



IMPACT OF THE RABIES VACCINE BANK FROM THE RECIPIENT COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE: THE PHILIPPINES

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr Rubina O. Cresencio, DVM, earned her DVM degree from the University of the Philippines, Diliman Quezon City. She is currently the Director of the Bureau of Animal Industry and concurrently the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Official Delegate to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Dr Cresencio has wide experience and distinguishes herself as the first woman appointed in her country as Director and CVO.

SUMMARY

An average of 200 Filipinos die annually from rabies, with about 98% attributed to bites from rabid dogs. Pursuant to the Republic Act 9482, otherwise known as ‘Anti-Rabies Act of 2007’, the National Rabies Prevention and Control Program (NRPCP), a multi-agency effort in controlling and eliminating Rabies in the country, was created. The Department of Agriculture (DA), through the Bureau Animal Industry, spearheads the implementation of the NRPCP in close coordination with the Department of Health (DOH) and other national agencies. One of the key NRPCP strategies is the vaccination of at least 70% of the total dog population. However, the cost of rabies vaccines, the substantial dog population estimated to be at about 10 million, and the very limited annual DA budget for the procurement of animal rabies vaccines, presented major drawbacks in achieving this coverage.

In February 2013, initially as part of the European Union (EU)-funded Highly Pathogenic and Emerging Diseases (HPED) Project, the Philippines became one of the first recipients of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Rabies Vaccine Bank for Asia, with a delivery of 500,000 doses. Shortly after its distribution in select priority areas, a dramatic reduction in dog rabies cases, and later in human rabies cases, was documented demonstrating the importance of good vaccination coverage, high quality vaccines, and an efficient procurement process. Building on this initial success, the Australian-funded Stop Transboundary Animal Diseases and Zoonoses (STANDZ)’s Rabies Project committed further support in the delivery of 940,000 more doses of rabies vaccines for 2014–2016, through the same vaccine bank mechanism.

Recognising the value of addressing the disease at source and the critical importance of nationwide mass dog vaccination to achieve rabies elimination, the DOH provided PhP 69.5 million additional funds to the annual DA budget for rabies vaccine procurement. Further to this, the World Health Organization (WHO) provided assistance in the procurement of animal rabies vaccines through its reimbursable procurement scheme, also tapping the established OIE Vaccine Bank mechanism. With the combined budget from DA and DOH, and through the WHO scheme and the OIE Vaccine Bank Mechanism, the Philippine government in 2015 was able to order more than 7 million doses of dog rabies vaccines, 4.22 million of which will have been delivered by December 2015.

The experience of the Philippines demonstrates that invaluable platforms, such as the Regional Rabies Vaccine Bank, can help any country to achieve what may initially seem to be an ambitious goal, particularly when forces are brought together in the true spirit of ‘One Health’.