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This presentation explores how risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) can help translate information and awareness into practical action during animal health emergencies. It focuses on a central issue: encouraging farmers and communities to report suspected disease early. This depends not only on the information they receive, but also on their trust in the people and systems responding to the situation.



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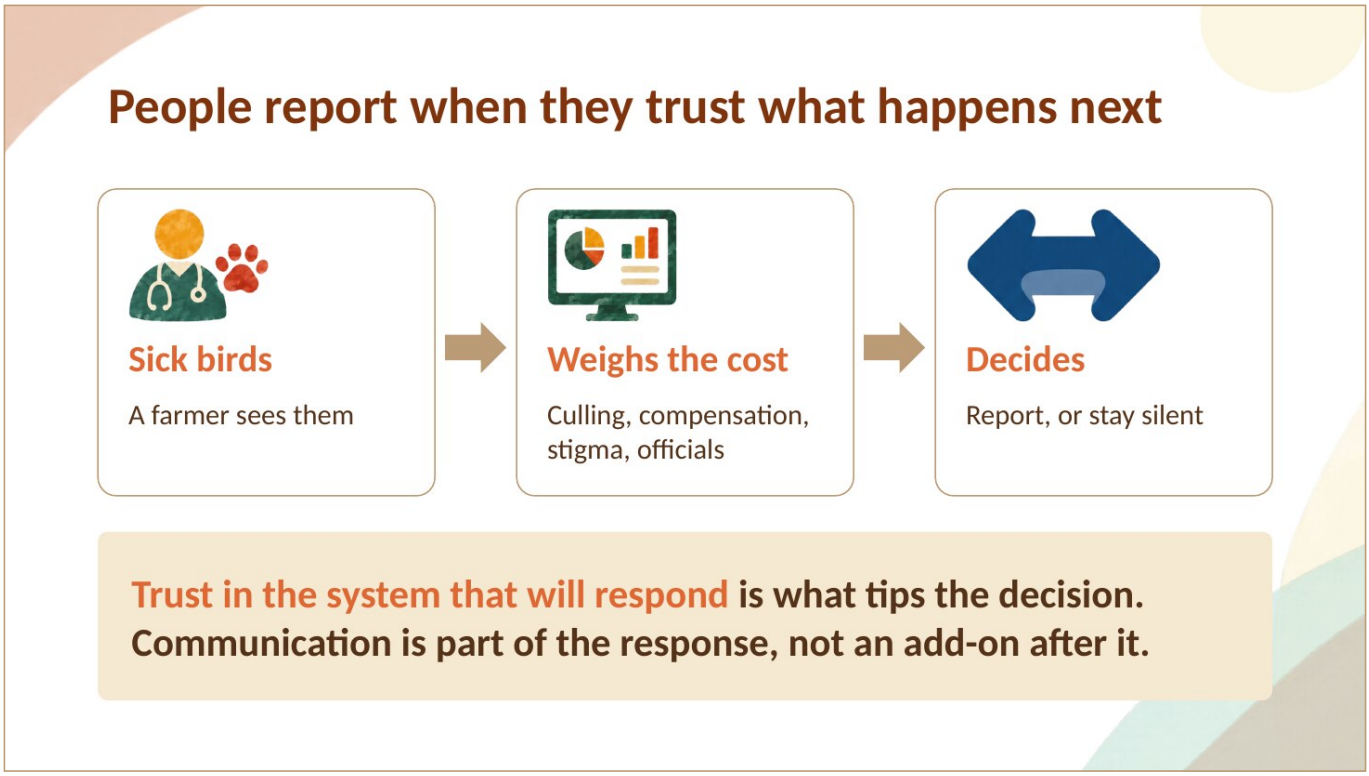
The discussion begins with a simple question: why might a farmer choose not to report sick animals? Participants were invited to consider the decision from the farmer's perspective. This helps shift the focus from assuming that people lack information or awareness to understanding the practical concerns, risks and experiences that influence their decisions.



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There are several reasons why farmers may hesitate to report suspected disease. These include fear of losing their animals through culling, uncertainty about whether or when compensation will be provided, stigma, distrust of officials, and difficulty recognising disease signs.

Farmers weigh the potential costs of reporting. When the consequences are unclear, remaining silent may appear to be the safer or more rational choice. Effective communication must therefore address these concerns, not simply repeat instructions to report.

