

Linking population, health, environment and climate change adaptation: A review of the science, policy, and programing

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Summary Abstract

As SDGs agenda moves from global arena to national policy and program implementation, there will be increasing attention to approaches that facilitate multisectoral integration across policies and programs. This paper examines integration of population-health-environment and climate change, by reviewing related thematic science, policy and programming. The paper finds an increasing recognition in both science and policy on the role of population and family planning/reproductive health (FP/RH) in efforts to increase individual, family and community ability to adapt to the effects of climate change. However, this appreciation hasn't translated to commensurate field programs and projects. The paper calls for concerted efforts to ensure the recognition of the links between population and FP/RH is readily translated to integrated projects. The efforts include improved design, measurement and evaluation, and communication of projects' ability to contribute to health outcomes and climate change benefits, while addressing a key sustainable development issue, rapid population growth.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

There has been a lot of discourse throughout the SDGs process on the need for integrated policies that consider the synergies and trade-off across SDGs thematic areas and how that is critical for the achievement of sustainable development. Additionally, various analyses have shown that some thematic areas covered by the SDGs are well connected among one another. However, most of the discussions have remained in the realm of global policy arena, with less focus on how the integration would be achieved at national policy and program levels.

One such thematic area is population health and how connected it is around to a number of SDGs including environmental sustainability and climate change. In recent years, there has been growing attention to integration of population, health and climate change adaptation.

Objectives

As the SDGs and climate change agendas move from the global arena to national policy and program implementation, there will be increasing attention to approaches that facilitate multisectoral integration across policies and programs to help deliver sustainable development. This paper examines integration of population-health-environment and climate change, thematic areas which could offer important lessons for integrated SDGs implementation. The paper reviews evidence of such integration across the science, policy and programming. A specific analysis is undertaken for integrated Population Health and Environment (PHE), programs that improve access to health services, including voluntary FP/RH, while helping communities to manage natural resources and conserve the critical ecosystems on which they depend.

Methods

The analysis primarily relies on desk review and synthesis of published and grey literature on population, health, environment, and climate change including articles, reports, policy and strategy documents, and project documentation.

Results

The paper finds that there is increasing recognition in both science and policy on the role of population, FP/RH in efforts to increase individual, family and community ability to adapt to the effects of climate change. However, this appreciation hasn't translated into commensurate field programs and projects.

The Science

There is increasing attention in scientific literature on the role population and FP/RH in efforts to adapt to the effects of climate change. More recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report's "Working Group II on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation" cites numerous studies which contribute to this body of knowledge. A general observation is that providing access to family planning in areas that have both high fertility and high vulnerability to climate change, such as the Sahel region of Africa, can potentially help households, communities and countries build resilience to climate change (Potts and Henderson 2012, cited in IPCC AR5).

A review of the literature by PAI shows the various pathways that FP/RH make individuals, households, communities and nations better adapt and improve their resilience, to the effects of climate change (PAI, 2013a; PAI, 2013b).

The Policies

In terms of national policy, the potential impact of FP/RH as an intervention for climate change adaptation has been demonstrated at the national level. Family planning can help to slow national population growth, which can improve countries' capacity to manage climate change-related challenges. When countries prioritize meeting women's reproductive health needs, this can reduce poverty, protect natural resources, reduce inequality, and encourage social development, all of which can enable countries to better cope with the challenges of climate change (Mutunga, et. al 2012). In line with the literature that makes connections family planning and improved climate change resilience, several developing country policies mention FP as among the priority actions to adapt to climate change (Hardee and Mutunga 2009). Outside the NAPAs, countries such as Malawi identify FP as one of the interventions for climate change in their national climate change policy.

Policy guidelines from development organizations are also making the links between family planning and resilience. For instance, USAID's Resiliency framework recognizes population growth as an underlying factor to the chronic cycles of crisis in the Sahel. USAID's "Building Resilience to Recurrent Crisis" acknowledges that meeting the unmet need for family planning may be a necessary component of a larger strategy to build resilience.

The Programs

Given the growing recognition in both the science and policy one would expect a similar momentum in the implementation of field projects. The review finds limited evidence of field programs and projects that are integrating population, health and climate change. Furthermore,

only a handful of projects have been able to document the benefits that across the multiple development sectors. PHE programs would be perfect examples of this integration and documentation since by their nature they integrate population and FP/RH across climate sensitive sectors such as health, environment, energy, food security, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and livelihoods. However, PHE projects have hardly measured and reported on the climate change benefits that accrue from implementation of multiple integrated development activities.

Conclusion

The paper calls for concerted efforts to ensure that the recognition of the links between population and FP/RH in science and policy better translates to integrated projects. These include better design, measurement and evaluation, and communication of projects ability to not only contribute to better health outcomes but also environment and climate change benefits while also addressing an important sustainable development issue, rapid population growth .

References (To be completed)