Regional policies to control rabies in the Southern Mediterranean

A workshop was held in Paris from 15 to 16 October 2013, aimed at improving coordination among the Mediterranean Neighbourhood countries of the European Union (EU) in defining and implementing control policies for rabies in the Southern Mediterranean.

The workshop was organised and financed by the TAIEX instrument of the European Commission, in cooperation with the Health and Consumers Department of the European Commission (DG-Sanco), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). It was labelled a GF-TADs multi-regional workshop. Participants came from Algeria, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal and Tunisia. Speakers represented the OIE, FAO, WHO, EFSA, ECDC, DG-Sanco, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), the EU Reference Laboratory for rabies, the Pasteur Institute and the French National Veterinary School of Lyon.

In the Mediterranean region, the rabies virus is sustained almost exclusively by dog populations. The disease is usually introduced and/or spread over long distances in the region by dogs, travelling in cars with their owners. Given the biological characteristics of the disease, and the geographical situation of the Southern Mediterranean, where the desert provides a natural barrier to the South and the Mediterranean to the North, rabies appears to be a disease that could effectively be controlled at a reasonable cost.

Public awareness, mass vaccination of dogs and dog population management are the key elements in the control of rabies.

The culling of stray dogs alone is not effective to control either stray dog populations or rabies cases. Experts agree that vaccination strategies should aim at 70% vaccination coverage.

According to OIE and WHO data, controlling the virus reservoir (dogs) is much more cost-effective than concentrating efforts on the indefinite post-exposure prophylaxis of humans, which has no influence on the disease's ecology. In the long term, using just 10% of the money which is currently spent on rabies treatment, it would be possible to vaccinate all dogs in all infected countries and eventually to eliminate rabies cases in humans altogether. The control of stray dog populations should follow OIE recommendations.

Control strategies should be coordinated at the regional level to provide sustained results.

Public awareness, mass vaccination of dogs and dog population management are areas in which beneficiary countries need assistance, e.g. vaccine procurement via a regional/sub-regional vaccine bank, dog vaccination programmes combined with effective dog population management and responsible dog ownership, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, in accordance with the relevant OIE standards, notably Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

---

1Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia
3GF-TADs: FAO/OIE Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases

The RSPCA and International Companion Animal Management (ICAM) Coalition have developed a guidance document and methodology for dog population management programme. Moreover, the RSPCA is in a position to assist Mediterranean countries with conducting initial dog surveys and developing targeted intervention. In addition, the TAIEX instrument could be used specifically for stray dog control. The Blueprint for Rabies Prevention and Control website provides further detailed information, which is crucial in setting up a rabies control strategy.

As a next step, FAO, OIE and WHO can assist Mediterranean countries to establish a regional/sub-regional rabies vaccine bank and in formulating rabies control strategies, taking into account the regional analysis of the OIE PVS reports available in the Mediterranean. This approach should allow the Mediterranean Neighbourhood to identify regional priorities and possible gaps on the basis of individual country assessments and make recommendations based on international standards. The Mediterranean Animal Health Network (REMESA) can also play an essential role in this endeavour. Linking with the Network for the Control of Public Health Threats in the Mediterranean Region and South-East Europe (EpiSouth) would be beneficial to coordinate action.

To initiate the development of national and regional strategies, follow-up activities may also be eligible for funding through the TAIEX facility (e.g. study visits from experts). Implementing control measures should come under the umbrella of GF-TADs. Funding could be sought under different programmes and from different donors.

---

**Official acts**

The OIE has two new Members

The OIE welcomes its 179th and 180th Members: the Republic of Liberia and the Republic of South Sudan.

Their application for accession was accepted unanimously by the World Assembly of OIE Delegates during its General Session on 30 May 2014 (Resolutions nos. 12 and 13 of the 82nd General Session).

New composition of the OIE Regional Commission for Africa

On becoming OIE Members, Liberia and South Soudan joined the OIE Regional Commission for Africa, which now has 54 members:

1. Algeria
2. Angola
3. Benin
4. Botswana
5. Burkina Faso
6. Burundi
7. Cameroon
8. Cape Verde
10. Chad
11. Comoros
12. Congo (Rep. of the –)
13. Congo (Dem. Rep. of the –)
14. Côte d’Ivoire
15. Djibouti (+ME)
16. Egypt (+ME)
17. Equatorial Guinea
18. Eritrea
19. Ethiopia
20. Gabon
21. Gambia
22. Ghana
23. Guinea
24. Guinea Bissau
25. Kenya
26. Lesotho
27. Liberia
28. Libya (+ME)
29. Madagascar
30. Malawi
31. Mali
32. Montenegro
33. Mauritius
34. Morocco
35. Mozambique
36. Namibia
37. Niger
38. Nigeria
39. Rwanda
40. Sao Tome and Principe
41. Senegal
42. Seychelles
43. Sierra Leone
44. Somalia (+ME)
45. South Africa
46. South Sudan
47. Sudan (+ME)
48. Swaziland
49. Tanzania
50. Togo
51. Tunisia
52. Uganda
53. Zambia
54. Zimbabwe

(+ME): Also member of the OIE Regional Commission for the Middle East

---

**Appointment of permanent Delegates**

8 May 2014

Pakistan

Dr Qurban Ali

Animal Husbandry Commissioner,

Ministry of National Food Security and Research