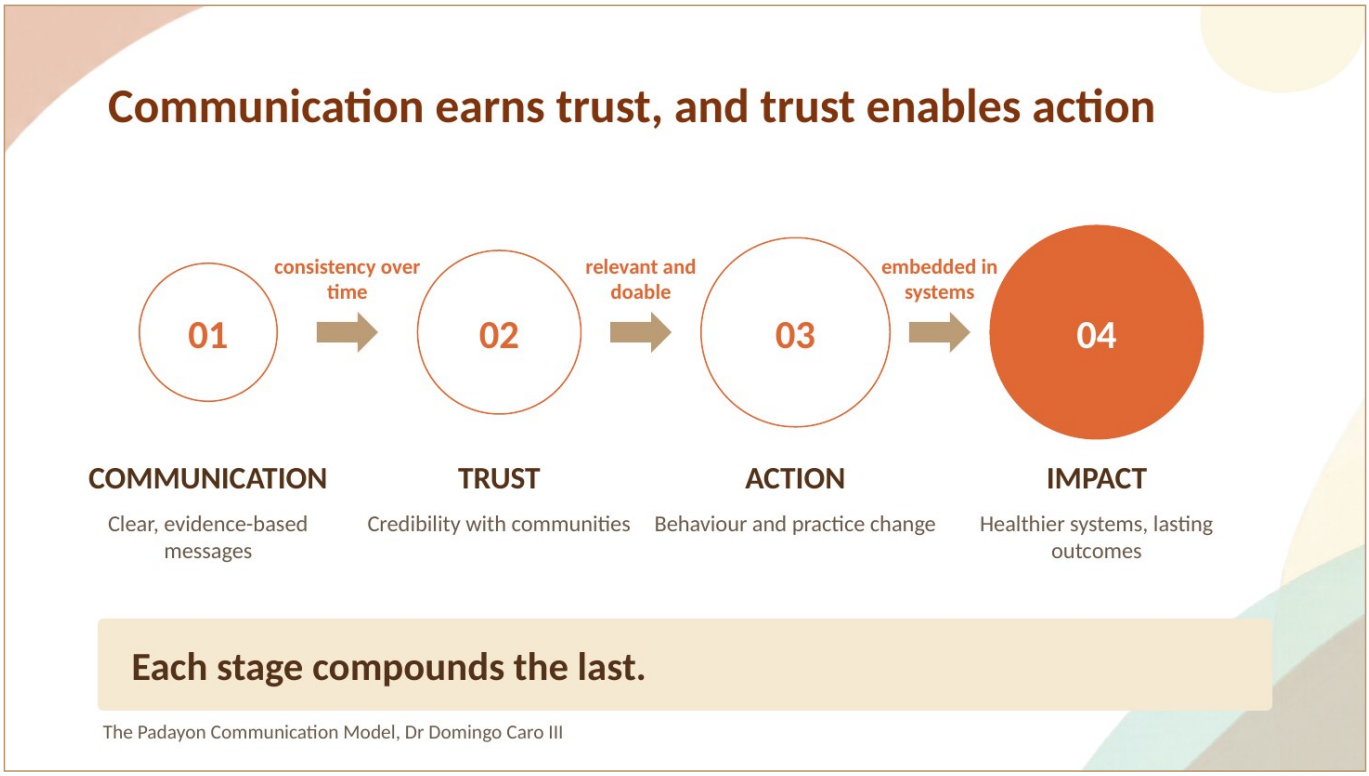


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When farmers see sick animals, they make a decision about whether to report or remain silent. That decision is influenced by what they expect will happen after they contact the authorities, including possible culling, compensation arrangements and how officials will treat them.

Past experiences also shape how people respond during future crises. If previous government responses have discouraged reporting, failed to provide promised support or left communities feeling unsupported, farmers may be less likely to report suspected disease again. These experiences can reinforce non-reporting as a behaviour.

Trust in the response system can influence whether a farmer reports early. Communication is therefore part of the emergency response itself, not an activity to be added after technical decisions have been made. Clear information about the response process, supported by actions that match what authorities communicate, can help communities understand what to expect.



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The Padayon Communication Model illustrates a pathway from communication to impact:

Communication: Clear, evidence-based messages help people understand the situation and what they can do.

