

Eradicating Rabies in The Gambia

A journey towards zero by 2030

26th conference of the WOAHA Regional Commission for Africa

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Delegate

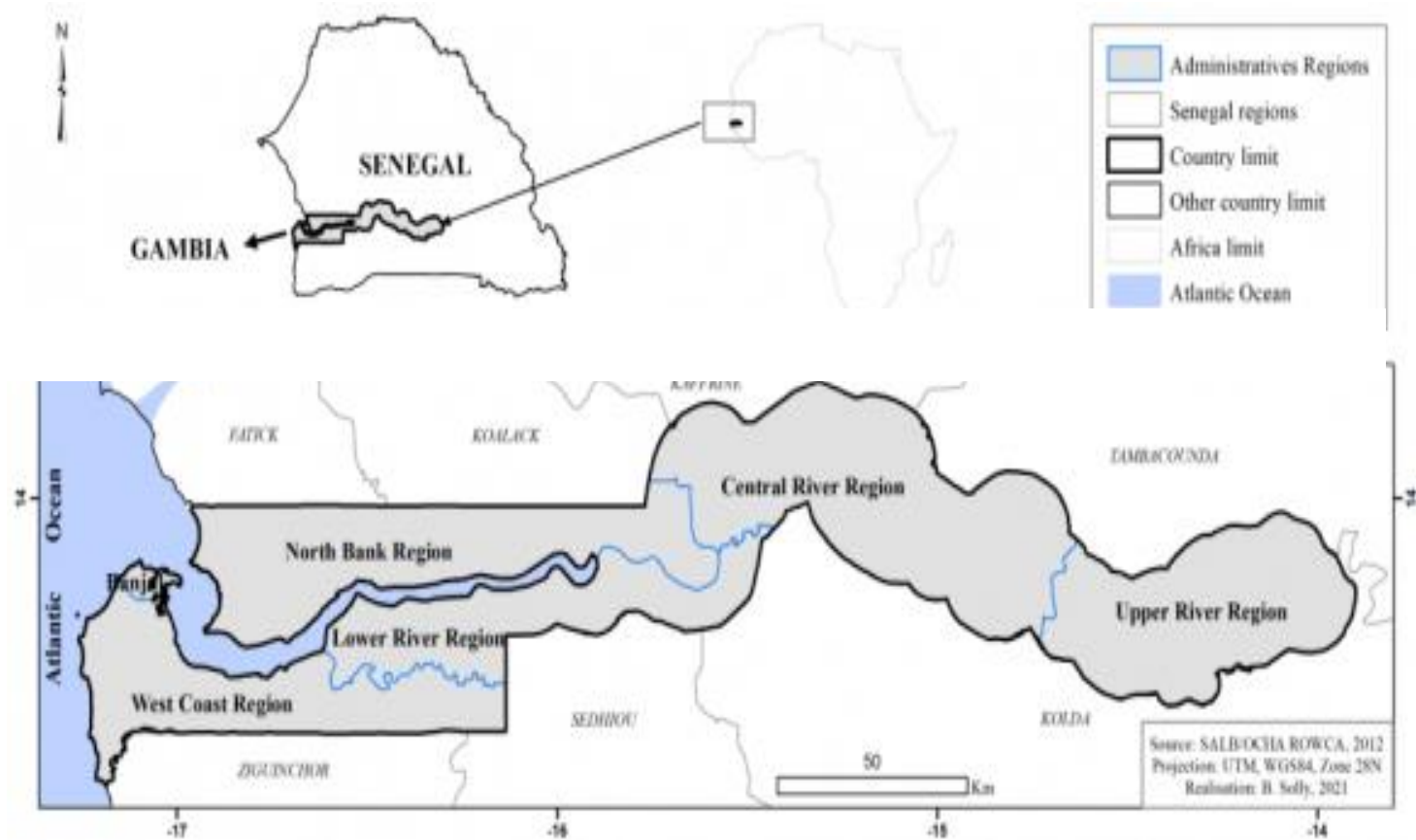
**4th - 7th February 2025,
Addis Ababa**



World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

COUNTRY PROFILE

- The Gambia is a small country:
about 11,000 km²
- Population: Approx. 2.4 million
- Livestock population:
 - Cattle: 292,837
 - small ruminants: 500,998
 - Poultry: Approx. 1 million
 - Horses and donkeys: about 20000
 - Dogs and cats: No reliable data available



