



Global Alliance for Rabies Control
PARACON
Pan-African Rabies Control Network



2nd GARC-WAP rabies stakeholder workshop under the auspices of the Pan-African Rabies Control Network (PARACON) Meeting Report

Summary

The 2nd GARC-WAP rabies stakeholder workshop under the auspices of the Pan-African Rabies Control Network (PARACON) was held in Accra, Ghana, on 26 and 27 November 2019. The focus of this workshop was to provide a select number of West African countries with targeted support – specifically using and implementing the recently developed rabies control tools from the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC).

Government-nominated rabies focal persons from both the animal and human health sectors from the following countries participated in the workshop: Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Introductory session

After the welcome address delivered by Professor Louis Nel, the Executive Director of GARC, delegates were given the opportunity to introduce themselves and share their current concerns, problems or vision for rabies control in their countries.

The common remarks that arose from the session included:

- The need to improve education and awareness of rabies amongst the community, especially children;
- The challenges associated with free-roaming dogs and how to promote responsible dog ownership;
- The challenges associated with coordinating rabies control activities in the country;
- The need to improve surveillance and mass dog vaccination efforts; and
- The requirement of data to advocate for improved governmental support for rabies control activities.

During this session, representatives of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) also expressed their support towards improving capacity within the national veterinary services in target countries.

Following the update on the scope of the PARACON network and its activities, support and available tools, representatives from each country had the opportunity to present on their country's progress towards rabies elimination. All countries had previously undertaken a Stepwise Approach towards Rabies Elimination (SARE) assessment, either at a regional PARACON meeting ($n=2$), or during an in-country SARE workshop ($n=5$) and used this information to measure recent progress and the accomplishment of activities. Some highlights included the establishment of national rabies control action plans in countries that previously lacked a national plan, an increase in governmental support for national rabies action plans in countries with existing plans, and several mass dog vaccination campaigns that took in place in 2019. Contrarily, common challenges included the lack of community sensitization and weak surveillance data (based on inadequate diagnostic capacity and/or sample submission), exacerbating already limited advocacy efforts that resulted in insufficient governmental support and funding for rabies control programs.



Workshop 1: Rabies Epidemiological Bulletin, Level 1 training

During the interactive session focusing on the use of the Rabies Epidemiological Bulletin (REB), all of the delegates had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the REB user interface, the process of submitting data to the REB, and generating visual outputs of the data for further dissemination through the REB Level 1 workshop. All delegates successfully completed the final assessment for the workshop and were awarded certificates of completion. These certificates serve to indicate that they are trained in the basic use of the REB and are now eligible to attend the REB Level 2 training workshop to further hone their skills for the optimal use of the freely available REB.

Workshop 2: Using the “Rabies Case Surveillance” component

The second workshop introduced delegates to the REB’s Rabies Case Surveillance (RCS) component. During this workshop delegates used actual confirmed human and animal rabies case data from their countries to update the RCS data for their country. The REB subsequently proceeded to automatically update country-specific maps and graphs to reflect this data in less than an hour after submission. Since becoming familiar with the RCS component, the delegates have ongoing access to rabies “hotspot” maps that can be continuously updated without the need for any GIS skills or knowledge. In addition to the hands-on training, detailed protocols and training videos were provided to each delegate for future reference, ensuring the ability to have continued use of this component after the workshop.

Workshop 3: Using the Rabies Vaccination Tracker and the Rabies Treatment Tracker components

For the following session, delegates were split into two respective groups: one group from the animal health sector and the other consisting of those from the human health sector.

Delegates from the human health sector received training in the use of the Rabies Treatment Tracker (RTT) component of the REB. The RTT is the latest component to be developed by GARC and focuses on assisting countries to collect pertinent human health data at the clinic-level – specifically data on PEP compliance, human vaccine usage, and treatment information. Using data from their country, it was illustrated how patients can be tracked throughout their treatment regimen and how automated reminder messages can be sent to improve patient compliance and continue to save lives from rabies. This community-level resolution of surveillance data helps to ensure that accurate and meaningful data is collected for informed action and response.

Delegates from the animal health sector had the opportunity to investigate the use of the Rabies Vaccination Tracker (RVT) and how data can be collected in the field during a vaccination campaign using either the GARC Data Logger (GDL) or the RVT mobile application. Mock data collected during this session was used to demonstrate how to log data from vaccinated animals – with either the GDL or RVT App – and how to upload this data directly onto the REB. Additional benefits of the GDLs were discussed, including the possibility of using the GDLs for dog census, tracking of sterilization campaigns, and even tracking other diseases. Once the data had been uploaded onto the REB, maps and graphs were automatically generated to display the vaccination data from the day. The extreme accuracy of the GDL devices was also noted, distinguishing mock vaccinated animals to within half a meter on the map, making the use of the GDLs and the RVT mobile application ideal for tracking door-to-door mass vaccination campaigns.