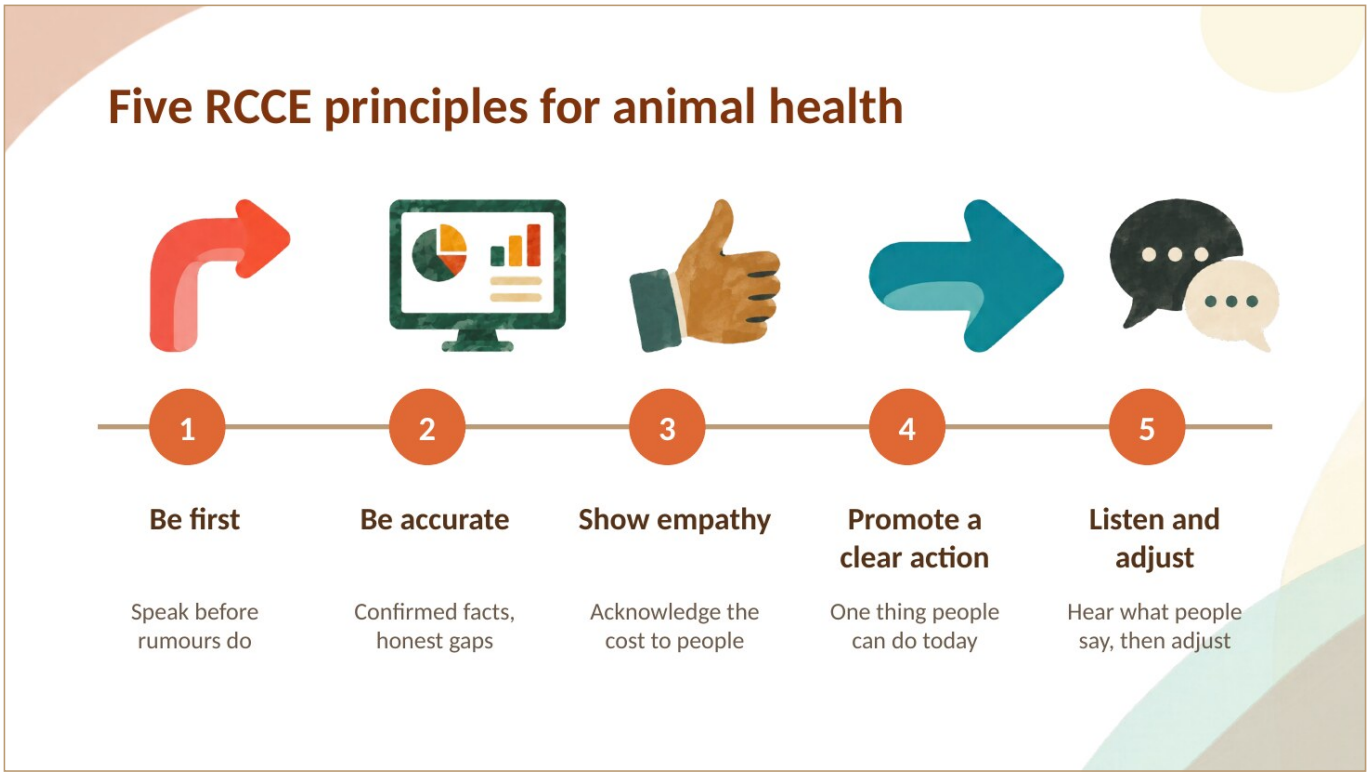
Trust: Consistent and credible communication helps build confidence among communities.

Action: Trust can support changes in behaviour and practice.

Impact: Sustained action contributes to healthier systems and lasting outcomes.

The model highlights three considerations: communication should be consistent over time, relevant and doable for the intended audience, and embedded in the systems responsible for responding. Each stage builds on and reinforces the previous one.

The Padayon Communication Model, Dr Domingo Caro III.



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Five practical principles can guide communication during an animal health emergency:

Be first: Communicate before rumours and misinformation fill the information gap.

Be accurate: Share confirmed facts and be honest about what is not yet known.

Show empathy: Acknowledge the impact and costs that disease and response measures may have on people.

Promote a clear action: Tell people what they can do now.

Listen and adjust: Pay attention to community concerns and use what is heard to improve communication.

