Jacmel, Haiti Case Study: Learning from SASA! Adaptations in a Caribbean Setting

Summary

Background

SASA! is a community mobilization approach to prevent violence against women (VAW) and HIV, developed by Raising Voices in Uganda. SASA! works by supporting communities through a comprehensive process of social change focused on interrogating unequal power dynamics between women and men. A randomized controlled trial conducted in Kampala, Uganda, between 2007 and 2012 demonstrated SASA!’s community-level impacts on preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) against women and reducing social acceptability of violence. With this evidence, global uptake of the methodology has grown dramatically; SASA! is currently being implemented in over 25 countries worldwide.

As the number of organizations implementing SASA! continues to increase, it is essential that Raising Voices explores systematically how SASA! is being used in different contexts and creates tools that can support quality adaptation and implementation. To address this gap, Raising Voices launched the three-year Learning from SASA! Adaptations Project (Adaptations Project) in 2016, supported by the UN Trust Fund. The overarching aim of the project is to strengthen global prevention programming by distilling learnings from SASA!’s adaptation in three diverse settings: the Caribbean setting of Haiti, a humanitarian setting in Kenya, and a rural setting in Tanzania. Through a case comparison approach, our core objectives were to explore: (1) the SASA! adaptation process across these diverse contexts; (2) context-specific implementation strategies; (3) the organizational structures and processes necessary for effective programming; and (4) SASA! implementation progress against expected outcomes.

Raising Voices is collaborating closely with four partners on this project: Beyond Borders (Haiti); International Rescue Committee (Kenya); Women’s Promotion Centre (Tanzania); and University of California, San Diego (United States).

This case study focuses on how the Caribbean country of Haiti and the organizational structure of Beyond Borders influenced SASA!’s adaptation, implementation, and progress towards expected outcomes. Haiti has a long history of resilience in the face of colonialism, political repression, and widespread destruction from natural disasters. Haiti was the first nation to fully abolish slavery (1793), which, coupled with its independence from France in 1804, helped inspire a global anti-slavery movement.

Jacmel and surrounding communities are located in Haiti’s Southeast department. In 2010, when SASA! programming started, the estimated population of the intervention area was between 82,700 and 92,000 people. Although some of that population resided in the town proper, much of it was clustered in rural communities that have daily interactions with the town. Jacmel once flourished from active trade and tourism, but its economy and tourism have declined, in part due to the 2010 earthquake that just preceded the SASA! intervention. It is still considered a center for art and culture in Haiti.
Box 1: Beyond Borders

**Beyond Borders** is a non-profit organization committed to helping people build movements to liberate themselves from oppression and isolation. In Haiti, Beyond Borders supports movements to end child slavery, guarantee universal access to education, end violence against women and girls, and replace systems that oppress the poor with systems that support dignified work and sustainable livelihoods. Beyond Borders has been operating since 1993 and has offices in Port-au-Prince, Jacmel, and Nan Josen (on the island of Lagonav).

Between 2010 and 2015, Beyond Borders conducted the first adaptation and full implementation of SASA! outside Africa, in five communities in and around Jacmel. In 2014, Beyond Borders published the entire SASA! Activist Kit in Haitian Creole. Since then, Beyond Borders has also provided technical assistance to other Haitian organizations who wish to implement SASA! (SASA! Technical Assistance Hub in Haiti). Beyond Borders’ involvement in the Learning from SASA! Adaptations Project facilitates critical examination of the possibility and process of adapting SASA! in a Caribbean setting.

**Methods**

Capitalizing on Beyond Borders’ long history of working with SASA!, we used a combined retrospective and prospective design to learn from the challenges and opportunities Beyond Borders experienced when adapting and implementing the approach in Jacmel and surrounding communities. Retrospectively, we conducted a secondary analysis of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data collected by Beyond Borders between 2010-2016, using the following methods:

- **The SASA! Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS), designed to assess gender and violence-related knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors.** RAS respondents were adult women and men drawn from public sites (e.g. markets, outside of churches or cock fights, or on a beach) in Jacmel, Cayes Jacmel, Bosye, Menot, and Cap Rouge. Data were collected four times: July 2010 (298 women, 295 men), October 2012 (328 women, 331 men), July 2014 (352 women, 350 men), and January 2016 (307 women, 309 men);

