

# Community voices call for greater awareness of rabies virus, a focus on responsible animal ownership, and improved reporting channels.

## Community Voices in Action: Communicating Community Needs for Rabies Risk Prevention in Bombali District, Sierra Leone

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### INTRODUCTION

- Rabies is a fatal viral infection transmitted
- Ranked the second highest priority zoonotic disease in Sierra Leone
- Little local research on community-level risk

### METHODS

- Conducted FGDs in five constituencies in 16 communities in Bombali District
- Fifteen FGDs; 133 individuals
- Stratified by age, gender, and participant type)



**Research Question:** What are current community-level perceptions and gaps in knowledge related to rabies?



## RESULTS

### Context of animals

- Dogs and cats provide security from vermin and thieves
- General perception that animals are not treated humanely and are frequent victims of neglect and unprovoked violence

*"Sometimes we contribute greatly for an animal to become stray dog because people treated animals as if they do not have life meaning."*

### Rabies and health knowledge

- High awareness of rabies (at 79%), but few knew what caused it
- General understanding that rabies is lethal, comes from dog bites, and causes madness
- Use local names, such as "en tin en penk" and "craze dog"
- Many believed that all stray dogs have rabies – and that rabies is inherent in dogs
- Varying perceptions of risk of rabies, usually correlating with rabies knowledge
- Inconsistent knowledge of need for immediate treatment

*"If someone has been bitten by a dog, the person will behave like the dog."*

### Reporting

- Many participants were unsure where or to whom to report an animal bite
- Poor communication and coordination of cases between human and animal health
- Fear of cost and fees are a major challenge in reporting: traveling to a health facility costs money; receiving treatment often costs money; a livestock officer may require a fee to investigate a rabid animal; vaccines and other post-exposure prophylaxis is incredibly expensive (and often unavailable)

*"The woman was a relative to me and she and son was bitten by a mad dog ... What they do, they used traditional herbs to cure them, but the situation becomes worse and the child was taken to the hospital so he could survive. Because during that period the treatment was not in Makeni so the child could not survive with the rabies."*

## DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Community Education

- Conduct a rabies information campaign that uses highly visual representations of transmission pathways and treatment, and responsible animal ownership

### Health Worker Education

- Create job aids to help standardize information and messaged relayed to community members

### Reporting & Coordination

- Establish a coordinated, intersectoral reporting system
- Closely involve and support Sierra Leone One Health sector

## RESEARCH INFORMS PRACTICE

