



1st Regional PARACON Workshop Summary

Following on the inaugural full Pan African Rabies Control Network (PARACON) meeting in June 2015, the first regional PARACON workshop was held in Grand Bassam, Cote d'Ivoire from 29-30 June 2016 and introduced the delegates to several new tools to support their rabies control efforts.

The workshop was organised by GARC with support from Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques (CSRS) in Côte d'Ivoire who formed the local organising committee. This gathering was planned to be a region-specific workshop for West and Central African countries. The workshop focussed predominantly on Francophone countries; with some Anglophone countries from the region also present. In total, 15 African countries were represented, with 10 of the 15 countries having representatives from both the medical and veterinary sectors. Of these 15 countries represented, 4 were not represented at PARACON in 2015, due to the Ebola crisis. This meeting extended the reach of PARACON to representatives from 37 of the 42 mainland African countries (plus Madagascar), excluding North African countries that, together with other Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries, make up the MEEREB network. This means that PARACON now represents more than 88% of the remainder of the African continent.

Day 1 Session 1

The first session of the meeting consisted of a welcoming address from Professor Bassirou Bonfoh from the CSRS – the local organising committee – as well as Professor Louis Nel from GARC. The focus of the addresses was specifically on the way forward, focusing on the fact that a unified approach will be the most beneficial means to prevent the misery of rabies in humans and animals and to avoid the associated economic losses. Success in rabies will not only benefit the entire healthcare system, but will also enable other neglected zoonotic diseases to follow the same template towards elimination, using rabies as a flagship model. It was highlighted that the best human resources for rabies control and elimination in West and Central Africa were present at the meeting. Therefore, an urgent call was made to the delegates to work together through the PARACON network and other such networks to make a tangible difference now, as this will be the only means to achieve the goal of elimination of canine-mediated human rabies by the year 2030.

A brief overview of the progress made since the last PARACON meeting in 2015 was given, followed by a brief presentation from the WHO. The WHO reiterated the goal to achieve canine-mediated human rabies elimination by 2030, leading on to the need for countries to improve their capacities regarding rabies control efforts. The issue of vaccine was raised and the WHO indicated their intention to facilitate procurement and access to vaccine. Delegates were also informed about the existence of a rabies vaccine bank in South Africa. Furthermore, the importance of data collection and the new Global Health Observatory (GHO) was highlighted, with the need for more public data to become available as there are still too many countries that rely on vague estimates of the situation and burden of rabies in their country. This laid the foundation for the launch of the PARACON bulletin at the workshop.

Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and Liberia then provided a brief, yet informative overview of the situation of rabies in their countries. Important points from each country were highlighted and delegates from other countries were able to relate to the challenges faced in each of the three countries that presented. Following the brief country reports, the COLT (Customised Online Training) Programme showed the benefits of an upcoming COLT workshop in Cameroun later this year (2016). The COLT programme relies on both face to face interactions as well as online courses to provide in-depth education on rabies. During the discussion session, the issue of internet connectivity was raised and is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Session 2

The second session focussed on education, awareness and advocacy. A brief update of the progress of the various GARC Education Platform (GEP) courses that were available was provided, with the figures depicting an ever-increasing number of REC certified users globally and a large increase in graduates from South Africa, making this the leading African country in this regard. Lesotho had the highest number of AVC certified users and the AVC course is also continuing to grow.

The next GARC Education Platform (GEP) course was also BETA launched at the workshop. The Community Caregiver Certificate (CCC) is a course specifically targeting those individuals interested in helping their communities fight rabies. The CCC trains individuals as community workers that are then able to facilitate interactions between the community and professionals involved in rabies control and elimination. After a short presentation about the course, valuable feedback was obtained from the delegates at the workshop, which highlighted the importance of networking and the sharing of relevant information from personal experiences and knowledge. This feedback included the suggestions for the inclusion of further modules into the course as well as editing to better suit all countries in Africa, making it a universally applicable, relevant and useful, course. The course materials will be revised and improved upon, accordingly.

Lastly, an important presentation regarding rabies advocacy emphasised the need for a unified voice across the continent. Each country and influential individual should be disseminating the same message about rabies – that this disease can be controlled and eliminated. A constant repetitive message to governments and stakeholders will be the most effective message that can be easily remembered. If Africa unites together with a single voice, the power of that voice becomes greater, drawing people together to demand action and thus forcing stakeholders into action.

Session 3

This session began with a brief World Rabies Day (WRD) presentation and a new WRD video that is freely available online and subsequently led into a brainstorming session about potential ideas for the upcoming WRD that is themed: "Educate. Vaccinate. Eliminate." WRD events can now be registered on Facebook in addition to registration on the WRD website. A new initiative for an award in recognition of the best WRD events was promoted with 2 prizes per region – 1 institutional prize and one individual prize. For more details, please see the WRD website: <https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/>

Following from the successes at the inaugural PARACON meeting, this regional PARACON Workshop again focussed on the use of the Stepwise Approach towards Rabies Elimination (SARE) tool in order for countries to perform self-evaluations regarding their progress towards controlling and eliminating rabies. At the first PARACON meeting in 2015, the SARE tool was introduced, emphasizing the need that this should be a dynamic and evolving tool. Building on this promise by GARC, the FAO and all of the organisations involved in its development, a newly revised version of the SARE tool was used for the first time at this PARACON workshop.

