

# WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES TAKE THE LEAD

Women rule in an integrated crop management project that is improving vegetable profitability and food security in the southern Philippines and Australia

## KEY POINTS

- In 2015, the Philippines climbed to ninth in the World Economic Forum's report measuring gender equality among 145 countries, the highest rank in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The strength of women is on display in an ACIAR project that is helping smallholder vegetable producers in the southern Philippines overcome low yields, pests and diseases so as to meet local market demand and improve nutrition and livelihoods.

## BY DR SANDRA MCDUGALL

Leader of Southern Irrigated Cropping Systems, Plant Systems at the NSW Department of Primary Industries

One ACIAR project that stands proud for the preponderance of women taking part as researchers and farmer trainers is an integrated crop management (ICM) project that is testing and rolling out improvements to vegetable production systems in the southern Philippines.

The project's aim is to improve livelihoods and the food security of smallholder vegetable farmers. This is being achieved through research and extension into protected cropping systems, good agricultural practice and integrated pest management. A sub-component also

looks to produce clean seed potatoes through aeroponic techniques.

Female academics lead each of the research groups participating in this ACIAR project from five collaborating universities in the Philippines. Each of these women provides technical and research leadership to our collaborators at the smaller, principally teaching, agricultural universities:

- Dr Zenaida C. Gonzaga is the Philippine vegetable ICM project leader and component leader for agronomy. She is based at the Visayas State University (VSU), Baybay City, Leyte province
- Dr Lucia Borines is the component leader for plant pathology
- Professor Reny Gerona is the component leader for entomology.

Additionally, of the nine research assistants employed on this project, five are women.

Farmer training, using the farmer field school model, is delivered by East-West Seeds training teams, Landcare Philippines and a senior plant protection specialist at the University of the Philippines, Los Banos. All but one trainer is female.

## THE PROJECT LEADER

Dr Zenaida C Gonzaga is an associate professor in the Department of Horticulture at VSU. She currently leads the ACIAR vegetable ICM project

and previously led an ACIAR project that improved farmers' yields by developing cost-effective structures to protect vegetable crops from torrential rain and typhoons. In 2011, she received a John Dillon Fellowship.

## THE PLANT PATHOLOGIST

Dr Lucia Borines is professor at the Department of Pest Management, VSU. She teaches courses in plant pathology and plant protection to undergraduate and graduate students. She leads the plant pathology component of the vegetable ICM project. Additionally, she is component leader of the current ACIAR project 'Tropical tree fruit research and development in the Philippines and Australia to improve productivity, resilience and profitability'.

This follows on from engagement with a previous ACIAR project 'Integrated management of *Phytophthora* disease of durian and jackfruit in the southern Philippines and Australia'. She also served as plant pathologist in a previous ACIAR protected cropping project. Further, she heads VSU's Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, advising farmers, researchers, students and other clients in the Eastern Visayas region on plant disease problems. She was a John Dillon Fellow in 2015.

## THE PEST SPECIALIST

Besides leading the entomology component of the vegetable ICM project, Dr Reny G. Gerona is an associate professor in entomology and the Plant Pest Clinic coordinator at the Department of Pest Management, VSU. In her 35 years of experience in instruction, research and extension she received the Most Outstanding Teacher Award in 2003, was a visiting scientist to Japan under a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) grant in 1992 and a John Dillon Fellow in 2013. She was the entomologist on the ACIAR project 'Development of a cost-effective protected vegetable cropping system in the southern Philippines and Australia'. ■

**ACIAR PROJECT:** HORT/2012/020 'Integrated crop management (ICM) to enhance vegetable profitability and food security in the southern Philippines and Australia'

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**MEDIA LINKS:** Protected vegetable cropping in Visayas, the Philippines at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKkNb0CN0xs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKkNb0CN0xs)



PHOTO: ACIAR

(From left) Dr Zenaida Gonzaga, Dr Lucia Borines and Dr Reny Gerona.