These principles help make communication timely, credible, relevant and responsive to the needs of affected communities.



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During an outbreak, there is pressure to communicate quickly. However, sharing unverified information can undermine confidence and create confusion. A useful approach is to communicate three things clearly: what is known based on confirmed information, what is not yet known and is still being investigated, and when the next update will be provided.

Giving a specific time for the next update helps manage expectations, even when all the answers are not yet available. Consistency is essential: communicate what is known, what remains uncertain and when people can expect to hear from you again. Then honour that commitment, even if the update is simply to explain that there is no significant new information.



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Technical information is important, but a long list of facts does not necessarily tell people what they should do. During an emergency, communication should make the required action easy to identify and understand.

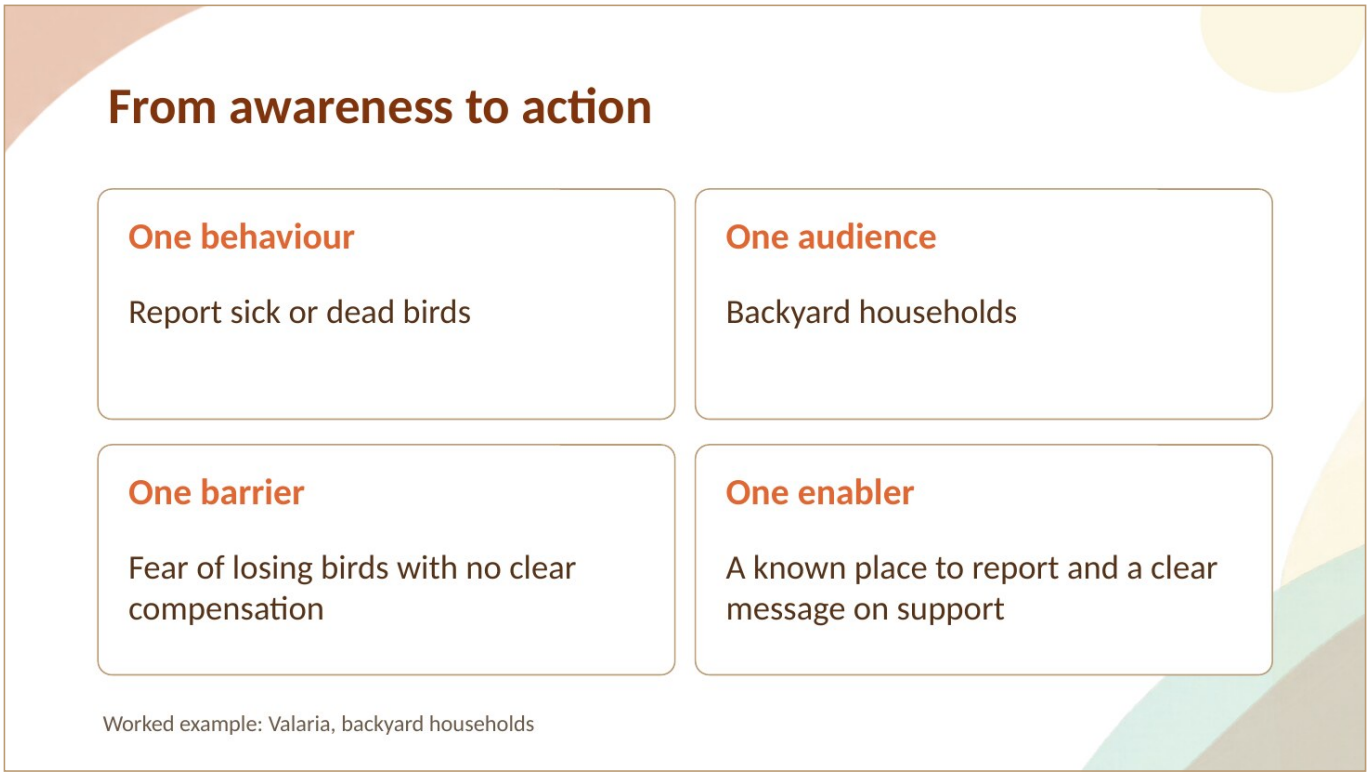
For example, rather than focusing only on information about the virus, outbreak locations or market effects, a message can ask farmers to report sick or dead birds to their local veterinary office that day. It can also acknowledge the impact on their families and livelihoods and explain that information about available support will be shared.



