REPORT

WORLD RABIES DAY COMMEMORATION

IN

LAWRA MUNICIPALITY, UPPER WEST REGION GHANA

*28TH SEPTEMBER 2020*

**REPORT ON 2020 WORLD RABIES DAY COMMEMORATION IN LAWRA MUNICIPALITY, UPPER WEST REGION OF GHANA**

**BACKGROUND**

Rabies remains endemic in poor parts of the world accounting for tens of thousands of deaths annually. The global rabies situation results in yearly economic losses amounting to billions of dollars. The burden of rabies in Ghana is greater than reported (Nel et. al., 2013). However, it is in line with global trends which indicate that majority of human rabies cases occur in deprived communities, among children and are dog-mediated (WHO, 2020).

Ghana has accepted the global challenge to eliminate dog-transmitted human rabies by 2030. The country has developed a national strategy for rabies prevention and control (PASA, 2018). RIWA since its inception in Ghana and within its framework of activities has conducted rabies awareness education and free vaccinations in conjunction with celebrating World Rabies Day (WRD) on September 28 for four (4) consecutive years.

Although the on-going COVID 19 pandemic continues to ravage many countries worldwide, the threat of rabies claiming lives world-wide remains a significant public health concern. To assist the government of Ghana and the people to control rabies, RIWAG commemorated the 2020 WRD with the following activities:

1. National launch of WRD in Accra, Ghana
2. Education workshop for media person and stakeholders in Lawra Municipality and Wa.
3. Mass dog vaccination in three neighboring municipalities of Lawra, Nandom and Jirapa Municipalities
4. Durbar to launch WRD in Lawra Municipal
5. **National Launch of WRD, Accra, Ghana**

To create greater awareness and exposure about rabies, a One-Health sub-committee including RIWAG, Veterinary Services Directorate, NADMO, Ghana Health Services, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Local Government launched a press conference on September 16th, 2020. The Ghana rabies Strategic Elimination document, to eliminate rabies in Ghana by 2030 was signed by key stakeholders of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Ministry of Health.

The endorsement of the rabies strategic plan by government is the first step on a government level that has now been taken and the government of Ghana is committed to eliminating rabies by 2030. The national launch of WRD durbar was attended by All One Health Stakeholders and the Press. The event was published in both electronic and print media in Ghana.

1. **Sensitization of Public Educators on Rabies Control and Prevention**

Two workshops were organized prior to the commemoration of WRD 2020. The first training was organized on the 23rd September, 2020 at the District Assembly hall in Lawra for public educators and media persons from Lawra, Nandom and Jirapa municipalities. The second workshop was organized at SEM B hotel on the 24th of September, 2020 in the regional capital of Wa for selected public educators drawn from some of the remaining districts of the Upper West Region. Each workshop was a day training. The training was sponsored by USAID and jointly organized by RIWAG and Breakthrough Action of John Hopkins University. The purpose of the training was to provide participants with the requisite knowledge on the rabies prevention and control, creating a cadre of public educators that would sustain awareness creation on rabies in the Upper West region.

A total of 60 participants trained; 30 in the Lawra workshop and same 30 in Wa. Participants were from the following stakeholder organizations:

* Media (reporters, editors, and journalist) – Regional + District
* Health Promotion Officer – District
* Information Officer – District
* SHEP Coordinators – District
* Environmental Health Officer – District

The trained media participated in the final 2020 WRD commemoration in Lawra and did gave a good account of the training by producing excellent media reportage in their various newspapers etc.

This was the first training workshop for media in the country and on WRD. There has been sharp difference in reporting and it is hoped we shall keep momentum on training of media persons on rabies. This will hugely impact on education on rabies.

1. **Free mass vaccination campaign**

The objective of RIWAG was to vaccinate pets, predominantly dogs in three (3) districts; Lawra, Nandom and Jirapa. To achieve maximum results in the three districts, a slightly different approach was used which is described in each district below for records. Also, this will serve as an example to inform Veterinary Services of the methods available to consider during mass vaccination exercise.

***Lawra***

Radio advertisements commenced one (1) week prior to commencement of vaccinations making the public aware of the free vaccinations and more about rabies itself.

There were three operational zones for the vaccination exercise, namely Erimon, Brifoh and Lawra and vaccination teams worked in each zone concurrently. In all of these areas a door to door approach was used and there were no fixed vaccination points. The teams moved from house-to-house vaccinating pets in the comfort of their homes. In some situations, a few neighbours brought their pets to the house hosting the team and that house served as a temporary vaccination point. With majority of residents being farmers, most farmers were in the field harvesting. The teams therefore extended their activities to farmlands to vaccinate the dogs who had followed their owners to the fields. This approach ensured the remotest settlements, including those with no vehicular access, were covered.

Routinely, vaccination started at 6 a.m. and ended at 5 p.m. each day September 23-27 with mop-up after. The teams received supplies from mobile teams in Lawra. The teams received desired cooperation from local residents in all communities. The people were sensitised on rabies alongside the vaccination exercise. In all 2,164 pets were vaccinated against rabies as in table 1. below.