- **13 focus group discussions (FGDs) with male and female community members.** Participants were asked to share their experiences of conducting community activism to prevent VAW and HIV risk, their perceptions on whether changes occurred in the balance of power between men and women in the community, and to provide suggestions for improving the intervention;

- **A qualitative program evaluation process conducted in January 2016 called Most Significant Change.** Community members and Community Activists (CAs) from the five RAS communities were interviewed by local researchers about what they considered the most significant (positive or negative) change in their community as a result of SASA!. The “winning” stories from each community were selected by a panel of volunteers from the SASA! community network.
Prospectively, we collected and analyzed data from five qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs) and six FGDs conducted between December 2016 and March 2017 with Beyond Borders staff, local community members and CAs. Qualitative study participants were guided through conversations in which they were asked to share their experiences of: implementing SASA!; participating in SASA! activities or seeing SASA! implemented; their understanding of SASA!’s evolution in the five different communities; retention rates and perceived turnover of CAs; assessments of which people the intervention reached most; barriers to intervention delivery; and other relevant activities and policy changes that occurred over the time period.

Apart from three IDIs that were conducted in English with Beyond Borders staff members, all other data collection sessions were done in Haitian Creole by trained research assistants. All research planning and procedures were designed to adhere to the ethical guidelines on conducting safe research on the topic of violence against women, emphasizing confidentiality, informed consent, and providing referrals to response services. Ethical approval was obtained from institutional review boards (IRBs) at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Human Research Protections Program in the U.S. and the Comité National de Bioéthique in Haiti. Both IRBs provided approval to analyze retrospectively the quantitative RAS survey data and qualitative FGD data collected before the Adaptations Project commenced and to collect and analyze new data through IDIs and FGDs. All participants provided oral consent to participate in research activities. During the prospective qualitative research conducted in 2016 and 2017, we audio-recorded all IDIs and FGDs and created verbatim transcripts that were subsequently translated into English.

Data were analyzed iteratively to establish and build on findings, patterns and themes. The quantitative RAS data were retrospectively analyzed to measure progress towards the intended outcomes of exposure to SASA! (e.g. change in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors), assess patterns, and compare trends over time. The qualitative FGD data collected concurrent to SASA!’s implementation were retrospectively analyzed to expand on and clarify survey findings. The primary qualitative interview and FGD data (collected in 2016 and 2017) were analyzed in a multi-step process to identify, examine and interpret patterns and themes in the text that we could organize systematically to help answer the research questions that formed the basis for the Adaptations Project. The Haiti case study benefited from the dual design, mixed-methods approach that allowed for sequential and iterative learning, and also from the opportunity to make comparisons with the other project sites in Kenya and Tanzania. To enhance collaboration, in-person discussions were held with all Adaptations Project team members to engage with emerging findings. Additionally, an all-partners validation workshop was held to draw out implications and meaning collectively.

### Adaptation Assessment

Developing successful VAW prevention programs for new contexts relies on a careful interplay between two aspects of implementation: (1) fidelity – the delivery of the program as intended; and (2) adaptation – changes to delivery and/or content to ensure a program’s contextual appropriateness.

Ongoing attention was required to ensure that the adapted approach can be implemented with fidelity to the original model’s structure, content, and level of exposure. Each document and activity was examined to discern the original intent, and adaptation was done only where needed in order to meet the same aims as the original SASA!.

At the same time, given that the socio-cultural and political context in Haiti differs significantly from the development settings for which SASA! was originally created, it was necessary to adapt SASA! for Haiti and Beyond Borders’ organizational structure.

Some of the key challenges to adapting SASA! in Haiti also ended up being among the most rewarding and effective components of the process. For example, Beyond Borders and the CAs they supported quickly realized it was insufficient to simply translate SASA! into Creole and still respect the model’s original spirit and intent. Beyond Borders’ adaptation can be considered a “cultural changes” modality because the key to its success was ensuring that SASA! was tailored to reflect Haitian voices and culture in all aspects of programming in order to be relevant to Haitian communities.
The process of “Haitianizing” SASA! involved translators, Haitian staff with deep connections to local communities, a staff member with experience with VAW and SASA! in Uganda, and CAs implementing in Haitian communities. Haitian artists and graphic designers were also brought in to support the team in transforming communication materials.

