



PHE story cards

Overview and facilitation guide

Version 1.1



PHE
Madagascar Network

Population
Health
Environment

Recap of the PHE approach

“Population-Health-Environment” or “PHE” is a term used to describe a holistic approach to sustainable development that reflects the connections between people, their health and the environment.

PHE initiatives are designed to address the multidimensional challenges facing isolated rural communities living in areas of high biodiversity and/or natural resource dependence with limited access to health services.

PHE initiatives typically integrate voluntary family planning and other health services with community-based natural resource management efforts. PHE initiatives may also encompass biodiversity conservation and alternative livelihood initiatives as well as measures to improve water, sanitation & hygiene (WASH) and/or nutrition.

PHE initiatives should be designed to uphold human rights, including the reproductive rights of all individuals to choose freely the number and spacing of their births as well as the management rights of communities with regards to their natural resources. PHE initiatives seek to promote gender equality by engaging men in discussions about family health while involving women in natural resource management decision-making.

Rationale for the creation of this tool

Integrated community outreach can be considered the glue that binds all of the components of a PHE initiative together; it ensures that the different workstreams within a PHE initiative aren't implemented in parallel but rather complement and proactively reinforce each other. Integrated community outreach is also key to advancing gender equality in natural resource management and family health.

Communities are likely to have a good understanding of PHE linkages as they experience them in their everyday lives, but it can nevertheless be helpful to surface and facilitate discussions about the connections between various health and environmental issues in order to support communities to think critically about their situations and the consequences of the decisions that they make.

There are already many health-focused community outreach tools in Madagascar designed by health organisations such as Marie Stopes Madagascar, or through various programmes such as Mahefa Miaraka, USAID Mikolo, etc. In general, they aim to encourage health-promoting behaviours and the uptake of health services. There are also already many environmental-focused community outreach tools in Madagascar designed and used by environmental organisations, and adapted to different contexts. In general, they aim to promote community support for natural resource management rules and appreciation of ecosystem services.

Given the existence of this range of sectoral community outreach tools, the Madagascar PHE Network isn't looking to produce health-focused or environment-focused community outreach tools. Network members who wish to develop their health-focused or environment-focused community outreach work are instead encouraged to use existing tools.

On the other hand, there appears to be a remarkable lack of practical community outreach tools that enable environmental and health organisations to facilitate discussions with communities about the links between their health and the health of the ecosystems upon which their livelihoods depend. Therein lies the rationale for this tool: to support environmental and health organisations in their integrated PHE community outreach efforts.

With a view to promoting the active participation and critical thinking of community members, and in order to produce a tool that can be used across a variety of ecosystems, it was decided to design a pack of story cards that can be used as visual aids to facilitate storytelling and discussion sessions on PHE topics in different contexts.

Objectives of this tool

General objective:

- To enable communities to express and explore their understanding of the links between their health and ecosystem health, as well as their livelihoods and the management of natural resources

Specific objectives:

- To facilitate the exchange and sharing of ideas among community members
- To foster critical thinking and the sustainable adoption of health-promoting and environmentally-friendly behaviours at the community level
- To enable environmental and health organisations to listen to community perceptions about health-environment linkages in their everyday lives

Description of this tool

This is a very simple tool consisting of a set of illustrated cards. Each illustration represents a small part of the realities experienced by rural communities on a daily basis.

For example: healthy coral reefs with many fish / degraded coral reefs, fishery reserves / destructive fishing practices, thick forests with many lemurs / degraded forests, forest reserves / forest harvesting activities, a bowl with lots of varied food / a bowl with limited food, children going to school / children working, women and youth participating in natural resource management committee meetings / women and youth excluded from natural resource management committee meetings, a woman growing seaweed or vegetables / a woman taking care of children, a couple choosing to use family planning / a couple choosing not to use family planning, a couple with three children / a couple with seven children, a mother with a sick child who goes to a community health agent / a mother with a sick child who stays at home.



These illustrated cards can be used by community members as building blocks to develop fictional, unique and realistic stories based on their own experiences, ideas and opinions during sessions facilitated by community health agents, school teachers and/or the community-based staff of environmental organisations. These cards have been designed in thematic categories, but they should be shuffled and used all together to make and explore links between different elements.

The thematic categories are as follows: ecosystem health, natural resource management, extreme weather events related to climate change, livelihood activities, household food situations, women's activities, children's activities, young women's situations, participation of women and youth in resource management, family health, family planning, birth spacing, family size, management of childhood illnesses, WASH, use of mosquito nets.

The tool is basically a set of 70 illustrated cards (some of which are only appropriate for marine or terrestrial settings) from which community members can select to create fictional stories. Just as regular playing cards can be used for different games, so these PHE story cards can be used in multiple ways.

