



The silent crisis: African Swine Fever

While COVID-19 dominated attention in 2020, another crisis was unfolding in parallel, with the potential to have an even greater impact on poor women and men in the Pacific, particularly in PNG and Timor-Leste: the highly contagious African Swine Fever (ASF).

In Timor-Leste, around 82 per cent of households raise pigs, which are used for cultural ceremonies and as a store of wealth – pigs make up a significant part of the asset base for many rural households. In PNG, about 600,000 households in the Highlands region alone rear nearly 1.8 million pigs, providing an irreplaceable source of protein and, like Timor-Leste, contributing a significant proportion to households' asset base.

In Timor-Leste, MDF has been the main vehicle for delivering the Australian Government's ASF response. First, through a major nation-wide communications campaign MDF reached a significant proportion of the population, resulting in changed pig rearing practices and, therefore, avoided pig losses for tens of thousands of households. Second, MDF is supporting the private sector to introduce practices that not only prevent the

spread of the disease, but also increase the productivity of pig farms. This includes increasing the supply of quality feed and better pig breeds, as well as using pig pens instead of allowing pigs to forage.

In PNG, there are a number of initiatives, such as PHAMA Plus and the Food and Agriculture Organization, that are looking at the biosecurity implications of ASF and supporting public communications campaigns. MDF is therefore approaching the problem from a different angle. Many of the factors that help raise productivity of pig farms also help prevent the spread of ASF. To complement the efforts of other programs, MDF is supporting the increased use of improved feed, which supports pig growth but also reduces the spread of the disease as it minimises wild foraging. The same applies to using pig pens. MDF is also working to increase the supply of healthy piglets with a faster growing breed variety; this will help restock the national herd while improving farmer incomes. These interventions are discussed in greater detail in Timor-Leste and PNG country chapters.