A key role in the Haitian adaptation of SASA! was a “Cultural Consultant” who provided information, strategies, insights, ideas, and perspectives through personal and learned experiences to the Beyond Borders team, fostering the ability to “Haitianize” the SASA! methodology. The Cultural Consultant was a Haitian man who had spent an extensive part of his life in Haiti, the U.S. and West Africa. As such, he brought a multi-cultural and multi-lingual lens to the project. He was described as someone who was “always listening”; in addition to being an expert at Creole-English translation, he was skilled at reading people’s expressions, interpreting the unsaid, and seeking clarifications.

Colors, illustrations and artistic styles were aligned with cultural norms and assumptions. For example, the colors depicting the different SASA! phases were changed to avoid religious and political connotations. Facial features were added to some of the images because the originals (i.e. developed for use in Uganda) had no eyes; this detail was distracting because community members perceived the lack of eyes as negative. Beyond Borders sought to use proverbs to explain certain concepts when possible because of their value in Haiti. Beyond Borders added a new character to one of the community dramas to help people better relate to the people and story, and also changed details on other communication materials to communicate strong cultural meanings.

Through the adaptation process, Beyond Borders established very close relationships with CAs, local organizations and community members, leaders and other stakeholders. This fostered extensive feelings of commitment to ensuring SASA!’s success and also facilitated strong community engagement.

Adaptation of each SASA! phase was done just before its implementation. This was done, in part, because the cohort of people implementing SASA! was not ready for the next phase of SASA! until they reached that place in their own personal process of change. Thus, other organizations who pursue a “cultural changes” adaptation might consider using the approach of concurrent adaptation and implementation. This approach supports ongoing feedback and sharing of lessons learned (including from RAS data collected) to allow for continuous learning, open dialogue and iterative revisions.

A challenge of this holistic approach is that it can take an implementing organization longer to feel ready for implementation with a model that feels adapted sufficiently. This could cause implementation delays or prolonged time to complete implementation and adaptation. Beyond Borders found that its adaptation of SASA! took much longer than anticipated, and there were several phases of high workload as the same staff tried to meet adaptation deadlines to allow implementation to continue without interruption. New planning tools and support have since been created to improve this process for new organizations.

Another notable learning from the Beyond Borders’ SASA! adaptation process was the value of developing a translation dictionary for English-Haitian Creole to ensure consistency in translations across SASA! materials. This type of tool would be helpful in any setting where SASA! is adapted and implemented.

**Implementation Assessment**

Because Beyond Borders worked very closely with CAs, community members and local organizations to adapt SASA!, there was strong local ownership of the implementation process. Community members were excited about and engaged in the implementation process, increasing the chances that SASA! outcomes will be sustained over time. Additionally, involving the local community in the process leveraged Beyond Borders’ ability to interweave cultural strengths into SASA’s materials and implementation (e.g. inclusion of Haitian proverbs that encouraged caring for neighbors, activism, or other SASA! principles), and ensure that key characteristics of the population, such as low levels of post-secondary school education and high levels of illiteracy, were addressed as needed.
Implementation strengths include:

- **SASA! implementation created unexpected violence prevention activists.** Many of those deeply involved in SASA! “turned into activists”; i.e. community members with no track record in VAW prevention took on integral roles and became experts in raising community level awareness about how power imbalances drive violence and HIV, and inspiring and enabling communities to rethink and reshape social norms.

- **Positive community relations.** SASA! implementation strengthened community relationships by fostering open communication, including positive communication among organizations in the Haitian women’s movement and communities.

- **Influence of SASA! on other Beyond Borders programs.** SASA! influenced child protection and other Beyond Borders programs in other locations in Haiti, sparking organization-wide reflection and an action committee on gender-power imbalances.

> A child protection program from Port-au-Prince came for a short course on principles of community mobilization and they started creating communication materials that are really cool that follow the [SASA!] Stages of Change, but are related to child protection. They are also integrating some of the discussions on domestic violence and its relationship with violence against children into the materials they are creating.

- Beyond Borders staff member

Implementing SASA! also involved challenges. Several of the CAs experienced initial resistance to the intervention, primarily related to traditional attitudes about gender roles and VAW. Beyond Borders largely was able to address and mitigate these challenges by actively using SASA! to involve women, men, girls and boys in the intervention. Engaging both female and male community leaders and members in meaningful and safe conversations about power and violence fostered widespread participation and minimized resistance.