The revised tool was shown to be a huge improvement, particularly with the inclusion of a feature for automatic scoring of the country's stage. This, and other revisions, resulted in a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of the situation in each country. Several countries performed the SARE evaluation for the first time. The preparedness of all of the delegates, as well as the fact that most countries were represented by both Medical and Veterinary delegates, enabled a fruitful and accurate self-assessment of each of the countries' progress.

Day 2, Session 1

The day began with a brief recap of the SARE workshop from the previous day and then led into a session focused on the use of the Blueprint in the SARE. It was demonstrated how exactly the Blueprint can be used to help countries achieve their SARE objectives and progress along the SARE scale towards rabies elimination. The Canine Rabies Blueprint can be found at the following address: <http://caninerabiesblueprint.org/>. Using this information, country representatives were asked to record the top 5 priority activities that they would be able to achieve before the next PARACON meeting. The aim was to stimulate countries to set easily achievable targets in order to progress rapidly and obtain further support for larger initiatives.

The second part of this session began with a presentation regarding the importance of data collection, and how good data from the field is especially important, despite the challenges that many countries face in this regard. The newly developed PARACON Bulletin – another outcome of the first PARACON meeting, developed over the course of the past year and the product was presented at this meeting. Country representatives were provided log in details and shown the basics of reporting data directly onto the Bulletin – eliminating the need for paper-based or basic electronic country reports. The PARACON Bulletin provided immediate and useful analyses to country representatives, automatically calculating totals and percentages for various important data elements. Importantly, a basic estimate of dog populations within each country was automatically calculated for countries, from which estimated vaccination coverage was determined. These important data were especially interesting to delegates and showed the value of the PARACON Bulletin in providing essential information for advocacy and targeted control efforts. Any African country that was not represented at the PARACON workshop is now welcome to contact the PARACON team (paracon@rabiesalliance.org) for more information about the bulletin or for access to the bulletin. The web address and walkthrough for the bulletin is also available on the [PARACON website](http://paracon.rabiesalliance.org) (paracon.rabiesalliance.org).

Session 2

This session began with an interesting video developed by the African Union-InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) about rabies education and awareness. The video highlighted the importance of being aware of the dangers of rabies as well as the critical need to seek immediate medical attention, regardless of the severity of the wound. Following this, a presentation was given highlighting the role that AU-IBAR plays in rabies prevention and control. A strong message of action was given emphasising the need to *“Stop talking about inter-sectoral collaboration- start acting today.”* The need to share experiences and build on the One Health approach was once again reiterated. The AU-IBAR then responded positively to the launch of the PARACON bulletin and encouraged collaboration between AU-IBAR and GARC to reduce the burden of reporting and unify the data collection at a single point from where data can then be disseminated to other organisations. They showed their support of the PARACON bulletin initiative and pledged to work together in order to make it a success.

World Animal Protection (WAP) followed on from the AU-IBAR by further reiterating the need for improved surveillance capabilities in order to reduce underreporting and increase awareness about the disease. This

message reiterated the common theme of the meeting to unite and join together, and to improve surveillance and data reporting in order to make governments and stakeholders take notice of the burden that rabies poses on countries. Collaborative efforts with existing partners in countries or regions, as well as the engagement of multi-sectoral stakeholders, will be essential in achieving government and stakeholder interest and buy-in. Lastly, the message about the need to build responsible pet ownership programmes and initiatives into rabies control programmes is essential, with the need for specific guidelines to be implemented into government policy.

The meeting was then concluded with a brief summary from Professor Bonfoh of the CSRS followed by Professor Louis Nel from GARC, thanking all of the participants, sponsors and partners for their contributions to the successful PARACON regional Workshop.

Conclusions

PARACON would like to thank all of the partners and sponsors involved in hosting and enabling this regional workshop. It was our experience that this workshop provided a valuable and insightful platform for neighbouring countries within a region to network, communicate and share their experiences and efforts towards rabies control and elimination, whilst being introduced to new and ever-evolving tools that may facilitate their efforts. Country representatives departed the workshop with a self-set goal to achieve 5 activities from the SARE tool before the next main PARACON meeting scheduled for 2018. These 5 activities will enable each country to progress further upon the SARE scale and were set to be achievable goals to demonstrate good progress within their country.

All of the presentations from the meeting as well as the resources are available on the PARACON website:
<https://paracon.rabiesalliance.org/meetings/archived/paracon-archives/1st-regional-paracon-workshop-29-30-june-2016-cote-divoire>