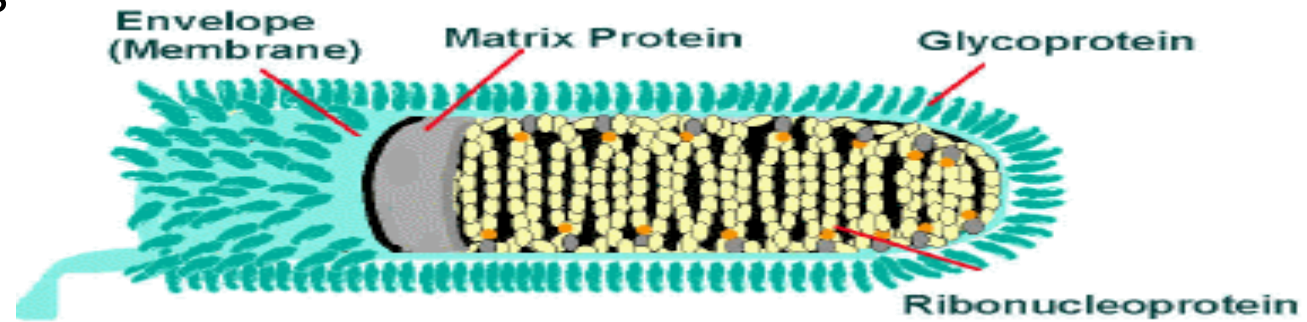
Dog population in The Gambia (mainly stray dogs)

- Not known
- Free ranging not contained in anyway and thus describe a loose level of ownership
- Found quite significantly, in the urban communities and rural growth centres (towns) of the Gambia, establishing spots where they frequent or live permanently at different times of the day to scavenge and hunt for food.
- Markets, beaches, Tourism Development Area, the streets, parks, garages, football field grounds, hospitals, health centres and local restaurants.
- The massive expansions in the Tourism Development Area (TDA), Urban and Rural towns have given newer grounds to colonise by the stray dogs and also increase their population generally.

- ***Rabies as a public health concern in The Gambia***
 - ***Importance of rabies control for both animal and human populations in the Gambia***
- Almost always fatal once clinical symptoms appear
 - Rabies virus typically transmitted through the bite of an infected animal (mainly dogs; responsible for the majority of human cases)
 - Rabies causes many deaths each year in countries like The Gambia. Effective Rabies control drastically reduces mortality rates
 - Controlling Rabies through vaccination and public awareness can protect both domestic pets and wildlife
 - A Rabies-free environment can encourage tourism and other economic activities
 - Effective control measures for Rabies can assist in managing other zoonotic risks in The Gambia

Definition and transmission

- A viral disease caused by the Rabies virus; a member of the Lyssavirus genus



- Primarily affects mammals, including humans; characterized by encephalitis
- Typically transmitted through the saliva of an infected animal via bites or scratches
- Common carriers: Bats, Raccons, foxes (wild animals); dogs and cats (domestic animals)

Number of cases (Historical perspective)

Animal cases

- Rabies never reported in wild animals in the country
- Within a period of **5 years only 8 cases** were confirmed in dogs (all between 2009 and 2012)
- Other suspected cases (not confirmed) in animals (all in 2014):
 - Dogs = 4; all died
 - Donkeys = 4; all were euthanized
 - Horses = 5; all euthanized
 - All horse and donkey cases resulted from dog bites

*Number of
cases(Historical
perspective)
contd.*

Human cases

Data available from Medical Research Council: between 2006 and 2021, 171 patients with a history of rabies exposure were recorded

- Majority of exposures were of medium risk
- All subjected to PEP
- More than 50% were male
- Majority were below 18 years
- Majority were Gambian nationals

- Number of cases(Historical perspective)*
contd.
- 3 of the dogs involved in the exposure tested positive for rabies
 - 10 documented as either having demonstrated suspicious behavior at time of exposure or died (many animals are not seen after initial contact)
 - All animals either unvaccinated or vaccination record unavailable
 - Long term follow-up of rabies-exposed patients is not done

- Generally in-country records of rabies cases are unreliable
- Given the high rate of under-reporting, the above figures may be considered a significant underestimation of the true burden of rabies in the country

Number of Cases (most recent)

Species	2022		2023	
	Estimated no. of cases	Estimated total population	Estimated no. of cases	Estimated total population
Dogs	7	Unknown	5	Unknown
Humans	Unknown	2.4	Unknown	2.4

- *Health impacts on communities*

- 1304 dog bites encounters reported to health facilities in The Gambia annually
- Lives claimed mainly of School going age children

