and more Filipinos are connecting these dots in their own ways.



**Raul N. Banias**

Provincial Administrator, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Sarah V. Harlan**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

When I was the local chief of Concepcion, I realized that there is a clear link between the population growth rate, the family health situation, and the environment. We are living in a coastal municipality and about 55% of our population is dependent on our coastal resources—on fishing. We have noticed that because of uncontrolled, illegal modes of fishing, the fish catch is already dwindling and cannot support a family. That's one reason that our community is really poor. The family income is just not enough. It took several years to address that—we decided that we should protect our environment, prevent illegal fishing, and establish marine-protected areas.

Then, Save the Children engaged a university to teach our folks how to assess their coastal resources and to monitor their fish catch. As we compare the daily fish catch before the program and during the program, where we are now regulating fishing, we clearly showed the results: Fish catch increases if you also protect the environment. Also, the couples are more aware, because they conducted family sessions, development sessions, where the couples realized the importance also of planning their family and family size. Again, we realized that there is a demand for family planning, but then the programs available to the families—even the family planning commodities—are scarce, are not enough. So we addressed that. We procured family planning commodities.



**Marissa Hinacay**

Community Health Outreach  
Worker  
Humayhumay, Bohol  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Amy Lee**

Photographer:

**Gerald James Cabal**

We cannot separate population, health, and environment, because without any of those three, everything is affected. If you have a large population, your health is affected, and your environment is affected also. There's that law of supply and demand. When you have a large family size, then you have to work harder or even work illegally by cutting trees and fishing illegally just to feed your children. But when you are planning your family, you'll know how many children you can afford to send to school. And when you have a large family size, you have [children with] nutrient deficiency. I'm so sad for the environment. We only have two main resources here: coastal and upland. Either or both of them will be damaged if [communities] have large families and have nothing else to depend on.



**Rene Sobremonte**

Municipal Planning & Development  
Coordinator  
Concepcion, Iloilo  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Amy Lee**

Photographer:

**Dovie D. Lozada**

If a lot of people are using a resource, of course it will be depleted. But if fewer are using it, then it will be sustained. That's a very clear example of why PHE impacts the lives of coastal municipalities.

In mainland barangays, the major source of income is farming. The common farmer has one to two hectares of land. If you have a family of five or six, you cannot send them all to school. But if you have a smaller family, then you can be assured that you can send your children to school and that they graduate....

In fact, the original concept of PHE [population, health, and environment] has another 'E' for education. Education also has a critical role in integrating population, health, and environment. Save the Children previously introduced the PESCO-DEV (People, Environment Co-Existence Development) Program in 2002.... The education sector is very much engaged and involved in local government programming. In fact, one of our [municipal] programs for teen centers is school-based. We find that a good sustainability mechanism is having programs in schools that can be managed by teachers and educators.

# PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



Communities that have adopted integrated PHE programs are starting to see positive changes. It's clear that love is at the heart of their efforts: love for their children and their country, and a concern for the legacy they're leaving behind.



A volunteer in a community project for ecological balance crosses a pathway in Bakhawan Eco-Park, a 220-hectare Mangrove forest located in New Buswang, Kalibo, Aklan, Philippines.



**Fredeswinda Badinas**

Community Based Distributor  
Humayhumay, Bohol  
The Philippines

Interviewers:

**Brittany Goetsch, Marissa Hinacay**

Photographer:

**Gerald James Cabal**

Before the [Population, Health, and Environment] project, people had a lot of children. One family had 12 children. Now, after the counseling and the peer education, the families may have three or four children—a new generation. For me, the importance of this program is that couples can send their children to school, they can buy clothes, and they have enough food for the family. Before, they had to turn to illegal fishing—dynamite fishing—just to feed all their children. But now they restored the sea, so we have a marine-protected area for the fish to multiply and have enough food for the family.



**Ralph Lagura**

Coastal Resource Management  
Officer, Agricultural Technologist  
Ubay, Bohol  
The Philippines

Interviewer:

**Brittany Goetsch**

Photographer:

**Gerald James Cabal**

The younger generations have a smaller number of children. Maybe they accept the reality that it's not good to have a large number of children because of limited resources. They can't send their children to school....

Maybe 10 years ago, because illegal fishing activity was not contained, we were getting more resources from the sea. But now, maybe because it's limited, younger generations realize a need to change their lifestyle....The fishing gear they are using is different than before. They used to use illegal gears, so they would get more fish. Fish were easy to get, so it was easy to grow a family. But in reality, it was not good for the environment. Now the number of fish they're harvesting is less than before, because they are using legal gars. There are also more fisherman going into the sea.

# FILIPINO PROVERB

*Anything that is heavy can be light if we put our resources together.  
Ang mabigat ay gumagaan, kung pinagtutulungan.*

**Footnotes:**

- 1) <https://psa.gov.ph/content/philippine-population-density-based-2015-census-population>
- 2) <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/8754>
- 3) <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/health/population>

