

HUMANE CANINE POPULATION MANAGEMENT FOR HUMAN HEALTH

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Following an outcry by the Dagoretti District hospital (located in the Dagoretti area of Nairobi) caused by a massive rise in cases of suspected rabid dogs attacking individuals drawn from the 7 villages surrounding it, the area District Veterinary Officer (DVO) who was first contacted by the Hospital management in turn approached us (Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals – KSPCA) to address the menace. It is important to note that in prior similar cases the DVO would have responded by carrying out indiscriminate killing of all dogs in the area via bait laced with strychnine. But due to improved awareness of animal welfare issues (in no small measure due to constant lobbying and campaigning by the KSPCA) and also spirited resistance by the community to strychnine poisoning the department of veterinary services has sought alternative and more humane methods to combat canine overpopulation and rabies outbreaks.

Due to the complexity of the problem, we organized a seminar where we invited all the stakeholders i.e. Dagoretti District Hospital (DDH), DVO, area Chief & community members. This enabled us come up with a broad based, community accepted and animal welfare founded raft of measures so as to effectively and sustainably address the problem. It was therefore agreed upon that responsible pet ownership be practiced by all dog keepers which involved yearly vaccinations against rabies and humane restraint of their animals within their compounds. Community Health Workers – CHW (Individuals based in the community working in close collaboration with the hospital on a volunteer basis on health related matters) were to include the canine population in their agenda. The CHW were tasked to carry out a census of the dog population from their respective areas.

It was the data from this census which formed the basis of a program devised by us to combat the challenges of canine overpopulation, attacks on people and rabies outbreaks. We tackled canine overpopulation mainly using male dog neutering using the compound Zinc gluconate neutralized with L-Arginine (chemical castration) and vaccination of all dogs against rabies. We also included local veterinary services providers in the campaign for training and thus enabling long-term sustainability of yearly ant rabies vaccination.

The program is currently ongoing and the CHW has proven to be an invaluable resource and guide during the campaigns. The DDH has reported a significant fall in the reported cases of suspected rabid dogs attacking people.