

Terms of Reference (ToR)

for

South Asia Rabies Laboratory Network (SA-RABNET)

(ToR was endorsed by the Chair on 17 April 2023 after launching of the Network on 6th April 2023)

Background

Barring few countries, rabies is endemic in both humans and animals in most countries in Asia and the Pacific Region, with dog-mediated rabies being the predominant source of disease. However, it is often under-reported and is therefore considered to be a neglected disease. Over 95% of human rabies cases are associated with dog bites. Except for the Maldives, rabies is endemic in rest of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries resulting in about 45% of the global burden of human rabies.

Although rabies poses significant public health concerns in the SAARC region, there is a general lack of ground-level surveillance owing primarily due to inadequate rabies diagnostic capacity across the region. The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE) initiated capacity building measures such as regional and country-level trainings on rabies diagnosis in the region since many years. Through its laboratory twinning programs, the WOAHP supported the laboratory twinning programme between Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries Sciences University (KVAFSU)- Commonwealth Veterinary Association (CVA) Rabies Diagnostic Laboratory (RDL), Veterinary College, KVAFSU, Bengaluru, India with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), UK and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, USA during 2016-2020. The outcome of this twinning programme was the designation of the KVAFSU-CVA RDL as the WOAHP Reference Laboratory for Rabies in India in 2020 with Dr Shrikrishna Isloor as the designated expert.

Since 2020, to support capacity building for rabies diagnosis and surveillance in animals in South Asia, the WOAHP Regional Representation for Asia and the Pacific (RRAP) with the WOAHP

Reference Laboratory for Rabies in India organised virtual trainings on brain sampling and diagnosis of rabies in animals in 2020 and rabies serology in 2021. During these trainings, there were inquiries and requests from countries regarding further support for rabies diagnosis especially in terms of providing rabies laboratory proficiency tests, supply of reagents, harmonisation of tests, and technical backstopping for advanced laboratory tests from the WOA Reference Laboratory in India and RRAP. It was therefore, felt necessary to provide a platform to connect the national laboratories involved in the diagnosis of animal rabies in the SAARC Member States (MSs) for harmonization of rabies diagnosis, surveillance and its control.

The proposed South Asia Rabies Laboratory Network (SA-RABNET) will be a regional platform for the National Lead Rabies Laboratories (NLRLs) in the SAARC to meet and discuss issues on rabies diagnosis, surveillance and control. The SA-RABNET will bring the region together to share rabies outbreak information, and work towards harmonization of rabies diagnosis and surveillance approaches and regional collaboration for rabies prevention and control.

Vision

End human deaths from dog mediated rabies in South Asia through collaboration in diagnostics, surveillance, research, and information sharing.

Goals

Enhance animal rabies surveillance and disease reporting through improved collaboration and coordination amongst national lead rabies laboratories towards more effective rabies control in South Asia.

Objectives of SA-RABNET

- To provide a platform for sharing of information and experiences amongst the National Lead Rabies Laboratories (NLRLs) of the SAARC Members on rabies diagnosis, surveillance and control;
- To facilitate building capacity for rabies diagnosis, surveillance and control and other technical assistance to the Network members.
- To encourage collaborative activities on rabies diagnosis, surveillance and control.
- To foster partnerships and collaborations with other regional and international rabies laboratories or Networks.

Governance Structure of the SA-RABNET

Members of the Network

- Laboratory Director / Head of NLRLs of the SAARC MSs as nominated by the WOAH Delegate/competent authority as the case may be.
- The WOAH National Focal Points (NFPs) for Veterinary Laboratory of the SAARC MSs if different from above.
- Laboratory Director/ Head of Regional Rabies Reference Laboratory (KVAFSU, Bengaluru, India).

Secretariat the Network

- WOAH RRAP in Tokyo, Japan will serve as the interim Secretariat of the Network with the support of KVAFSU for an initial 1-3 years after which MSs are expected to take over the management of the Network.

Operation of the Network

- The Network will be managed by the NLRLs of SAARC MSs
- The Chair of the Network will be selected as decided by the Members at the Network meeting.
- The Chair shall serve for one-year period and will rotate amongst the Members as decided during the Network meeting.
- The Network will meet regularly, at least twice a year virtually and/or physically
- Observers from academia, research organizations, private sector, public health, NGOs, associations, etc. can be invited to specific meetings of the Network if their inputs are needed for the meeting and if approved by the Members.
- WOAH RRAP will provide secretarial, and if needed some financial support to the Network for an initial 1-3 years after which MSs are expected to take over the management of the Network.
- After Members take over the role of the Secretariat, the Chair and the Secretariat could be from same country for efficient functioning of the Network.

- KVAFSU (WOAH Reference Laboratory for Rabies) will provide technical expertise to the Network activities.

Sustainability of the Network

- Initially, WOAHA and KVAFSU will take lead and provide necessary support to make the Network operational.
- Once established, Member States are responsible for mobilizing resources to ensure the sustainability of the Network. WOAHA and KVAFSU will continue to provide support to Members in the activities of the Network.

Selection criteria of the Chair/ Co-Chair of the Network

- The Chair/Co-Chair should have good knowledge and experience on rabies diagnosis, surveillance, control and policy making.
- The Chair/Co-Chair should have a good understanding on rabies epidemiology including regional situation and issues/challenges in rabies control in the region.
- The Chair/Co-Chair should have a good understanding of the WOAHA's activities on rabies control.
- The Chair/Co-Chair should have desirable qualities in leadership, interpersonal communication and networking.
- The Chair/Co-Chair should be preferably working in the national rabies laboratory with at least few years of remaining service.
- The Chair/Co-Chair should have strong commitment for the functioning of the Network activities.
- The Chair/Co-Chair will provide services voluntarily.

Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Chair of the Network

- The Chair will be selected for the duration of one year.
- The Chair will moderate the Network meeting in coordination with Members, WOAHA and KVAFSU.
- The Chair will confirm the agenda of the meeting, ahead of the meeting, in consultation with Members, WOAHA and KVAFSU.

- The Chair will coordinate with the Network Members for any issues/topics to be brought for discussion.
- The Chair will coordinate with WOA and KVAFSU for any issues/topics to be discussed at the meeting and for any support in strengthening the activities of the Network.
- The Chair will make the final decision at the Network meeting and will validate the minutes of the meeting.
- Upon completion of tenure, the Chair will hand over the responsibilities to the next Chair with detail briefing of the past activities and pending activities to be continued.

Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Co-Chair of the Network

- The Co-chair will be selected for the duration of one year.
- The Co-chair will support the Chair for performing his/her responsibilities.
- The Co-Chair will function as per directives of the Chair and report to the Chair.
- In the absence of the Chair, the Co-Chair will conduct the Network meeting and will assume the full responsibilities of the Chair.
- Upon completion of tenure, the Co-Chair will hand over the responsibilities to the Chair/next Co-Chair with detail briefing of the past activities and pending activities to be continued.

Amendment

The Terms of Reference for the Network will be reviewed as necessary as proposed by Members.