- *Economic burden*

- PEP Bill between GMD 18,000.00 (US\$257) to GMD 30,000.00 (US\$429) per victim: **GMD23,472,000 to GMD39,120,000 (US\$450,000) for all dog bite victims**
- Dog vaccination costs



- Serious underreporting of cases
- Limited vaccination coverage in vulnerable areas
- Limited awareness in rural areas
- Irresponsible dog ownership

Overview of Control Strategy

- ❖ Stray dog population apparently on the increase
- ❖ Rabies control as part of the Department of Livestock Services' (Veterinary Services of The Gambia) disease prevention and control program
- ❖ Rabies is a priority zoonotic disease for The Gambia
- ❖ Strategic approach for the control and eventual elimination of Rabies adopted in 2016
- ❖ Rabies control initiative fully supported by government and partners of the VS. Annually, except for the past two years Government has been providing funds for rabies vaccines annually

Overview of Control Strategy *contd.*

❖ Vaccination:

- Year round vaccination campaign
- Starting from the 28th September of every year
- Demand driven for owned dogs (especially after the World Rabies Day Commemoration)
- Capture and vaccinate (for stray dogs)
- Coverage is however still low (Apparently)

❖ Sensitization / Education

- Use of mass media – National TV, National and community Radios
- Symposiums

❖ Neutering (control of dog population especially stray dogs)



- Rabies a target zoonosis for the One health platform of The Gambia
- Collaboration with NGOs and other stakeholders: The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust and GambiCat, GVMA, GVC, FAO, GTB partner with the DLS
- Regular engagement with the Gambia Tourism Board to implement ad hoc Rabies control programs supported mainly by the Ministry of Tourism



Overview of vaccinations

- ❖ Vaccinations Conducted year round
- ❖ Vaccine support of 2500 doses from WOAHA helped kick start the strategic Rabies control program
- ❖ Vaccines provided by government annually (1000 doses on vaverage)
- ❖ Occasionally partners provide vaccines
- ❖ On avaverage 600 dogs are vaccinated annually (before 2021)
- ❖ 585 dogs vaccinated in 2024





Target locations for vaccination

REGION	ADMINISTRATIVE HQ	TOWNS
Banjul City	Banjul	Banjul
Kanifing Municipality	Kanifing	Serrekunda, Bakau, TDA, Abuko
West Coast Region	Brikama	Brikama, Bwiam, Sibanor, Kalagi
Lower River Region	Mansakonko	Soma, Bureng, Nioro Jataba
North Bank Region	kerewan	Barra/Essau, Farafenni, Fass Njaga Choi/Amdalai
Central River Region- North	Wassu	Wassu, Kaur and Kuntaur
Central River Region-South	Jangjangburray	Brikamaba, Jangjangburray, Bansang
Upper River Region	Basse	Basse, Gambisarra, Alunhari



❖ Rabies Diagnosis enhanced



❖ Rabies diagnostic unit established at the Central Veterinary Lab (CVL) – supported By AU-IBAR

❖ CVL lab personnel trained on Rabies Diagnosis





Partners of the Department of Livestock Services (VS) on Rabies control

- ❖ **The Ministry of Health: Surveillance and suspected case management within the One Health framework and sensitization activities**
- ❖ **Gambia Veterinary Council and Gambia Veterinary Medical Association: Organization and conduct of vaccination campaigns**
- ❖ **Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust: Provision of Vaccines, Sensitizations and conduct of vaccination campaigns**
- ❖ **Gambicat: Conduct of neutering clinics**
- ❖ **Gambia Tourism Board: Stray dog control and conduct of vaccination campaigns**
- ❖ **Animal Welfare Advocates Group of The Gambia: Awareness creation**

Current initiatives

- Collaboration between Mission Rabies UK and the VS has been initiated to implement a more effective vaccination campaign

- With WOAHI intervention the VS has plans to determine the dog population of The Gambia

Symposium on Rabies (to launch a Rabies vaccination campaign

- ❖ First of its kind organized by the Veterinary Services
- ❖ First vaccine support from OIE / WOAH
- ❖ Graced by the ministers responsible for Public Health and Human Health
- ❖ A significant number of Schools in the Greater Banjul Area (GBA) and community and local authorities represented
- ❖ Boost for a high number of dogs vaccinated during that year



- WOAHI and other partners to continue supporting The Gambia in its efforts: (vaccines and capacity building)
- Government to increase its support for Rabies control efforts in the country

- Rabies continues to be present in The Gambian Territory
- More funding support needed from both government and development partners (local and international)
- More support from our public health partners
- **Elimination of dog rabies in the territory a possibility by 2030

Thank you!

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