

An Introduction
FAO's Rabies Stakeholder Consultations
(RASC)

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Terminology

Chairperson	Person chairing the subgroup's discussions
Constraint	Obstacle to plan, prepare, set up and respond to a severe zoonosis or highly transmissible emerging infectious disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Facilitator	Person ensuring that participants stay focused on the consultation's aim and methodology during subgroup activities
LPHC	One Health Livestock and Public Health Consultation
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoH	Ministry of Health
OIE	World Organization for Animal Health
Reporter	Person taking notes of the subgroup's findings
Spokesperson	Person presenting the subgroup's key findings in plenary sessions
WHO	World Health Organization

Background

Rabies continues to be a health threat at the human–animal–ecosystem interface in many countries, especially in Africa and Asia, imposing a burden on human and animal health. Because reducing these risks cannot be achieved by one sector alone, there is increasing convergence of rabies prevention and control toward a One Health approach that incorporates a collaborative, cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary mode of addressing rabies threats and implementing prevention and control of the disease with a view of eliminating dog transmitted human rabies in affected countries. FAO, OIE and WHO recognize the importance of strong partnerships among players who may have different perspectives on some issues and different levels of resources. The FAO/OIE/WHO Tripartite has selected rabies as one of their One Health priorities for the development of collaborative actions targeting to achieving no more human rabies cases transmitted by dogs as an achievable One Health goal.

Thus, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has developed **Rabies Stakeholder Consultations (RASC)** for country, regional and local levels aiming to foster interaction among rabies-stakeholders. A first consultation is usually a two-day event, during which the stakeholders collectively identify constraints, viable interventions and policy options for risk reduction and sustainable development. When requested by a country or region, FAO organizes and facilitates these RASCs together with the requesting or appointed institution. FAO tailors the event to the prevailing situation and issues to be addressed. It is possible to focus the event on a special topic, like dog rabies, livestock and wildlife interactions, emergency preparedness for countries where rabies is absent or where there is a risk of introduction or spread, cooperation between physicians and veterinarians.

The **FAO Rabies Stakeholder Consultations** are meant to enable country teams to organize themselves to work pro-actively towards efficient and timely responses to rabies incursions. Reaching consensus among the diverse stakeholders at country level, applying the One Health approach, is important for building an integrated prevention and control system that is effective. Active consultation and participation of stakeholders allows them to engage in rabies prevention and control, from understanding the benefits, needs and how to implement in the specific country context. Further, this pro-active approach allows for maximizing coordination and response actions.

Several countries from unrelated geographical regions held Rabies Stakeholder Consultations. The experiences and inputs from these meetings and country based processes helped to further develop and refine the approach.

Carrying out Rabies Stakeholder Consultations allows a country to efficiently assess the strengths and gaps in its rabies prevention and control. It enhances efficient collaboration by jointly defining priorities, roles and responsibilities. This process is key to inform government officials, donors, NGOs or international organizations on what to include in future rabies prevention and control projects. The *Step-wise approach towards rabies elimination (SARE)* (<http://caninerabiesblueprint.org/Canine-Rabies-Blueprint-PDF-of>) recommends to organize the process through RASCs. **Objective**

The FAO Rabies Stakeholder Consultations objectives are to:

- Sensitize national and local institutions on rabies and create a constructive, dynamic dialogue between the different relevant actors in public and private animal and human health sectors, animal welfare, municipalities, wildlife management, etc.,
- Identify prevailing (prevention and control?) mechanisms and their strengths, gaps, constraints, opportunities, and viable intervention and policy options to efficiently address rabies at the human–animal–ecosystem interface,
- Develop an action plan that defines “Who does what?” (roles and responsibilities). It also has to include “Who takes the lead under what circumstances?”,
- Strengthen the national capacity to prevent and respond to rabies threats as well as endemic risks,
- Inform decision-makers on what is necessary for bringing about a national integrated rabies prevention, preparedness and response system,
- Engage in regional rabies prevention and control strategies,
- Reinforcing interaction between the different stakeholders.



Regional Rabies Stakeholder Consultation, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Core structure

FAO's RASC consists of two-day facilitated events bringing together representatives of public and private animal and human health systems, municipalities, animal welfare organizations, wildlife sectors, and other rabies stakeholders. It usually includes:

- **An official opening;**

- **Expert presentations:** introductory presentations on rabies at global level, the situation regarding rabies in the country and contributing factors, and on the consultation's methodology;
- **A small rabies case study or simulation exercise:** with the purpose to tune participants into an outbreak situation and kick-start discussions
- **Stakeholders' subgroup activities** during which participants are split into subgroups according to their expertise;
- **Plenary discussions and wrap up sessions,** which follow the subgroup activities, to share and discuss subgroup's findings and collectively further elaborate on recommendations.

Key people

Organizing team

The organizing team comprises the resource people who are primary responsible for the design, implementation and follow up of the RASC, and up to seven experts, and a focal point responsible for the logistical organization of the event. The experts should include at least one person experienced in organizing FAO consultations, rabies experts and, optionally, representative(s) of the national authorities (MoA and MoH).

National consultant

The national consultant is a veterinarian and a veterinary public health specialist and plays a key-role before, during and after the consultation:

- Maps all the actors and institutions
- Collects the background information and available data before the consultation (conducts a “Rabies review”),
- Elaborates a preparatory questionnaire to be used for interviews with participants prior to the consultation,
- Can be a facilitator during the consultation’s subgroup activities,
- Drafts the report of the consultation and finalizes the action plan for the National Rabies Strategy.

Chairperson

A local person is in charge of the facilitation of the consultation event, especially of the plenary sessions. He/she must have excellent knowledge and understanding of the public veterinary and human health systems.

