



ECSP Pathways to Peace: Stories of Environment, Health, and Conflict

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Edited Transcript — Joan Regina L. Castro

Joan Regina L. Castro:

Good afternoon. First I'd like to thank the Wilson Center and the Fetzer Institute for this opportunity to share with you our experience from the other world, and this is from a country called the Philippines. I would like to start my sharing with you by describing the Philippines because it will put into context the concept of what we call "population, health and environment" that is a sustainable approach for development that supports linkage of these various sectors. And it is a way that we were able to address some of the issues of poverty alleviation and food security, which are a source of conflict because it involves a lot of natural resources.

The Philippines is a country of 7,100 islands -- it depends if it's actually high tide or low tide. [laughs] So, we are a very small country, but our population -- I was looking at this this morning -- it's more than 90 million, so we are actually the 12th most populous country in the world. Our growth rate is 2.04, and we are considered a hot spot in terms of marine biodiversity, one of the top 25. So we boast very nice beaches and good coral reefs, but, unfortunately, in the past 50 years, the coral reefs, which is also the habitat for the fish, has actually been going down. So Filipinos, 80 percent of us, the source of our protein is actually fish. Natural resources, particularly in the marine coastal area, are very, very important.

It's also the source of livelihoods. When we had some studies in 2001, when we were starting the project, a majority of the community we were starting to work with were seeing that resources are dwindling and there's not enough food to go around. So that is actually where we started; that situation and findings within the community started the project called Integrated Population and Coastal Resources Management. It was made in such a way that it's easy for us to remember, because we targeted the youth, we targeted fisher folks, we worked with policymakers to be able to try this new approach of integrating different sectors



environmental change & security program



and try to get some synergy in integrating these various sectors. And the reason is, and I think that's kind of universal, that programs are usually vertical programs, so even if the Health Department is very close, and the other side is agriculture, they don't talk to each other. So that is one part of the project.

A multi-sector collaboration was encouraged; we applied multi-disciplinary approaches. So we looked at food security as the central theme, basically, because of the situation that I mentioned. We initially worked in four municipalities. And during that time, PHE was not a common approach. So, when you looked at the Web, there was nothing. So we were starting to do work that has not been there previously. So that was a big challenge. We started there with four municipalities, working in areas where there's a remote access to transportation and services -- really far flung areas.

In the Philippines, about 80 percent are Catholics. Addressing issues of family planning as part of population is very controversial. So, we had four initiatives that we did. One is building capacity with the community to be able to have community-based family planning services. In some communities that we went to, they never saw a doctor for their whole lifetime. A doctor is God in those areas. And then, also, building the capacitating of the community to be able to manage their resources, and so, the project helped establish or strengthen protected areas or fish sanctuaries that were there. We work with local executives to be able to see the links of integrating population, health and environment. And also, we had to make these leaders able to be our champions for the rest of, as we scale up the project.

So, there's also a livelihood component we just mentioned, which is very important. And this is an activity of the Coastal Resource Management Initiative. Because when you actually strengthen or establish a marine protected area, the fishing ground of the fishers, we push them further away to fish. So it has allowed alternative livelihoods, allowed the wives of the fishers to be able to gain skills and be able to have access to microcredit financing and enable them to be able to contribute to the income of the family. So, most of these families that we have would have five to 13 children. Some would have 14. So when you call, they say "How many? Is it the living or the dead?" You know, so that's the way to count. Because children is wealth, and I guess that's very common in developing countries like ours.

So, as Geoff mentioned, we also have an operations researcher, that was also alongside us as we did the implementation of the project. We looked at the synergy, so we did biophysical





surveys at the household level, at the biophysical level, and we did a baseline in 2001, did one in 2004, and then one in 2007. Some of the results of the projects were to increase access to family planning because we worked with convenience stores and small kiosks that were the only ones available in the villages, we were able to provide family planning commodities such as condoms and pills, and we were also able to train peer-educators, both youth and couples, to be the motivators, to be able to talk about how to manage families and how to protect your natural resources. And then also youth was a group that we work with to help them become stewards of the future and become responsible for their sexuality. So those were the activities that we've had. We increased access. We were able to pass and work with local policymakers to pass policy reforms that would protect the natural resources and to establish marine protected areas for them to take care of. We were also able to capacitate leaders that advocated, from local chief executives to the next chief executives about the benefits of linking population, health, and environment.

We have ended the project, actually, that was an initiative from 2001 to 2007. We scaled up some of the aspects of this project, so we are actually reaching about 54 municipalities. So, in fact, even if we ended, the local communities that we work with were able to sustain the initiatives, and that's the showcase that we'd like to show some of our partners in East Africa to show that a project can be sustained and can be owned by the local governments and local communities if they are provided the capacity to be able to continue to implement their programs and that they see the value of the programs that they do.

We are now scaling up, also, the approach, and that's called the Balance Project. I left some brochures outside to promote PHE as an approach to sustainable development in countries in East Africa that have similar parameters and variables that we work in the Philippines. So, even if we started in Coastal Research Management, we found out that the basic components of implementing the approach also works in other setups.

So, I think for now, I'll end with that. And if you're interested, then we can talk more about the project. Thank you.

[applause]