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Risk communication is not only about sending messages. Community engagement means creating opportunities to listen, understand concerns and respond to feedback.

Listening channels may include hotlines, community meetings, social media and market visits. Trusted messengers may include village leaders, para-veterinarians and traders. Information gathered through these channels should influence what authorities communicate and how they respond. Without listening, communication risks being based on assumptions rather than the realities experienced by communities.



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Moving from awareness to action requires identifying the specific behaviour that needs to happen and understanding what may prevent or enable it. The Valaria example focuses on encouraging backyard households to report sick or dead birds.

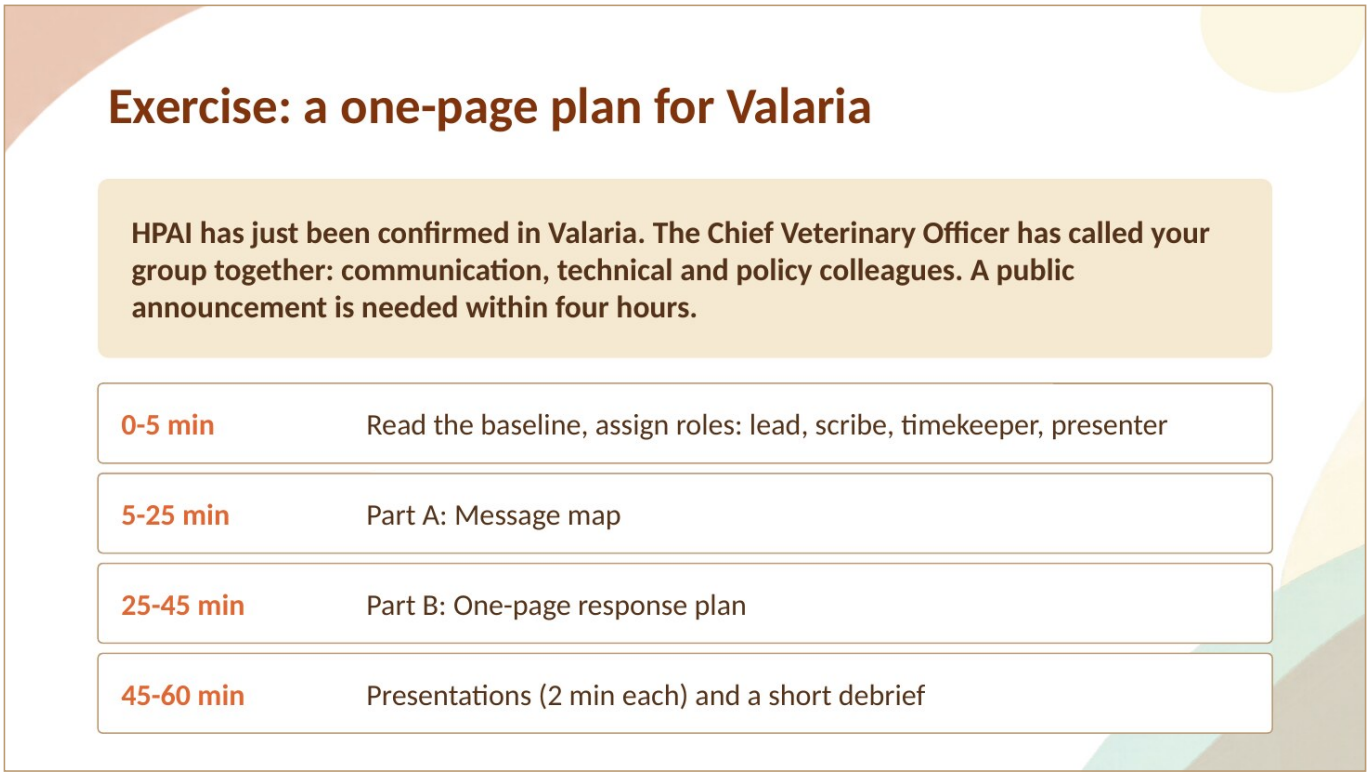
Behaviour: Report sick or dead birds.

Audience: Backyard households.

Barrier: Fear of losing birds, combined with uncertainty about compensation.

Enabler: A known place to report, together with clear information about what happens after reporting and what support, if any, is available.

