

**Opening Speech by the OIE Sub Regional Representative for  
Southern Africa, Dr Bonaventure Mtei (P. Bastiaensen,  
representing) to the OIE Regional Seminar on Veterinary  
Communication**

**Gaborone Sun Conference Centre,  
Gaborone - Botswana - 22 - 24 September 2009**

**Hon (Assistant) Minister,**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Colleagues,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour, on behalf of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and on my own behalf to welcome you all to this meeting on veterinary communication. We sincerely thank you all for coming. Thank your Excellency, Hon (Assistant) Minister, for availing yourself to come and officiate this meeting. We are also most grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Government of the Republic of Botswana for hosting this seminar.

I would also like to acknowledge with appreciation financial support that the OIE has received from the World Animal Health and Welfare Fund and from the European Commission, to organise this meeting. I am delivering this welcome address on behalf of Dr. Bonaventure Mtei, the OIE Sub-Regional Representative for Southern Africa, who could not be with us today, as his father passed away last week and he had to travel to his homeland of Tanzania. Our thoughts are with you, Mzee, and with your family.

Hon Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will be deliberating on animal health communication issues during this workshop and in so doing we must carefully examine current perceptions and in particular those of our target audiences. Animal health interventions are often complex in

nature and as such our communication objectives should be simple and measurable, underpinned by clear statement of principles. Some of the principles are simple and self-evident. For example, we must be honest, to the point and credible with our peers and of course cost-effective. However, there are deeper and more delicate issues also worth considering.

Our animal health communication strategies need to deliver clear messages. Appropriate knowledge and skills are therefore required to develop 'key messages' in our animal health interventions. It is advisable we avoid blanket or overly complex statements or indeed having too many messages flying around. A good benchmark is the so called *Dog and Duck* test i.e. **if you explained your message to someone you have just met in a bar, would they understand what you meant?** We should always remember that our audiences, including journalists and policymakers are today overloaded with information and simply won't remember our messages if they are too complex or too highly scientific. It's useful for us to consider what our messages should look like in the different formats like media releases, reports, briefs, newspaper articles or website pages to name a few. It is also useful to think in advance about stories and packages of animal health information that will improve our visibility by targeted and prioritised audiences.

Hon Minister,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A useful question to ask is: if we had half the resources including half the time to spend on communications, how would we prioritise our audiences without ignoring the so called '*usual suspects*'. What may seem like less significant audiences such as women's organisations, ambitious backbench MPs, keen freelance journalists and so forth are worth cultivating. We don't want a '*mud against the wall*' approach of targeting everyone; however it is worth having a selective list of 'up coming' audiences like gender and youth groups, whose influence is likely to grow and develop over time.

Having prioritised a list of audiences, it is then important to think about the most appropriate channels to reach them. Only then can we start to frame the main activities and preferred communications channels like say:-

- ✓ Regular newsletters rather than occasional media briefings;
- ✓ Large national conferences rather than a series of smaller regional seminars;  
or
- ✓ Electronic bulletins rather than face-to-face contacts.

This being said, while seminars like this one are a good thing, accompanying social events are equally important in facilitating networking and information exchange. We should not underestimate the value of personal, direct contact with our audiences. This can often be an effective form of information dissemination, invaluable when compared to the new gizmo's of e-mail, sms, rss, wap and indeed, facebook and the likes.

An important question also arises ....How will we know if we have succeeded in communicating effectively? In our communication strategies, when thinking through the objectives and activities, it is important to build in performance indicators and evaluation measures to include tracking awareness 'before and after' among important audiences.

Evaluations and feedback from events like this one, tracking media coverage and possible parliamentary discussions about animal health issues and monitoring website usage are but a few examples of performance indicators.

Building the discipline of evaluation and monitoring into communication strategies from the start allows us to use the findings to revisit and refine our strategies in keeping with knowledge and skills development.

These are some of the issues we will have to address during this seminar and at the end of the day we should be able to agree on a set of resolutions for follow up by each and everyone here present in our different capacities. None of us here in the room can pretend to know it all and to have it all. This meeting serves primarily to identify where we stand, what is lacking, and how we can address shortcomings and new challenges in the future. For this to happen, the OIE, with its partner organisations such as the FAO and the African Union, is there to assist in whichever way it can.

Hon Minister,

Once again thank you for being here with us and thank you all for your attention.