



## 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Regional Rabies Focal persons in East Africa

Based on the successful approach of the Panel of Rabies Program Directors of the Americas (REDIPRA) towards rabies control and elimination in Latin America, the idea was conceived to develop similar structures for various sub-regions in Africa. These smaller sub-regional panels of rabies focal persons, operating under the umbrella of the Pan African Rabies Control Network (PARACON), would collaborate, share and disseminate pertinent rabies information among relevant communities to drive international co-operative initiatives towards rabies control and elimination on the African continent. In turn, these communities are envisioned to feed more detailed sub-regional knowledge and information into the greater regional PARACON network.

In light of this vision, the first regional rabies focal persons meeting was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 7-9 February 2017 and was hosted collaboratively by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC) and the Kenya Zoonotic Disease Unit (Kenya ZDU). As rabies control strategies are developed in East Africa, this meeting was intended to bring together rabies focal persons to discuss how individual country plans can be coordinated within communities, regions and the larger African continent.

The participants attending the first regional rabies focal persons meeting represented the ministries of health, agriculture, and one health programs from selected East African countries. During the course of the workshop, 10 country delegates from Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania and 25 international partners (many of which had specific interests and expertise in each of the represented countries) gathered to share their knowledge, assess their progress towards rabies control and elimination and improve communications within their own and across neighbouring countries.

### Meeting Objectives:

- Analyze current status of national canine rabies elimination programs in the sub-region
- Establish the role of a regional planning consortium comprised of rabies country focal persons
- Determine regional and national targets for canine rabies control
- Propose strategies and a sub-regional roadmap to achieve the control and elimination of canine rabies throughout the sub-region
- Share the experiences, lessons and progress with the regional PARACON network
- Identify regional resources and stakeholders that can be leveraged to support the rabies control efforts and identify gaps that need to be addressed

### Day 1

Following from the successes at the PARACON meetings as well as in-country workshops, this meeting again focused on the use of the Stepwise Approach towards Rabies Elimination (SARE) assessment. The SARE assessment scoresheet was used by the respective countries to perform self-evaluations regarding their progress towards controlling and eliminating rabies. The SARE

assessment was introduced to all countries present at the first PARACON meeting in 2015. As such, the majority of the East African countries attending this meeting had already undertaken a prior SARE assessment. The SARE assessment scoresheet had undergone various revisions and improvements when compared with the original SARE assessment scoresheet performed at the inaugural PARACON meeting and therefore country representatives were encouraged to update their country's SARE assessment scoresheet. By repeating the SARE assessment, a more accurate and detailed assessment of the current situation was obtained for each country, which in turn enabled users to accurately monitor progress. In addition, the links between the SARE assessment and the Rabies Blueprint (<http://rabiesblueprint.org>) were emphasized to direct users from the SARE assessment towards the more detailed Rabies Blueprint for further information and details regarding the specific activities and how they can be addressed. Most of the SARE scores reflected the true stage for each country, bar some counties where specific basic activities were preventing their progress along the SARE scale. Thus, easily achievable priority activities for each country in both the short- and the medium-term were devised by the country focal persons to progress along the SARE scale. These priority activities were presented to the greater group and common, core priority activities were highlighted for the group as a whole. This exercise helped various country representatives to take note that their neighbours were faced with similar challenges and were all focused on similar goals, emphasizing the specific need for a focused community for the sub-region to facilitate collaboration, coordination and communication.

The PARACON epidemiological bulletin was introduced to the participating focal persons as a useful tool for data collection, collation, analysis and sharing <http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fvets.2017.00018/full>. The focal persons were trained in the use of the bulletin and the majority submitted country-specific national data for the first time. The focal persons requested that an East Africa-specific 'Dashboard' be created where data from the community could be viewed, compared and shared, furthering the transparency of the community in their rabies control initiatives.

## **Day 2**

The second day was dedicated to the showcasing of the current rabies situation in each country, facilitated by the SARE assessment undertaken on the first day. Country representatives were encouraged to highlight specific progress, challenges, current activities and future plans for their rabies control efforts. This session was followed by a session dedicated to the stakeholders and international organisations who have an interest or who have current projects in each of the countries.

GARC, CDC, WHO, OIE, FAO, AU-IBAR and WAP all provided insights into their own activities in the region and the means by which they could facilitate and support the efforts in the community. Focused and intensive discussion sessions were the highlight of the day with various topics being covered, ranging from the OIE vaccine bank to improvement of dog population management with the support of WAP.

## **Day 3**

As many of the delegates were unfamiliar with the REDIPRA structure, upon which the concept for the meeting was based, the morning session of the last day was structured to provide a background

into this structure as well as an overview and more detailed success stories from the Latin American region. The similarities in challenges and experiences between Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa were clear and the session provided an excellent forum for discussions regarding the experiences from Latin America and their specific approaches to rabies control and elimination. A clear emphasis was placed on the fact that all of the tools required for rabies control and elimination are now available – a luxury that the Latin American community did not have when their programme started. Thus, it was emphasized and agreed upon that Africa could not only succeed in its goal for canine rabies control and elimination, but that it could also be achieved by the accepted target of 2030.

The second half of the day was dedicated to setting achievable goals, developing a clear and concise roadmap and building collaboration between the countries in the sub-region. These sessions were primarily based upon in-depth discussion sessions. Finally, the meeting was drawn towards a closing point by discussing and deciding upon the crucial link of this newly founded community with the larger PARACON network, ensuring that no overlap or redundancy was created in the formation of this sub-regional community. The participants all agreed that this community would form a close-knit working group within the PARACON network to support the initiatives driven by GARC and PARACON. Lastly, the meeting outcomes were discussed and agreed upon, including the decision that Kenya would chair this working group/community for the next two years. The roadmap for the working group/community will be shared with the larger PARACON network at the next Anglophone PARACON meeting scheduled for later this year (2017) in South Africa.