

## Policy and Issues Brief



**PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc.**

ALLEVIATING POVERTY \* IMPROVING HEALTH \* PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### Integrating Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Population, Health, Environment and Climate Change Matters! It is a Pledge for Resiliency.

#### Why Integrate Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Population, Health, Environment (PHE) and Climate Change?

Integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), population, health and environment (PHE) into the climate change (CC) response matters. A growing body of evidence on the interlinkages of SRHR, PHE and climate change among women and fishers affirms the effects of climate change ubiquitously exacerbates the situation in poor, rural and coastal communities, especially women and fishers. The SRHR/PHE integrated response is a developmental approach that necessitates multisectoral collaboration towards addressing poor health, loss of biodiversity (environment), unmet need for SRHR services that is contributing to growing population, large families and climate change specially among poor coastal communities. The approach supports key components: provision of universal access to quality health and SRHR services, natural resource management and biodiversity conservation and economically productive, stable and sustainable livelihoods. All of which are key towards achieving climate change resilient families and resources. Integrating SRHR and PHE approach into climate change policies and practices is a pledge due to women, the fishers, and other marginalized communities and to the natural resources /environment which they depend upon for food and livelihood.

#### Who Benefits from Integrating SRHR, PHE and Climate Change?

The people specially the women, fishers, vulnerable communities and Philippines ecosystems will benefit from integrated SRHR, PHE and climate change approach.

Jovita is 37 years old with eight children. She is currently pregnant. She married at 17 to a fisherman and lives in a coastal municipality located in the “center of the center” of marine biodiversity in the world—the Verde Island Passage (VIP). When Jovita was pregnant with all eight children including her present pregnancy, she never had prenatal check-ups. To support the family, the husband accepts odd jobs when



the weather is unpredictable. One day while doing carpentry work, he met an accident and was bedridden. The family had to move in with the husband's mother. Every meal is a struggle. Their eldest daughter now works as a housemaid in a nearby city to help support her parents. With no savings and her impending delivery, Jovita worries about how to deliver her 9th baby and the future of her children.

The Philippines a biodiversity rich country is considered a “hotspot” of population growth and climate change. It is growing at 1.7%, a 22% unmet need for family planning and fast depleting coastal resources affecting fisheries productivity. Moreover, in 2012, the Philippines along with Haiti suffered the most from extreme weather events pointing to the country’s vulnerability to climate change phenomenon (Kreft & Eckstein 2013) . All of which unfortunately, is threatening the ecosystems’ functions and services and exacerbating the situation in poor, rural and coastal communities.

The reality about climate change impacts is recognised by governments. Globally, the concern on climate change is manifested by the participation of 195 Parties to international treaties such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 192 countries in the Kyoto Protocol cooperating to reduce greenhouse gases emissions. These represent huge progress since the first World Climate Conference (WCC) in 1979. An Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was also set up in 1988 to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge in climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic impacts. The five reports of IPCC to date have underlined the importance of climate change as a challenge requiring international cooperation and to pay greater attention to the integration of climate change with sustainable development policies and relationships between mitigation and adaptation (IPCC, 1990; IPCC, 2013). The Philippines, as a state party to the UNFCCC enacted the Climate Change Act of 2009 to protect the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology. It created the Climate Change Commission, adopted the National Strategic Framework on Climate Change and the National Climate Change Action Plan, and created the People’s Survival Fund (PSF) to support adaptation activities of local governments and communities. The national adaptation programme of action (NAPA) is also in place and programs are ongoing.

While significant milestones have been achieved to address climate change globally and domestically, Jovita and many other women and fisher households continue to experience the effects of climate change. It is threatening their health and the resources they depend upon. They will benefit the most from an integrated SRHR, PHE and climate change response.

## Is There Evidence for Integrating SRHR, PHE and Climate Change?

A study on Linking Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Population, Health, Environment (PHE) and Climate Change (CC) Initiatives on Women and Fishers in the Philippines was conducted by PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. with support from the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW). The study aimed to determine the awareness/knowledge on climate change; interlinkages of SRHR, PHE and climate change; benefits of integration and; the factors and actions towards climate change

resiliency. Focus group discussions were conducted in selected coastal rural communities in the Verde Island Passage marine bioregion. In-depth interviews were also conducted with national and sub-national managers, elected officials, implementers and other stakeholders.

If the woman is healthy, the family is healthy and so is

Key finding revealed the following: 1) the health of women, the community and the ecosystems that they depend upon are key towards climate change resiliency. The women and the fishers have long been experiencing the effects of climate change. It is adversely affecting the environment and coastal resources which they depend for food and livelihood. They also understand SRHR as it relates to family planning, reproductive health and responsible parenthood. While this does not fully describe the embodiment of SRHR adapted as defined by UN, WHO, ICPD, the respondents expressed that SRHR services are needed to adapt to climate change impacts because the family's health, their children's education and coastal resource / environment conservation will be given more attention; 2) there is a need to empower communities by building local capacity to design and implement integrated SRHR,/PHE and climate change programs and; 3) there is a need to institutionalize best practices and lessons learned in integrated SRHR/PHE responses into climate change policies, programs and budgets, and to sustain and scale up effective actions that strengthen community resiliency to climate change impacts.

## What Needs to Be Done?

Key policymakers and decision makers are game changers in addressing climate change now and in the future. Findings from the scoping study show that climate change matters to everyone specially the poor and vulnerable. The "story of Jovita" among others can provide useful insights to policy and decision makers towards achieving climate change resilient communities and ecosystems.

Study results offers an enabling and holistic package of services necessary to address the unmet need for sexual and reproductive health services, poor health, loss of biodiversity (environment) and climate change. This is needed to break the vicious cycle that affects people and the ecosystem. The following package presents a critical action to the call of the women and fishers on their leaders to act for the future generation:

- Facilitate a participatory and multisectoral summit with community and women leaders to design and implement an integrated health, SRHR and biodiversity conservation plan and programs towards achieving climate change resiliency
- Institutionalize integrated strategies and best practices into local and national policies, plans and budgets, especially climate change adaptation, disaster risk preparedness and reduction, comprehensive land use policies and plans

A Policymakers Pledge and a Legacy:  
Invest in integrated SRHR, health and environment policies and programs that reflect and respond

- Support integrated package and actions that provides for stable and sustainable livelihoods, universal access to quality health care, water and SRHR services, i.e. family planning/reproductive health, adolescent sexuality and reproductive health, etc., and proper management and sustained environment conservation efforts
- Embark in continuing community education and advocacy on the intrinsic linkages of SRHR, health, environment and livelihood factors and the benefits of addressing these interrelated dynamics in an integrated fashion
- Know and support the country's national programs and international commitments to climate change measures

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PFPI is a non-government organisation that implements and promotes integrated PHE as a community-based adaptation approach for sustainable development and to mitigate climate change.

