

Pro-poor Growth Story

Communicating for change: Saving pigs in Timor-Leste

African Swine Fever (ASF), a highly contagious pig disease, appeared in Timor-Leste in September 2019 and has since killed approximately 50,000 pigs. Pigs are ubiquitous in Timor-Leste. The animals are an economic commodity, as well as a social one and are used as food, gifts and markers of social status. Since pig rearing is practiced by most rural households, this ASF outbreak presents a major threat to livelihoods and the economy as a whole.

This prompted MDF to collaborate with Timor's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) to launch an awareness campaign on the disease. In addition to spreading information about ASF, the initiative promotes pig rearing best practices and biosecurity to reduce the spread of the virus and prevent pig deaths. With the help of MAF, technical experts and the Australian Department of Agriculture, MDF developed engaging, informative communications material. The project required engagement with multiple media platforms, close collaboration with market stakeholders and strategic thinking.

The ultimate goal of the MDF-MAF awareness initiative is to bring about positive behavioural and social change to reduce ASF-related pig deaths. The team determined that an effectively designed communications campaign with appropriately targeted key messages would reach the intended audience strategically. The campaign has been a resounding success.

MDF began the project by determining the target audience, that is, households who raise pigs. This group includes both male and female farmers, who live in urban and rural areas and speak Tetun, as well as other local languages.

The campaign is based on a series of key messages drafted with pig rearing practices in mind and, specifically, what pig farmers should or should not do. The communications informed recipients what ASF is, how to keep pigs from contracting the virus, what to do when pigs are sick or dying, and how to safely transport pigs.



Understanding the media landscape

To create communications products that would resonate with farmers and be relevant to their realities, it was vital that the team understand how the farmers interacted with various media. For example, whereas newspapers are not widely read or distributed in Timor-Leste, television and radio enjoy a wide audience. Social media is used across the board, with urban and rural farmers differing only in terms of access to network data and social media platforms.



In Timor-Leste, most people own a mobile phone – and some have two connections, resulting in a **111%** mobile connectivity rate in relation to the total population. Although only **39%** of Timorese people have internet access, **31%** are active social media users. (Jan, 2020)





Launching a multi-pronged campaign

The ASF awareness initiative was launched in July 2020 and began on social media. The success of the campaign lies in the diverse range



Mainstream media

MDF used a combination of television, radio and SMS messages for the campaign and utilised tools such as short **videos** of real farmers sharing best practices on ASF prevention methods. The information was made more credible by using government-owned national television and radio stations.



Social media

a two-month campaign with short videos and snappy posts for the **MDF** and **MAF** Facebook pages, with the hashtags #ASFawareness and #Salvafahi ('save pigs' in Tetun). As of end-2020, the campaign had reached an estimated 330,000 people across Timor-Leste. MDF also engaged three Timorese social media influencers to run a two-week prevention and interactive promotional giveaway campaign to create awareness.



Cinema screenings

MDF collaborated with Cinema Lorosae, a mobile cinema that takes films to remote villages, to screen an ASF **video** after a short presentation. As of December 2020, Cinema Lorosae had completed a total of 19 screenings, reaching 8,000 people.



Print media

MDF and MAF developed written material for outreach work, including **brochures** and **posters**, which were made available on the two organisations' websites. These were distributed to agri-input shops and village chief offices. **Banners** were placed at airports and land border posts to discourage the cross-border transport of pigs and pork products.



Hotline

All external media directed farmers seeking more information to an MAF telephone hotline, manned by MAF's veterinary technicians.



Farmer trainings

In coordination with another MDF intervention, the Timor-Leste country team hired a technical expert to train and advise pig farmers on biosecurity and good pig rearing. In 2020, a total of 26 sessions were completed for 515 farmers, including 256 women.



As part of the ASF awareness campaign, informational text messages were sent to the **600,000** subscribers of telecommunications provider, Telemor. Of these, close to **16,000** subscribers registered to receive more information. Through this text messaging platform, farmers continue to receive information on pig feeding, pen building and cleaning, how to bury and report dead pigs, and other ASF prevention methods.



We built a pig pen so our pigs can't roam around and catch the virus from other pigs.

Betina,
A pig farmer from Baucau.

Measuring change

Assessing the reach and impact of our activities is a central aspect of MDF's work. The team in Timor-Leste conducted face-to-face interviews and engaged a telecommunications provider to conduct phone surveys.

Of a sample of 200 farmers covering Timor-Leste's 13 districts, 84 per cent had received information on ASF through the campaign, and 92 per cent of these reported that the information was useful. The videos broadcast on television and informational text messages were the most commonly cited distribution channels.

Most of the farmers took action after receiving the information. The most common newly embraced preventive action was to build pig pens and regularly clean pens. Many farmers also changed their feeding practices. Farmers who did not take any action reported pig deaths but shared plans to re-stock and follow preventive steps in the next 12 months. Nearly all farmers said their pigs stopped dying once they corralled them in pens.



I found out from television video and stopped any visitors from entering our pig farm. My wife read about not feeding pigs leftover food, from her phone text messages. We have been following these two prevention measures and our pigs are not getting sick anymore.

Gregorio Lelan,
A pig farmer from Oecusse.




When a farmer followed the suggested precautions against ASF



An average of **2** pigs were saved per household.

Survey respondents said that after following the campaign's recommendations, they observed better livestock health


68% of farmers experiencing better pig growth


18% reporting an additional **4** piglets per pig on average.