Benefits of this tool

The use of these PHE story cards presents many advantages:

Facilitates concrete discussions adapted to different contexts

This tool is designed to facilitate discussions among community members, rather than to disseminate information or promote certain didactic messages. It can often be difficult to discuss health-environment linkages in abstract terms, so this tool allows for the facilitation of concrete discussions around stories and scenarios constructed by community members themselves. The illustrations make the cards accessible to those with low levels of literacy, and the wide range of cards (including illustrations of different ecosystems and livelihood activities) allows them to be used in both marine and terrestrial settings.

Interactive and participatory tool

This tool presents itself as a card game (with multiple possible ways of “playing” with the cards to explore health-environment linkages) and is used in a similar way so as to promote interaction; community members are invited to handle, browse, select and arrange cards to tell their fictional stories. This tool thereby encourages the active participation of community members in the creation, explanation and exploration of PHE stories; they are the ones who direct the stories and discussions according to their experiences, interests and opinions. Such an interactive approach has been found to be most effective in facilitating the exchange of ideas, critical thinking, and the taking of responsibility within communities for the development of health-promoting and environmentally-friendly social norms.

Provides an opportunity for communities to freely express and process their ideas and everyday experiences



When facilitating a small group session, the facilitator lets community members speak freely without any influence or judgment. The role of the facilitator is to encourage the production of stories and to facilitate a process whereby community members are supported to examine their logics and to reflect on the various potential consequences of the different choices available to them in order to arrive at their own conclusions.

Allows environmental and health organisations to listen to community perceptions about PHE issues



In addition to its utility as a community outreach tool, these story cards can also allow environmental and health organisations to listen to community perceptions about PHE challenges encountered in their everyday lives. These story cards could therefore also be used as a community consultation tool, for example when an organisation is seeking to design a PHE initiative in response to the unmet needs and multifaceted challenges faced by communities.

How to use this tool

Facilitator

These story cards can be used by community health agents, school teachers and/or the community-based staff of environmental organisations to animate and facilitate discussions with small groups of community members (men, women and youth) in zones where PHE initiatives are being implemented.

Group

You may bring together people of different ages and genders within the same small group (up to 8 people) in order to stimulate debates among diverse viewpoints. Alternatively you can arrange groups into similar ages and genders if you find this creates a more relaxed atmosphere for open discussion among all participants.

Place

It's possible to facilitate the sessions outdoors (somewhere sheltered from the wind) or in a room. Note that the construction of stories using the cards may require a rather large space (preferably the ground or else a large table top).

Opening

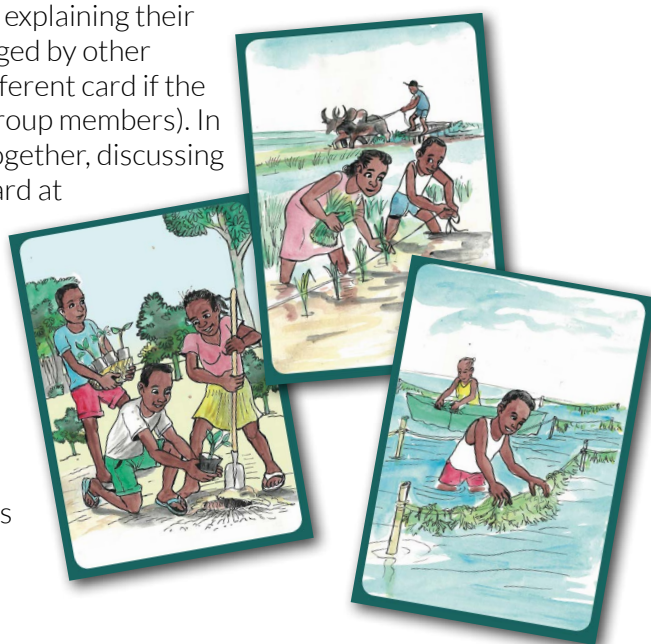
To begin a session, the facilitator presents the cards (spreads them in their hands or places them on the ground) and the general objective of the session (to explore together the links between the community and ecosystem health through storytelling and discussions), then explains a little how the session will work.

Storytelling and discussions

There are numerous possible ways of “playing” with the cards to explore health-environment linkages. Community health agents, school teachers and/or the community-based staff of environmental organisations who are preparing to use the cards with community members may first like to experiment with the cards themselves, for example, trying out different ways of “playing” with the cards to tell stories and stimulate critical thinking.

Some possible ways of “playing” with the cards identified through early trials include:

- The set of cards (or a selection of cards) is divided within a small group of community members. A random card is drawn to start the story and then each group member (one-by-one in turn) carefully chooses a card from their hand to add to the story, explaining their logic as they put it down (their logic can be challenged by other group members and they can be asked to pick a different card if the one they first chose doesn't make sense to other group members). In this way, the small group gradually builds a story together, discussing and checking the logic of the links between each card at each turn, until they've made a fairly extensive story comprising both health and environmental components (perhaps 20-30 cards).
- The facilitator starts by laying out a short sequence of 5-8 cards. A small group of community members is asked by the facilitator to narrate the beginning of this story based on their interpretations of those cards, and then invited to continue the story using the remainder of the cards that they have in their hands.