During the REB workshops, the delegates raised important questions and discussion points about the REB that were discussed in more detail. These included questions on: Data privacy and security – that the data entered onto the REB belongs to the country and cannot be used by GARC without permission



from the country; The customization of the REB dashboard and outputs – where the visual outputs generated by the REB can be adapted to fit a country's specific needs; and the possibility to analyze data from several REB components in the same visuals – for example, where maps from the RVT and RCS components can be overlaid to show vaccinations and reported cases on the same map.

Workshop 4: Dog Population Management

Dog Population Management (DPM) was a strong theme throughout the meeting. Therefore, in the afternoon session presented by Dr Emily Mudoga, the Companion Animals Campaign Manager for Africa at World Animal Protection, the focus was on strengthening knowledge on DPM – specifically in the context of rabies. A detailed overview of DPM and its various components was provided to answer some of the initial questions and to provide critical information regarding DPM, the ineffectiveness of culling and humanely addressing challenges faced by free-roaming dogs in particular. Available tools for guidance when planning a DPM strategy were also presented before delegates had the opportunity to discuss their country's specific concerns and requirements around managing dog populations in smaller break-away groups. The workshop was built around the following key questions:

- Is the dog the problem or the symptom of the problem?
- Who are the key stakeholders in DPM programs?
- Which DPM components can you identify for your country to implement in the near future?

Critically, through unanimous agreement, the dog itself was not identified as the problem, but rather the victim. Contrarily, the owner of the animal and the community at-large was determined to be the culprit for free-roaming and mismanaged dog populations. The need for community awareness, education and sensitization were determined to be critical factors and priority activities towards improving DPM and easing the challenges faced by free-roaming dogs in communities, especially in terms of rabies control and elimination. Through addressing these key questions, representatives from each country identified target areas where humane DPM could be integrated in rabies control efforts in the coming years.

Final Session

Delegates were provided with an update on all the online education courses available on the GARC Education Platform (GEP). In addition to providing empirical data on the GEP graduates across the region, possible avenues of increasing the number of graduates was also discussed. These included the possibility of integrating the courses into veterinary and healthcare curriculums and registering the courses for Continued Professional Development (CPD) points. Lastly, avenues whereby the GEP courses could be integrated into existing rabies control strategies to improve education and sensitization were discussed, with the representatives from Cote d'Ivoire providing a comprehensive overview of how they achieved this in their own country.

During the discussion of the United Against Rabies Global Strategic Plan, the representatives from Cote d'Ivoire shared their experiences on the development of a short briefing document that will be submitted to ministers to sign in support of the existing national rabies control plan. This document highlights the preventable human deaths due to rabies, and also the larger economic impact of these deaths. It stresses the importance of protecting the community against rabies through mass dog vaccination, and that a protected population also provides long-term economic benefit to the country. The economic impact of mass dog vaccination was highlighted to demonstrate its economic benefit over other preventative measures, such as post-exposure prophylaxis. This document will be signed by ministers from various ministries including finance, environment, health, education and



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agriculture. Documents such as these will assist countries to progress their rabies elimination efforts by making the case to their respective governments that rabies control programs should be prioritized and funded.

In closing, Professor Nel remarked on the professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm of all delegates during the workshop. Delegates were thanked for their participation and hard work. Several delegates expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to attend the workshop.

Meeting Outcomes

- All country focal persons (n=14) from seven African countries became certified REB Level 1 users
- All delegates were trained in the use of the RCS component of the REB
- All delegates representing the animal health sector were trained in the use of the GDL and RVT app for tracking mass dog vaccination events
- All delegates representing the human health sector were trained in the use of the RTT component of the REB to facilitate tracking potentially exposed people attending health facilities
- All delegates improved their understanding of DPM, including the importance of incorporating DPM components in rabies control efforts.
- All delegates were provided continued, free access to the REB and all its components, facilitated by detailed protocols and training videos in English and French.
- Regional cooperation between delegates was promoted through discussions on shared challenges and success stories, and the sharing of information.
- Delegates were updated on the UAR Strategic Plan and were unanimous in pledging support for the Zero By 30 goal.