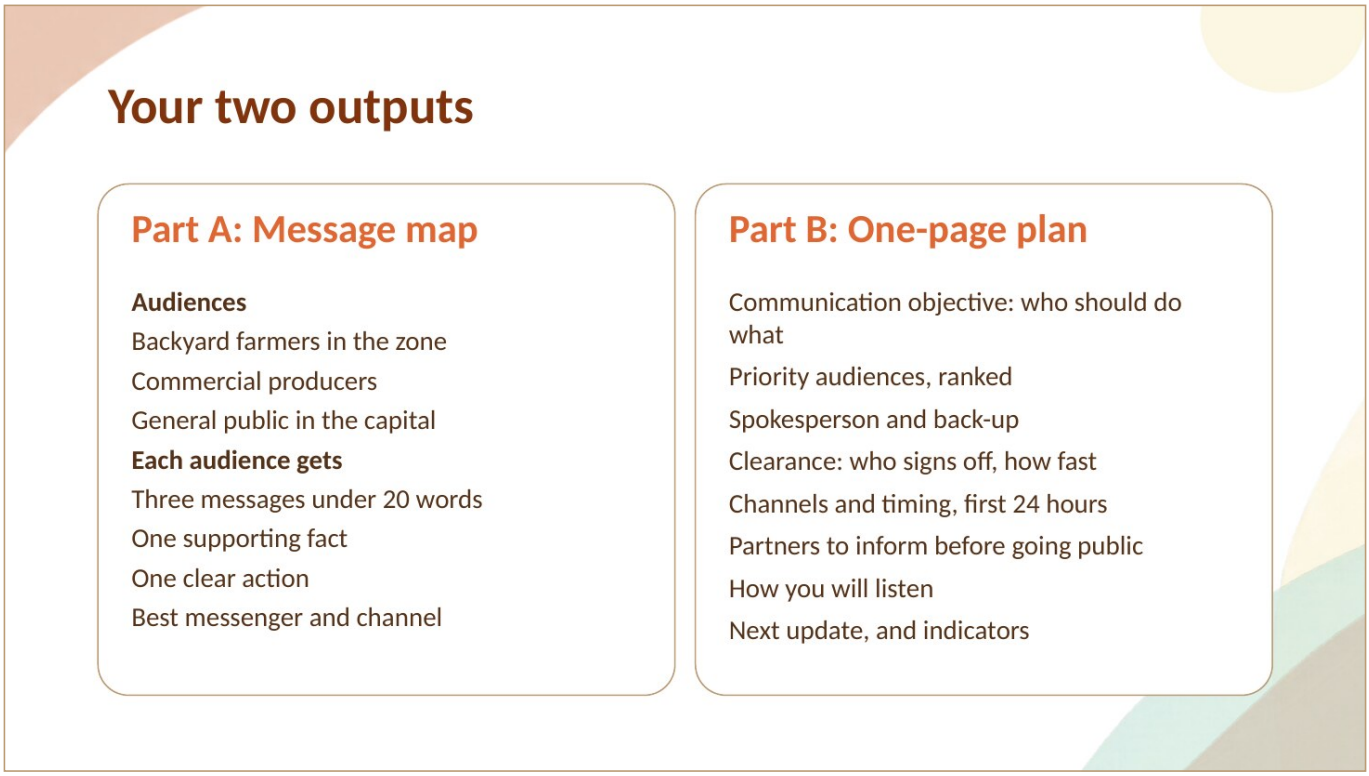
This approach helps make communication more focused by connecting the requested action with the audience's actual concerns and circumstances.



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In the group exercise, participants were asked to respond to a fictional situation in which highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) had been confirmed in Valaria. The Chief Veterinary Officer had brought communication, technical and policy colleagues together, with a public announcement required within four hours.

Working in mixed-role groups, participants were asked to develop a practical communication response. The exercise was designed to demonstrate how technical, policy and communication colleagues can work together under time pressure.



