

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

Established by UN Women and the
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2021 UN Women
Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards
Regional Awardee Profile



Winner

AGREA Agricultural System International Inc.



Cherrie D. Atilano
Founding Farmer, CEO, and President

AGREA Agricultural System International Inc.

Country: Philippines
Employees: 11 – 50 employees
Industry: Agriculture

Website
www.agrea.ph



About the Company

AGREA is a for purpose agri-business founded on inclusive, sustainable, and fair-trade practices. AGREA's vision is to create the first of its kind One Island Economy model in the Philippines to alleviate poverty in farming and fishing communities by spearheading three goals; Zero Waste, Zero Hunger, and Zero Insufficiency.

A Leader in Action

Agriculture plays a key role in the Philippine's economy, employing almost 25% of the nation's workforce in 2018.¹ However, farming is seen as a male-dominated profession; Filipino women farmers are outnumbered and overshadowed by men despite contributing equal if not more to the economy given additional unpaid care and household responsibilities. This is evident across islands in the Philippine archipelago that depend heavily on small-scale agriculture. Women are not empowered as key decision-makers in their farms or farmer cooperatives, creating an environment that limits their access to resources, networks, and opportunities for growth.

Cherrie D. Atilano, Founding Farmer and CEO of AGREA, champions gender equality and women's empowerment in the food and agriculture sector through her impactful leadership in farming communities across the Philippines. Cherrie founded AGREA on a small patch of land on the Island Province of Marinduque in 2014 with the goal to empower Filipino farmers, especially women, as change agents in their communities through targeted programs:

- AGREA Social Programs: capacity-building workshops on technical skills, financial literacy, values formation, and entrepreneurship for community farmers and youth.
- AGREA's Farm Estate (Model Farm): 2,500 sqm of land utilized for research and development of farming technologies and workshops on organic gardening.
- The Garden Classroom: schoolyards transformed into gardens to teach elementary school students about food cultivation and develop healthy habits related to nutrition and caring for the environment.
- AGREA Farm School: provides relevant and quality agriculture training through technical and vocational courses (e.g., organic agriculture production, pest management, and goat management).

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=PH>



On a mission to invest in the future of Filipino farmers and support more women to become empowered farmers, Cherrie launched AGREA Farm School in Marinduque in 2017 to accelerate the skills, knowledge, and opportunities available to farmers and provide a venue for farmers to incubate ideas that can spark transformation in their communities. AGREA Farm School in Marinduque is the first of its kind to provide scholarships funded by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), a government agency in the Philippines. TESDA provides a scholarship voucher that supports 25 students per cohort. Training runs for approximately one month, and upon graduation, students receive a National Competency certificate from TESDA that recognizes their competency in agriculture, opening more employment opportunities.

When AGREA Farm School started, less than 20% of the 25 students registered were women. To increase women's participation, Cherrie used education as a tool to integrate an intentional policy to develop gender-sensitive training modules in the schools. The gender-sensitive aspect of modules integrates and highlights soft skills that are introduced at

the start of training which involves dream-building, leadership, values formation and financial literacy. The program then builds upon these foundational soft skills with technical modules focused on sustainable agricultural practices. Training also integrates lessons in agribusiness such as managing finances to expand opportunities in entrepreneurship for all graduates, particularly women. By creating an environment that enables women to access resources, build fundamental skills, and create meaningful connections, women farmers are more confident of their abilities and empowered to lead.

Cherrie's vision for gender equality has equipped and empowered more women to participate and lead in farming communities. AGREA has established one Women Food Producers Association of Marinduque (WFPA) where women Farm School graduates can engage with AGREA as partners for development in areas including sustainable agriculture, farm tourism, and agri-technology. As a result of these efforts, women's participation in the Farm School has increased from 50% in 2018 to 64% in 2020, where out of the current 1,200 Farm School graduates, 768 are women.

“

AGREA Farm School is our way to make education a sustainable development multiplier –especially in the food and agricultural sector. We provide quality agriculture training programs, while promoting a gender equal and gender-sensitive environment.

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- Cherrie D. Atilano

Partnerships for Sustainable Communities

AGREA places collaboration at the center of their work. Through Cherrie's initiatives, AGREA is supported by Marinduque's Local Government Unit (LGU) to prioritize Farm School scholarships for Marinduque residents, enabling greater access to agricultural training for farmers in target areas. A partnership with the Department of Education has enabled AGREA to invest further in Farm School programming and create Garden Classrooms in their schools, encouraging youth to learn and develop an interest in growing their own produce. The achievement of having more than 1,000 farmers graduate could not have been realized without the commitment and support of these partners.

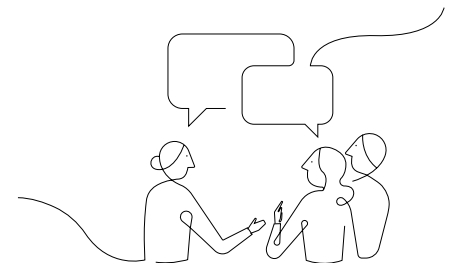
Witnessing the success of the Farm School in Marinduque, the local government of Siargao Island initiated discussions to partner with AGREA. As a result, Siargao's LGU has trusted AGREA to integrate gender sensitive agricultural training through their Farm School to promote women's empowerment within their five-year Siargao Food Sustenance and Security Project. Through the Siargao project, AGREA launched the "More Love for Women Farmers" initiative in 2019. With an initial target of registering 500 women farmers for the training, to their surprise, 800 women farmers signed up. To date, 139 women farmers have graduated with the support of TESDA's scholarship voucher that funds 25 students per cohort. AGREA plans to provide scholarships to support the remaining 700 women farmers in the next three to five years. In Siargao, it is women who are predominantly responsible for tending to farmlands, while men work in the service sector. Moving ahead, AGREA aims to reach and empower even more women farmers to contribute to improved food security on the island.

Pivoting through Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be one of AGREA's biggest challenges, especially to their mission of continuing to engage more women and youth in their Farm Schools. In-person meetings were not only limited by lockdowns, but women had less time to dedicate to their own pursuits given the increased care and domestic burdens spurred by the pandemic. While AGREA's Farm School training was previously conducted face-to-face, AGREA has now pivoted to a hybrid community-based training (CBT) model that combines online and community-based in-person training.

The hybrid program is focused on urban agriculture. Urban areas have been greatly affected by the pandemic since urban food systems rely heavily on rural farming communities. Growing food in urban areas is also a challenge given there is limited land available, soil is of poor quality, and urban dwellers have little to no knowledge on how to grow food. As of early 2022, AGREA had trained 200 women in an urban community in Metro Manila on sustainable and zero-waste urban food gardening, nutrition, and financial literacy. Trainees were able to establish their own home and community food gardens, creating community resilience in the face of challenges in the pandemic.

A total of 650 people participated in AGREA's hybrid program, and the majority are women. By being more flexible and open to alternative learning methods, AGREA can reach to women beyond farming communities and use education as a sustainable development multiplier to empower women across the food and agriculture sector.



Women's Empowerment Principles



High-Level Corporate Leadership



Treat all Women and Men Fairly at Work without Discrimination



Employee Health, Well-Being and Safety



Education and Training for Career Advancement




Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices




Community Initiatives and Advocacy



Measurement and Reporting

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