Participants

A **maximum of 45 participants** is recommended. Participants in the consultation must represent the different public and private animal and human health, animal protection, municipalities, wildlife institutions. It is suggested that the national authorities in coordination with the organizing team invite the participants. The selection of the participants should be based on their knowledge and experience of health threats, rabies and other zoonoses, dog population management, rabies post-exposure treatment.

An indicative list of participant’s profiles is proposed below:

National institutions (i.e. 12 participants)	Experts (i.e. 10 participants)	Other stakeholders (i.e. 15 participants)
Ministry of Agriculture Veterinary services (central & local levels) Ministry of Health Public health services (central & local levels) Ministry of water, forests/environment (wildlife services) Ministry in charge of civil defense Coordinating State Institution	Epidemiologists Private veterinarians Private doctors Laboratory (human & animal) Animal welfare specialists Socio-economists Sociologists Ecologists Communication specialists	Natural disasters and crisis management institutions National police forces (when relevant) Civil society Private sector Associations Research centers Academia

Facilitators (for the subgroup activities)

During the consultation, participants are split into subgroups according to their expertise (about 10 participants *per* subgroup, including a facilitator).

A dedicated facilitator per subgroup has as principal role to ensure that participants stay focused on the consultation process and methodology. Facilitators provide neutral guidance and ensure that the subgroup’s discussions run smoothly. They flag any difficulty to the organizing team.

Facilitators’ skills are fundamental to the success of the RASC and therefore should be carefully selected and briefed prior to the consultation. This means that they will be trained the day before the consultation by the organizing team, to assure that they are familiar with the consultation’s methodology and that they clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

Facilitated subgroup activities during a FAO’s stakeholder consultation in Mauritania



Subgroup Reporters

Each subgroup selects one of its participants to take notes of the group’s discussion. This person (the “reporter”) completes an answer sheet on the basis of the subgroup’s agreement and returns it to the organizing team at the end of each subgroup-session. These sheets serve as the core to draft the overall report on the consultation as well as the action plan.

Subgroup Chairperson and Spokesperson

Each subgroup identifies a person to chair the discussion (“chairperson”) and a person to present the subgroup’s key findings in the plenary sessions (“spokesperson”). This can be one and the same person or two different people.

Key steps of the process

The figure below summarizes the six key steps of a FAO's Rabies Stakeholder Consultation. These steps include activities to be carried out before and after the consultation. Technical material in support of these activities is available upon request.

PRIOR TO CONSULTATION		DURING THE CONSULTATION		AFTER THE CONSULTATION	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Review rabies situation	Ensure participants' interest and buy-in	Identify main strengths, gaps, constraints and solutions	Identify priorities and intervention strategies	Report on the consultation and action plan	Advocacy for concrete rabies activities

1. Review rabies situation: a review of the collaboration, coordination and communication between the different sectors involved in addressing rabies at the human–animal–ecosystem interface.

Prior to the consultations, the **national consultant** reviews the animal and human rabies situation in the country. He/she performs a literature review and prepares and carries out the stakeholder interviews. Based on this and on the national rabies data and information, (s)he compiles everything on in-country animal and human rabies prevention and control methods and capacities. The main findings of this review are presented to the participants on the first day of the consultation.

The review will consist of:

- A mapping and review of all the mandates, (coordination) mechanisms, and positions, within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock; the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment; the Order of Veterinarians; the Order of Physicians; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) like Veterinarians Without Borders, Médecins sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross; the private sector and animal welfare organizations dealing with prevention and control of rabies, dog population management and wildlife;
- An identification of existing rabies prevention and control plans;
- A review of specific rabies contingency or control plans especially if the country is considered free from the disease;
- A review on how rabies has been dealt with so far (through reports, other available material);
- An identification of the existing surveillance system(s) and epidemiological rabies data collection and on the means and mechanisms for exchanging information between sectors;
- An identification of relevant communication, consultation and collaboration mechanisms within sectors and between sectors/ministries.

2. Ensure participants' interest and buy-in into the process

To customized interview of the participants by the national consultant prior to the consultation event (see 1) ensures that participants are on board from the beginning of the consultation's process. This interview aims to have every participant reflect on all rabies related activities in the country and about the challenges they face. It intends to trigger their willingness to actively take part in the events and subsequent developments, by being given a voice in the process and being able to take ownership in the process.

3. Identify main gaps, constraints and solutions

During the event participants identify the main constraints when addressing rabies, as faced by each different stakeholder group (subgroups). They identify gaps in the process and come up with (realistic) solutions to consider that to fill these gaps and lift these constraints.

4. Identify priorities and intervention strategies

During the event, through group activities, the participants prioritize the in step 3 identified realistic solutions and policy options, response strategies and viable interventions to efficiently address rabies in animals and humans. Roles and responsibilities in terms of response are also discussed, along with funding options. This will form the basis of the rabies action plan.

At the end of the consultation, a concluding plenary debriefing session takes place. During this discussion the participants critically analyze the outputs of the consultation and the process itself. The participants are also asked to share their experience individually by completing an evaluation form. This will be integrated in the consultation report.

5. Report on the consultation and action plan

After the consultation, the national consultant drafts the consultation report based on the subgroups' findings and the consultation's evaluation outputs. (S)he consolidates the rabies action plan and the way forward based on the outputs of the consultation. This action plan defines the roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the consultation's recommendations and identifies potential financial resources.

6. Advocacy for concrete project activities

The **report on the consultation** as well as the **action plan** serve as a basis for donors, international and non-governmental organizations when defining the areas of engagement and designing concrete rabies project activities. In addition, country representatives should be enabled to advocate for the country's rabies strategy in regional and international fora.