

# The PHE approach as a tool to galvanizing GTP

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In was not until the late 1980s the idea of employing integrated approaches considered as a plausible approach to address development targets. During the stated period, though conservation organizations and practitioners began to realize the benefits of improving the quality of life for people by managing biodiversity and natural resources. Such projects were initially known as integrated conservation and development projects (ICDP) and were introduced to address a wide variety of community development needs.

Meanwhile, by the end of the 1990s, it was realized that ICDPs were not achieving conservation or development goals as successfully as anticipated mainly due to the broad nature of the scope of ICDPs. Nevertheless important lessons were learned from ICDP attempts that the success of the projects depended on the ability to focus on key interventions and avoid excessive complexity.

Hence the lessons learned from early ICDPs the conservation sector gave birth to the PHE approach with a new generation of integrated projects, according to evidences.

Therefore by drawing on what was learned from ICDPs, the conservation sector piloted the PHE approach during the 1990s with the first generation of PHE integrated projects. Since then USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, and the Summit Foundation have worked to strengthen the approach. The PHE approach has pushed on with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in mind.

Although the concept of integrating population, health and environment believed to be first introduced in Ethiopia during early twenties by different non-governmental organizations the approach came to be better grasped in the past few years following the

establishment of a local consortium called Population Health and Environment Ethiopia (PHE-Ethiopia).

The issue of integrating population health and environment began to be surfaced in the development discourse just recently. When the Consortium of Population Health and Environment also known as PHE-Ethiopia came up with the concept of integrating population, health, and environment, probably not many organizations were enthusiastic to buy it. However, today the approach seems to have crossed borders and inspired other countries to follow suit.

From 13 to 14 March, PHE Ethiopia consortium held its annual assembly during when experiences of different Consortium member and partner organizations presented experiences of their PHE integration.

According to Negash Teklu, PHE-Ethiopia Director integration of PHE is not just about environment, population, health and environment. For Ethiopia it is a question of ensuring sustainable livelihood, beating poverty and realizing the growth and Transformation Plan (GTP).

"PHE interventions use a holistic and participatory approach whereby issues of environment, health and population are addressed in an integrated manner for improved livelihoods and sustainable well-being of people and ecosystems."

So far, the PHE approach, as was tried by different organizations seem to be the right approach to address sustainable development issues. Experiences of various local self help and community organizations in Ethiopia have reported positive outcomes obtained as a result of integrating reproductive health with environmental management and income generating schemes.

Integrating population health and environment issues has also become an approach well taken by various organizations overseas. Accordingly, in Western Tanzania where population pressure, together with other

factors such as unsustainable fishing practice, unplanned settlement and over-dependence on agriculture have resulted in the diminishing of agricultural resources, a project called TUUNGANE has introduced a PHE approach to address the problem. TUUNGANE which in Swahili means 'unite' with the support of non-governmental organizations, is trying to ameliorate the livelihood diversity, reduce the population pressure through introducing family planning services and creating alternative livelihoods. The project envisions the rehabilitation of the degraded marine and terrestrial habitat on which the local community has been depending for livelihood and be able to resilient to environmental factors which are exacerbated by climate change.

A similar approach has been emulated by the lower Victoria basin countries under a project known as Health of People and Environment in the Lake Victoria Basin (HoPE-LVB)

Lake Victoria is the second largest freshwater lake in the world. The Lake Victoria Basin includes parts of 5 countries: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. The lake also plays a vital role in the culture and economies of these countries and over 80 per cent of the people in the LVB depend on the lake and the surrounding lands. Moreover, the Lake Victoria Basin is recognized for its biodiversity. However, environmental problems are threatening the abundance of the basin, including over-fishing, poor sanitation infrastructure, deforestation, and poor agriculture and land use practices. Hence rescuing the basin from eminent disaster is tantamount to rescuing the large number of community relying on the basin from catastrophic disaster.

Accordingly HoPE-LVB tried to introduce the integrated PHE approaches whereby the basin community get reproductive health services and alternative means of livelihood. The project, upon completion is expected to boost the threatened environmental

resources such as fish.

PHE integration is believed to improve participation of men in health aspects and of women in natural resource management aspects. Moreover, integrated projects can reach the most hard to reach populations, and be more responsive to priority needs.

The Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA) which has 360 member organizations started the first integrated PHE approach in its implementation areas in 2008.

The consortium now believes that PHE integration can be applied in a range of development goals --- poverty reduction, food security, gender equity, migration, climate change and disaster mitigation. Accordingly it has been implementing the integrated PHE approach through its coalition members particularly in the Southern Nations and Nationalities and Peoples State where environmental challenges are becoming a grievance concern as a result of high population density of 150 people per km<sup>2</sup> and with 91 % of the population in depending on agriculture

The region also has one of the highest fertility rates which is 4.5, and 25 per cent of the family planning needs remain unmet.

Therefore, the region faces various environmental challenges including, deforestation for farmland and fuel, degradation of the environment, and diminishing of natural flora and fauna.

Therefore, the complex problem can be better addressed through the integration of the PHE components.

According to Negash Teklu, PHE Executive Director, PHE is, is an important tool for the realization of the Growth and Transformation Plan(GTP). The existing policies and strategies have PHE approach is consciously put into play.

In this respect, he particularly mentioned the over 35,000 health extension workers in the country and the 45,000 development



Negash Teklu, PHE Director

agents are vital human resources to facilitate the integration of the PHE approach. Moreover, the existing favorable policies of the Growth and Transformation Plan and the Climate Resilient Green Economy strategy and the Millennium Development Goals, provide a conducive framework for integrating population, health and environment issues.

According to Negash, experiences have so far proven that multisectoral, integrated approaches better address the diverse problems communities face. In this respect community ownership, partnership with local governments as well as working with the youth are vital to sustain the success of PHE integration.

Despite the positive outcomes implementation processes of PHE integration face challenges including reluctance for integration and working together, lack of comprehensive and systemic thinking, and lack of coordination between line ministries, regional bureaus and offices among others, according to Negash. To overcome the challenges and make the most out of the PHE integration there needs to be an increased level of government engagement. Moreover, more international support and partnerships are needed in strengthening monitoring and evaluation of PHE projects. It also requires scaling up PHE implementation models.