The limited availability of local staff with expertise in VAW prevention was another obstacle common to implementation in rural or semi-rural areas. Beyond Borders often faced the difficult decision of hiring someone who was deeply connected with residents of the intervention communities, due to being a resident of the community themselves, but did not have experience with VAW work — or hiring someone who did have experience with VAW work but who came from an outside community, such as Port-au-Prince.

> [We were faced with the choice of] ‘do we want stronger community relationships and “in’s” within the local rural communities and people who will adopt [SASA!] as their own, in part because they see it as a way for people from the community to get jobs OR do we want people who have issue area expertise’? We opted for choosing staff who were from and living in the communities because we were convinced that culturally it would be really hard otherwise.

- Beyond Borders staff member

Other implementation challenges included:

- **Limited funding/donor support for violence prevention work in Haiti.** Short-term funding and rigid donor compliance issues at the beginning of implementation created stress on the iterative and relatively long-term process of implementation.

- **Having a large, rural operational area.** The five areas in which SASA! was implemented between 2010-2015 were large, mostly rural and spread out. This made it challenging for staff to reach all of the communities with the same frequency.

- **Expectations of financial compensation.** A large component of the SASA! model is volunteer community activism that does not include financial compensation. This can be challenging in terms of engaging or sustaining activists and community members, particularly in low resource settings like rural Haiti where people are in profound need of financial support.
Implications for Other Settings

Several features of the context in Haiti had implications on the adaptation and implementation of SASA!, which may be relevant to other settings that share these characteristics:

1. Haiti has more of an oral than written culture, resulting in high levels of variation in literacy and language use and understanding. This influenced the methods and time needed for a written adaptation of the SASA! Activist Kit.

2. Haitian culture places a great deal of importance on personal social relations and informal community networks often have much more power than formal institutions. This increased the acceptability of SASA! as a relationship-based social norms change methodology.

3. Communities often mistrust organizations bringing in programming and rely heavily on them for economic opportunities and material resources. This required close relationships and different power dynamics between staff and CAs who were volunteers working with their own networks in the community on SASA! activities, and innovative solutions to keep SASA!’s activist focus.

4. There is a strongly felt legacy of slavery and foreign domination of Haiti. For SASA! to be fully accepted, it had to be “Haitianized,” referring to the process of tailoring SASA! to make it salient to local values and social mores.

For Haiti, it’s extremely important that the people feel that what they’re working with is Haitian, or at least Haitianized. If people sense the tone of foreign power . . . there’s this reaction against what’s imported and forced upon us. Even when it’s good, we don’t want it.
— Beyond Borders staff member

SASA! Outcomes

Overall, the five-year adapted SASA! implementation period in Haiti had a substantial and positive impact on community-level knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors related to the prevention of VAW. Knowledge increased in these four categories between 2010 and 2016. The most significant change between the Awareness (second) and Action (fourth and final) phases was an increased understanding of the ways in which violence interrelates with HIV. By 2016, almost all women (96%) and 90% of men recognized that certain forms of violence (e.g. a married man having several sexual partners) increased a woman’s risk of HIV infection. Qualitative findings reflected positive skills and behaviors around shared decision making, flexibility in gender roles, and even included several claims – especially in smaller, rural communities – that violence had decreased as a result of exposure to SASA!.

Most men and women reported baseline attitudes in support of gender equitable norms and lack of tolerance of VAW. These trends were retained over the course of SASA! implementation. Additionally, men’s agreement with the assertion that married women can refuse to have sex with their husbands increased more than twofold when comparing responses between 2012 and 2016.

An area where both women and men had attitudes less supportive of survivors of violence was related to offering public/social support. For instance, fewer than half of the respondents interviewed in 2012 and 2016 believed a married woman who had been beaten by her husband has the right to tell others. However, feedback from FGD participants differed slightly in that participants generally felt community members were proactive in terms of intervening in situations where they saw violence occurring. At all time points measured, RAS findings indicate women were much more likely than men to offer direct support and assistance to women experiencing violence at home.