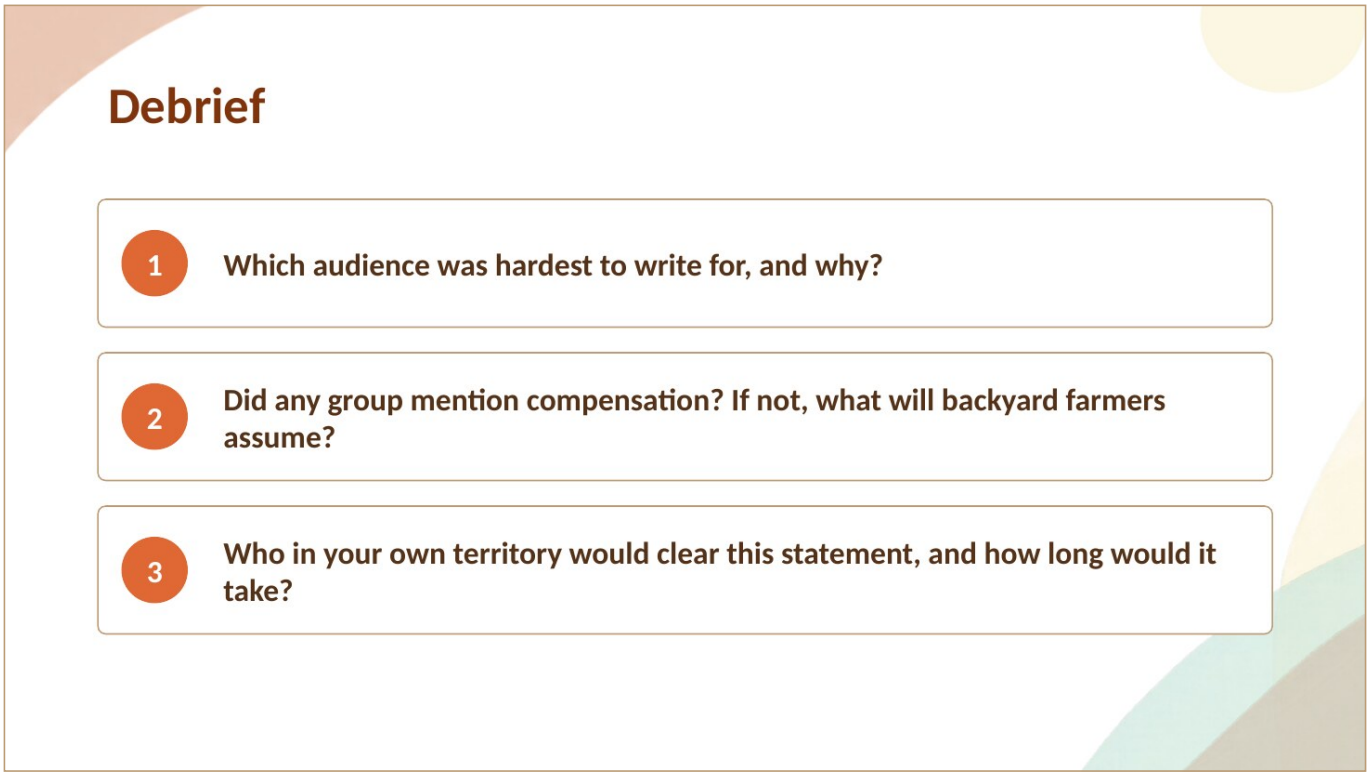
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Each group was asked to produce two outputs.

Part A: A message map. Groups developed messages for three audiences: backyard farmers in the affected zone, commercial producers and the general public in the capital. For each audience, they were asked to prepare three short messages, each under 20 words, supported by one fact and a clear action. They also identified an appropriate messenger and communication channel.

Part B: A one-page response plan. Groups identified the communication objective, priority audiences, spokesperson and back-up, clearance arrangements, channels and timing for the first 24 hours, partners to inform, listening mechanisms, the next update and indicators for monitoring the response.

Together, these outputs connect what needs to be communicated with how the response will be organised and delivered.



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The debrief invited participants to reflect on the practical challenges of developing an outbreak communication response. The discussion focused on which audience was most difficult to address, whether groups had considered compensation in their messages, and who would be responsible for clearing a public statement in their own territory.

These questions highlighted the importance of understanding audience concerns, particularly the consequences farmers may associate with reporting, as well as having clear and timely internal approval arrangements.



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The presentation closed by reinforcing the connection between communication, trust, action and impact. Effective risk communication is not simply about distributing information. It is part of the animal health response and requires clear messages, an understanding of community concerns, trusted relationships and mechanisms for listening and adapting.

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