



A CEDOVIP and Raising Voices staff training on SASA!

The SASA! Way to preventing violence against women

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Increasing evidence links violence against women to their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Studies in Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania show that women who have suffered violence are up to three times more likely to contract HIV than those who have not. Despite this, many organisations conceptualise their work on the two issues separately, with governments often allocating tasks of addressing them to different ministries, donors having separate budget lines for each issue, and groups doing the same in their tackling of HIV and violence against women.

Power in relationships underpins violence against women and their vulnerability to HIV infection. A study done in Uganda found that three in four people thought it unacceptable for a woman to propose condom use to her husband. Such a suggestion spelt mistrust, raising doubts over her fidelity, and putting her at higher risk of violence.¹

For fear of violence, women often remain quiet about their HIV status. A Kenyan study revealed that more than half the women who knew they were HIV-positive did not tell their partners for fear of being beaten or abandoned.²

There is growing recognition that to reduce violence and women's vulnerability to HIV, the link between these two issues must be addressed. Raising Voices believes that the key to preventing the twin pandemics is to address the power imbalance between women and men. The challenge lies in developing methods that convert this concept into a practical, context-appropriate response for use by community activists.

At Raising Voices, The SASA! Activist Kit is our response to the challenge of meaningfully, provocatively, constructively and effectively tackling the sensitive and

charged issue of reframing power dynamics between women and men.

Confronting power, violence and HIV

We have been working in the Horn, East and southern Africa and beyond to raise the issue of HIV and AIDS within the context of preventing violence and helped organisations and communities focus on the causes of violence rather than its many manifestations. Introducing HIV and AIDS in the mix increases the tendency of staff as well as communities to treat the issue as a technical or medical problem instead of a human rights issue — something that is 'out there' and not a struggle within all of us.

In developing SASA Activist Kit, we explored HIV and AIDS and VAW programmes to learn how others were addressing them. There were a few examples but few that fostered broad-scale social change. Our experience shows that changing social norms is the key to long-term, sustainable violence prevention and that the key to changing power dynamics in relationships is about challenging unjust social norms — deconstructing the negative norms and replacing them with positive ones that promote equality and justice. This perspective requires us to move away from

technical solutions towards personal engagement, including moving beyond:

- One individual at a time to more holistic community mobilisation.
- The narrow focus of working with specific groups.
- Information sharing to mobilising communities and engaging all players within communities to change long-held attitudes.

The SASA! way

Sasa is a Kiswahili word for 'now'. We chose it to reflect the urgency of addressing the twin pandemics of violence against women and AIDS and is also an acronym for the four phases of mobilising communities to change deeply-held social norms.

Start: Start thinking about violence against women and HIV and AIDS as interconnected and fostering the power within us to address the issues.

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Awareness: Raising awareness about how our communities accept men's use of power over women, fuelling the dual pandemics of violence against women and HIV and AIDS.

Support: Supporting women, men and activists directly affected by or involved in the interconnected issues by joining our power with others'.

Action: Taking action by using our power to prevent violence against women and HIV and AIDS.

The phases of the approach build on the Stages of Change Model³ that recognises that individuals typically pass through a process before lasting change is possible. Raising Voices modified this framework and scaled it up to the community level to help organisations systematically and effectively facilitate change.

“Before, we found ourselves responding to figuring things out day by day. We ended up doing awareness-raising for years. Now we have a plan, we are not going to get stuck; we see the importance of moving beyond awareness-raising to building skills and helping people take action. This is how we might be able to see real change,” a staff member of a Kampala-based NGO, said.

SASA! evolved from our experiences and success with the violence prevention

SASA! Strategies and activities

Local activism: Creating “everyday” activists by engaging women, men and young people in accessible grassroots initiatives. Activities include drama scripts, public events, community action groups, quick chats, health chats, etc.

Media & Advocacy: Spreading provocative facts and stories across the media and in leaders’ and policymakers’ offices through media exposure ideas, PowerPoint presentations, radio soap operas, leadership leaflets, etc.

Communication materials: Using creativity and fun of things like posters and comics to engage people spontaneously during their day-to-day activities through posters, comics, games and picture cards.

Training: Building people’s understanding of the issues using interactive and thought-provoking exercises, including specialised training for different professions via a series of modules designed for staff, community members and health care providers.

approach described in *“Mobilising Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence: A Resource Guide for Organisations in East and Southern Africa”*.⁴ It builds on and expands on this work by refining the phases and strategies, providing concrete activities and materials for the four key strategies, and focusing on power as the driver of both pandemics.

SASA! Power

SASA! is challenging women and men about their use of power. Grounding SASA! in terms of power can help groups and activists maintain a politicised analysis of violence against women, which we have found critical in violence prevention work and particularly challenging when HIV is added into the mix. SASA! seeks to reframe power by opening dialogue with communities about the positive and negative uses of power in personal and professional relationships.

As an NGO staffer said: “Power makes people uncomfortable. At first I thought this was bad and didn’t want to talk about it. Now I see it as good. How can we change if we are not made uncomfortable to rethink how and who we are in a new way? Now instead of avoiding discomfort, I try to create it.”