Both men and women reported significant increases in their familiarity with SASA! materials and ideas. For example, when compared with 2012 data, women in 2016 reported a three-fold increase in the odds of encountering SASA! materials during the last year and a 3.6-fold increase in the odds of knowing someone from their community who talks about SASA!. When compared to men in 2012, men in 2016 on average reported a 3.46-fold increase in the odds of encountering SASA! materials in the last year and a 2.36-fold increase in the odds of knowing someone from their community who talks about SASA!.
Participants felt very positive about SASA! and the impact it had on their lives and communities. 

SASA! provides training that allows people to have more control of themselves. As a result of SASA!, people become aware that violence is not good thing. Thus, life starts to flourish and people become more human.

- Male community member

My relationships have improved, violence has turned around, the truth is out, and when I can’t do it alone, I call on others to come and help me.

– Female religious leader and activist within SASA! network

Men have changed a lot because SASA! sat down with them together with the women, and they started to understand that women are people too, same as men.

– Female member of SASA! network and leader of another women’s organization that supports women experiencing violence

Recommendations

This Learning from SASA! Adaptations in a Caribbean Setting case study illustrates the challenges and opportunities involved in adapting SASA! in Haiti, which may be useful for organizations implementing SASA! in similar contexts. Because SASA! had not been adapted in a context outside Africa, Raising Voices had not yet developed any systematic guidance or reference on how to tailor it to meet the unique needs of another setting and also maintain fidelity to the original design. Through a process of establishing their own procedures for SASA! adaptation and implementation, Beyond Borders learned many important lessons on how to adapt SASA! to account for cultural and language differences. Beyond Borders’ learnings are intended to guide and offer assistance to other organizations interested in adapting SASA! in their own contexts. We draw on case study findings to propose four broad recommendations:

1. **Create a translation dictionary:** As SASA! has extensive materials that are often adapted over time, it is important to harmonize translations of nuanced terms to ensure consistency across documents. This is particularly true for oral cultures like in Haiti, where language and vocabulary can change over time, from one location to another, and in response to historical and political changes.

2. **Implement before finalizing adapted materials:** Making changes and testing how they are received and understood in the community enables the team to incorporate findings into setting-specific activities and recommendations in an iterative manner. Also, the phased SASA! approach means that even staff leading the adaptation may not be ready to fully understand the nuances of the concepts until they reach that phase directly; waiting allows for higher quality and nuance in adaptation.

3. **Let staff who are intimately familiar with SASA! and local communities tailor SASA!:** Relationship norms vary by setting so all materials should be tailored to best fit the needs of each community. This includes images, language, etc. in materials and types of activities; not all activities need to be implemented if they do not work for a specific community.

4. **Engage the community respectfully and continuously:** Respectful, equitable power relationships among staff, CAs and other community members can be a model for the positive power described in SASA!. This is particularly important for contexts like Haiti where communities tend to mistrust organizations, and where there is a perceived history of organizations “importing” inappropriate programs and/or foreign domination. In addition, the strength of the bonds between CAs from different areas can facilitate greatly the success of implementation in communities, increase a sense of ownership, and sustain activism.

5. **Ensure adequate and flexible time and resources:** Sufficient human and financial resources must be available to ensure that the adaptation, implementation and evaluation of SASA! can be done comprehensively, in a culturally appropriate manner, and in a way that maintains fidelity to the original design. It is essential to the quality of a cultural adaptation that there be enough time and resource flexibility to ensure responsiveness to community feedback throughout the process.
Final Word

Findings from this case study highlight unique aspects of adapting and implementing SASA! for contexts like Haiti, such as communities with a more oral than written culture, those where personal relationships and community ties are stronger than institutions, and cultures with significant scepticism about foreign organizations and their interventions.

Through the holistic and participatory process of “Haitianizing” SASA!, meaningful and lasting partnerships developed between Beyond Borders and community members living and working in and beyond the organization’s areas of operation. The cultural adaptation and deep community engagement contributed to successful and complete implementation of SASA! between 2010-2015; Beyond Borders now offers technical support to several Haitian organizations implementing SASA! throughout the country.

Beyond Borders provides a model for how SASA! can be adapted successfully and implemented in communities that are quite distinct from those for whom the model was developed. Overall, Beyond Borders’ experience in Haiti demonstrates the feasibility of a “cultural changes” type of SASA! adaptation and reaffirms that community-wide mobilization and engagement is a viable and potentially transformative VAW prevention approach within rural, non-African programming.


Available online at http://raisingvoices.org/innovation/disseminating-ideas/

Endnotes