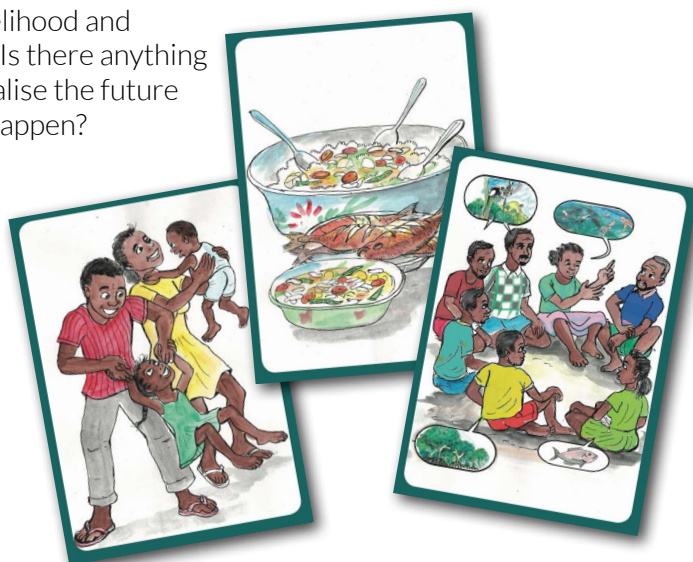
- One person within a small group is invited by the facilitator to use the cards to create and narrate a story (with all other group members silently watching), then the other group members are invited by the facilitator to ask the storyteller questions or make comments about the story.
- Once a story is created (in one of the ways described above or another way), the facilitator could ask group members to identify key turning points or decision points within the story (e.g. the decision of a couple to use / not use family planning, the decision of a community to manage / not manage natural resources collectively) and invite them to experiment with changing these to see how this would change subsequent cards (e.g. the good / poor health of a family, the well-being / degradation of an ecosystem) and the overall outcomes of the original story (e.g. those relating to livelihood diversity, food security, etc).

There are surely other ways of “playing” with the cards too, so please feel free to experiment creatively and let us know what works for you so that we can incorporate more ideas into this facilitation guide!

Once a story has been created (or during the creation of a story), the facilitator may like to ask group members some questions to stimulate critical thinking and reflection. For example:

- Do you think that the behaviours and choices of the characters in this story always lead to the outcomes that we see in this story? Could things have turned out differently for characters in this story even if they had made the same choices?
- Which parts (if any) of this story resonate / correspond with your own experiences and practices - and how? Which parts (if any) of this story don't resonate / correspond with your own experiences and practices - and how?
- How does this story relate to common health, livelihood and environmental practices within your community? Is there anything that you think needs to be changed in order to realise the future that you want - and if yes how could this change happen?

*Note: the facilitator should absolutely **not** critique the stories told by group members, try to use the story cards to promote certain didactic messages about PHE linkages, or try to influence the discussions by inserting their personal point of view at any time. Rather, their role is to facilitate critical thinking and reflection among group members, which may lead to them taking responsibility for the development of health-promoting and environmentally-friendly social norms. All of this in the spirit of upholding human rights, including the reproductive rights of all individuals to choose freely the number and spacing of their births.*



Close

To conclude the session, the facilitator can invite group members to share their feelings about the session as well as any reflections, ideas, lessons, relevant personal experiences, advice or suggested action points. To close the session, the facilitator can summarise the key themes that were discussed (in a neutral way) as well as any key lessons or action points suggested by group members themselves, then thank all of the group members for their participation and encourage them to share their thoughts from this session within their social circles.

Other uses

Although this tool has been designed for use with small groups, the illustrations could also be used with larger groups, for example, to animate PHE presentations with stories created by community members. That is to say, following a small group session, the facilitator could take a photo of the cards arranged on the ground and then produce a PowerPoint presentation with corresponding illustrations so that they can share this story with a wider audience and thus foster critical thinking among an entire community. The feasibility of this approach depends of course on the availability of additional equipment (camera, laptop, projector, generator) so this may not be possible for all organisations.

Feedback on this tool

This is just the first draft of these PHE story cards and this facilitation guide (facilitation guide already revised once following an early pilot), so feedback from all initial users is most welcome and needed to elaborate this facilitation guide further. Facilitators and their supporting organisations are invited and strongly encouraged to complete [this online feedback form](#) in order to enable us to assess the relevance and effectiveness of this tool, and to develop and improve it in response to your feedback.



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