We have all experienced a lack of power in our lives — in our families, in communities we live in, at the workplace, during conflict or civil unrest. SASA! discusses different types of power, and encourages activists to consider how we all have the ability and the responsibility to use power in just and fair ways.

“This talk of power has let me see how violence against women isn’t about anger or culture but how it is an abuse of power. I have experienced powerlessness in my own life; it only creates anger and resentment in me, so why not my wife too? I don’t want that in my relationship,” a man in Kampala said.

The Start phase is about fostering the power within ourselves. Power within is the strength that comes from within us when

we recognise abuses of power and our own power to start positive change. This compels us to show the benefits of change and facilitate community-wide support for change.

The Awareness phase is about understanding men’s use of power over women. Power over is the power a person or group uses to control another person or group. This control might be used directly in forms such as physical violence or intimidation. It could also be used indirectly, such as through social beliefs and practices that position men as superior to women. Using one’s power over another is unjust. Fostering a balance of power between women and men benefits all.

Power within is the strength that comes from within us when we recognise abuses of power and our own power to start positive change.

The Support phase is about joining with others to give support. Power with is the power felt when two or more people join hands to do something they could not have done alone. Power with includes supporting those in need, those trying to change and those speaking out. It means joining power with anyone for positive ends and creating a sense of support in the community.

The Action phase is about using our power to create positive change. Power to is the belief, energy and actions that individuals and groups use to create change. It is the power felt when individuals are able to enjoy the full spectrum of human rights. Power to is the freedom experienced by people when they are free to achieve their full potential, unfettered by norms that accept men’s power over women.

A woman said: “I was worried about talking about power with community members; won’t they say I am causing trouble, making women big-headed? Will they understand? There is some resistance, of course, but people are showing up during events and discussions; they want to explore this. They



Men should use their power to empower women

see power as something real, affecting their lives. The sessions are not typical NGO stuff, they are hot!”

The SASA! Activist Kit suggests a variety of activities (see box) to help activists use the four strategies to reach different people. We have found that the discussion on power — starting with the power we all have inside and moving toward the experience and implications of one person having power over another — is allowing communities to connect with the ideas, to really begin to examine their own use of power and to analyse the implications of its negative use. It quickly takes the conversation from knowledge/fact-based learning to personal stories of reflection, courage, shame or action.

Men often find it hard to understand women’s experiences of low status or lack of power because it is framed within women’s experiences yet every man we have come across has experienced powerlessness with a parent, teacher, boss, official, colleague, an elder, and community leaders and can articulate it clearly and passionately. In SASA! we make the connections between abuse of power and how that hurts us all, not by blaming or shaming men for violence, but by connecting with their own humanity, recognising injustice, opening up thought about the benefits of balancing power, and encouraging its positive use.

“I thought it was about giving up power which I, and of course all men, don’t want to do. But now I understand that power isn’t going to run out; mine doesn’t depend on my wife having none...” an activist said.

Through field testing and implementation of the approach with our partners the Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), we are finding that using this new language of power is helping people get engaged more personally, take the issues more to heart, to open up personal reflection and action in unprecedented ways. As one man testified, “I would not have said our relationship has violence, I have never sent her (wife) to the hospital. But power? Now I see I use my power all the time to control her and that it is actually a kind of violence. That’s why I got involved, SASA! is about me, even though it is hard to admit that.”

Learning from experiences

It is essential to understand the implications and impact of creating practical methodologies. We are partnering with CEDOVIP, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Makerere University and PATH to generate knowledge and learning about the impact of SASA! A randomised control trial known as the SASA! Study, will help us determine the implications of such programming and share evidence on SASA!’s effectiveness.

There is resistance to change, and as a Kampala man says, “It is not possible for both women and men in a relationship to have power. There is one head — of the church, of a government, of a home. It has to be the man...” Yet a female community member said: “I fear my husband. Of course I want power, not over him but for myself... to be able to do things and take care of myself and my family. But I have to pretend I don’t have or want power, otherwise, he won’t like it.” The baseline survey was completed in April 2008 and data is currently being analysed. A follow-up survey will be done in 2011 and the study should contribute to the small but growing body of knowledge in violence prevention.

We are also monitoring and assessing activities in implementing SASA! in Kampala. The SASA! Kit was designed for activists struggling to produce meaningful

and objective measures of their work. The low cost and activist-friendly tools will hopefully contribute to more effective monitoring and assessment of the approach.

“SASA! tools allow us to move beyond counting the number of people who show up at an event to what the event means to them. I think this is going to teach us more about how to create change,” an NGO staffer said.

Future plans

Raising Voices and CEDOVIP will work to scale up the SASA! approach in Northern Uganda this year through a three-year programme with five organisations. Raising Voices will begin a regional roll-out in 2009. Ten organisations in the Horn, East and Southern Africa will apply for a three-year relationship with Raising Voices to learn about and implement SASA!

To learn more about SASA!, visit:
<http://www.raisingvoices.org/sasa>

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