

## Rabies Elimination in the Visayas, the Philippines

Rabies is responsible for the deaths of 200-300 Filipinos every year, more than 1/3 of these are children under the age of 15. Within 6 years of implementing control activities in the Visayas (an island region in the Philippines), 2 provinces, 5 island municipalities and 5 smaller islands were declared rabies free.

### Background

Rabies control activities were jointly implemented by the Philippines Department of Health (DOH) and Agriculture (DA) in the Western, Eastern and Central Visayas. Project sites covered approximately 19% of the Philippines population, and 28% of total human rabies cases nationwide.

The project aimed to:

- Demonstrate the feasibility of eliminating human rabies through canine rabies control
- Include the Philippines in rabies control initiatives in Africa and Asia
- Declare the Visayas rabies-free by end 2015

Figure 1: South East Asia and the Western, Eastern and Central Visayas of the Philippines



### Unique Approach

(1) Canine vaccination: mobilising local government units to achieve 70% vaccination coverage.

Mass dog vaccination campaigns were prepared for and conducted by local government units at the barangay (village) through province level, with the aim of vaccinating 70% of the canine population. This was aided by dog registration, movement regulation between islands, and community engagement through Rabies Awareness Month and World Rabies Day activities.

(2) Human post-exposure prophylaxis: making treatment accessible and affordable.

Animal Bite Treatment Centres (ABTC), where medical staff are trained in the management of bite cases, were established by local governments in strategic areas to improve treatment accessibility. This was further assisted by the Department of Health, which provided human rabies vaccines for free to exposed persons.

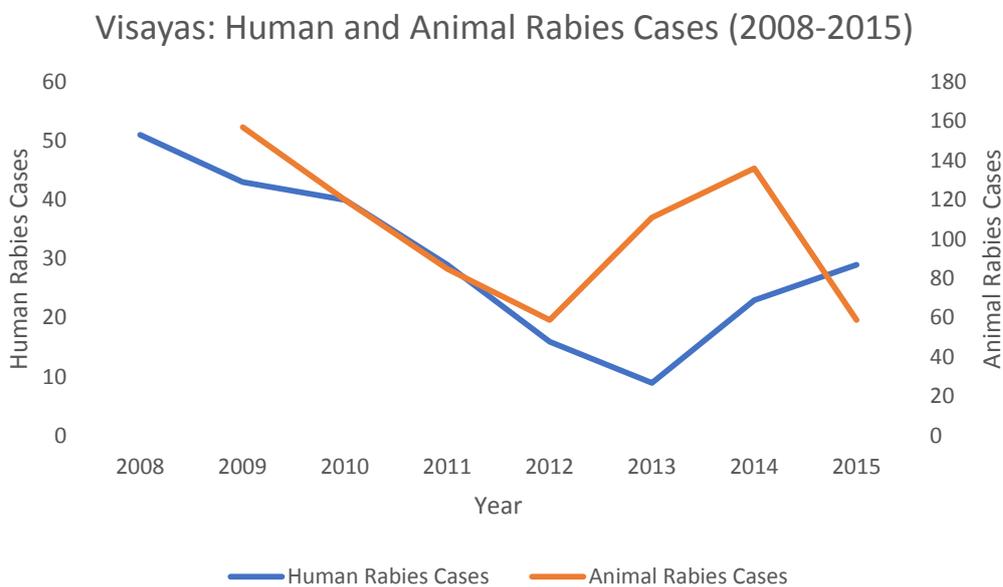
(3) Data collection: establishing NaRIS, a national rabies database.

The National Rabies Information System (NaRIS) was established to record rabies cases, vaccine inventory and utilisation. The database had 3 user levels for (1) the public, with information on rabies disease, first aid tips and locations of treatment centres; (2) ABTC personnel for reporting of rabies cases; and (3) managers and decision makers. Data from NaRIS guided development of rabies elimination strategies and declaration of rabies free areas.

### Achievements

Within 6 years of project implementation, 2 provinces, 5 island municipalities and 5 smaller islands were declared rabies-free, and human rabies cases approximately halved.

Figure 2: *Human and animal rabies cases in the Visayas, the Philippines (2008-2015)*. NB: case increases in 2013 correspond to campaign interruptions following Typhoon Haiyan.



Key outcomes of the project were:

- Demonstrating that human rabies elimination is possible in the Philippines through mass dog vaccination with local government support.
- Improved access to human post-exposure prophylaxis, through provision of free human rabies vaccines, and the establishment of 120 animal bite treatment centres.
- Development of the NaRIS database. Accessible online, NaRIS is being expanded to cover other regions and serves as a data source and information portal to the public.

### What Next?

Rabies elimination is included in the Philippine National Objectives for Health, and a regional target for ASEAN countries. The Department of Health is supporting canine vaccination to eliminate human rabies through collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, funding canine vaccines, and covering treatment costs for human patients. While many areas are still implementing control activities, newly declared rabies-free zones have become models to neighbouring communities and are working to maintain their status.