***Nandom***

A float through the principal streets of Nandom Municipality was held to educate residents about rabies in the local dialect and also to inform them about the free rabies vaccination by Rabies in West Africa – Ghana on 15th September 2020. In addition, radio announcements and live interviews discussing rabies were done one (1) week prior to commencement. The free rabies vaccination started from 17th September,2020.

The Veterinary personnel together with the recorders, rode motor bikes through the towns which have the houses distanced from each other and did the vaccinations in their households with the pet owners assisting in restraining. Vaccination certificates were provided to the pet owners after vaccination and for some who did not know anything about rabies were educated. There were seven (7) vaccination teams. Each team comprised of a vaccinator and a recorder. The Municipal Veterinary Officer was the supervisor of the seven (7) teams. In all 1,445 pets were vaccinated

***Jirapa***

Before the start of the campaign, public announcements were done via radio. The vaccination was done by the Veterinary Technical Officers (T.Os) in the Jirapa Municipality. Vaccination was done at designated vaccination centers where pet owners brought their pets for vaccination.

There were also mobile vaccination teams that moved from house to house to carry out vaccinations; especially in areas where houses/settlements were far apart or scattered.

The dogs that were vaccinated were above three months old after which a vaccination certificate was issued. In all 1,255 pets were vaccinated (Table 1.)

**TABLE 1. TOTAL PETS VACCINATED. WRD LAWRA, GHANA**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Community** |  | **TOTAL CATS VACCINATED** | **TOTAL PETS VACCINATED** |
| **Dogs vaccinated** | **TOTAL DOGS****(% VACCINATED****Dog Population)** |
|  | **MALE** | **FEMALE** | **DOGS** | **PUPPIES**628246268**1,142** |
| **LAWRA** | 495 | 727 | 1,222 | 1,850(64.35%) | 314 | **2,164** |
| **NANDOM** | 347 | 640 | 987 | 1,233(39.35%) | 212 | **1,445** |
| **JIRAPA** | 343 | 343 | 686 | 954(23.44%) | 301 | **1,255** |
| **TOTAL** | **1,185** | **1,710** | **2,895** | **4,037****(40.06%)** | **827** | **4,864** |

**Rabies Awareness Survey**

RIWAG took the opportunity of the presence of many of her members to administer questionnaires to pet owners to assess the knowledge and practice on rabies in the Lawra municipalities. Three hundred (300) questionnaires were administered in the 3 districts.

1. **Commemoration of 2020 WRD in Lawra Municipality.**
2. ***Rabies awareness walk***

World Rabies Day September 28, 2020 started with an organized walk through the streets of Lawra.

Approximately 125 school children and 150 adults took part starting from the back of the Municipal Assembly buildings and returning to same for official commemoration.

The walkers were accompanied by a brass band and escorted by the Lawra Police Department.

Three Rabies awareness banners were carried along with posters and flyers to hand out on route displaying information about rabies.

The walk commenced at 9:00am and ended at 10:00am.

Refreshments were served to the children on return to the commemorations ground.

1. ***Durbar to Commemoration of WRD***

The official commemoration of WRD 2020, commenced at 10:30am with approximately 400 persons in attendance including the 125 children & their teachers, members of Zoomlion, members of the Police & Fire departments, general public, vaccination teams, RIWAG members, Breakthrough Action and One Health members from Accra, Veterinary Officers from the 3 Districts, Regional Veterinary Officer, District Health officials, MCE’s from Lawra, Nandom and Jirapa, Municipal, Paramount Chief and his sub chiefs and Guest of Honour, FAO MP for Lawra and Deputy Minister for Roads and Highways.

The Chairman for the commemoration was the Paramount Chief for Lawra who opened the event with his comments and gave the closing remarks.

Short speeches were given to educate the durbar participants on rabies by the following:

* MCE Lawra
* Russell Coombs RIWAG
* Dr. Richard Suu-Ire, RIWAG
* Director Veterinary Services
* MCE for Nandom
* MCE for Jirapa
* Director of Breakthrough Action
* District Director, Ghana Health Services
* MP/Deputy Minister for Roads & Highways
* Dr Maina Garba , FAO

The event ended at 12:15pm.

Lunches and beverages were provided for all children and participants with 80 invited guests going to the Municipal Guesthouse for a VIP Buffet.

The WRD ended with the entire RIWAG team meeting for a final WRD wrap-up and dinner in Babile.

**CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

Rabies has caused a huge economic burden in developing countries and affects mostly the juvenile population.

RIWAG in collaboration with the Veterinary Services Directorate, Ghana Health Services and other stakeholders has been using the WRD to educate public on rabies.

We recommended the following:

1. Government to implement the Rabies Strategic Plan and roll out Mass dog vaccination in Ghana

2. There should be a joint venture among the political leaders, health care providers, veterinary doctors and the community at large to control this disease.

3. Mass education and facilitation of community participation such as the RIWAG type durbar should be enhanced.

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4. BreakThrough Action
5. Lawra, Nandom and Jirapa Assemblies
6. Spintex Veterinary Services

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