

# Fidelity to the *SASA!* Activist Kit

Programming  
for Prevention  
Series,  
Brief No. 2

## Background

*SASA!* is a community mobilization approach to prevent violence against women (VAW) and HIV, developed by Raising Voices in Uganda. A randomized control trial conducted with the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Makerere University, evidenced *SASA!*'s effectiveness in preventing intimate partner violence against women<sup>1</sup> and demonstrated that change can occur at a community level within programmatic timeframes. Translated into several languages and adapted to many contexts, *SASA!* is now being implemented by more than 60 organizations in over 20 countries. The increasing uptake of *SASA!* over the last few years has brought some interesting challenges and questions.

Program Briefs are designed as practical guides to address critical challenges and questions in violence against women prevention programming. This Program Brief specifically addresses questions around the importance of 'fidelity' to the *SASA!* methodology -- what does it mean to use *SASA!* in different contexts? What are the essentials of the *SASA!* methodology needed for impact to be realized? Based on Raising Voices' experience with partners in sub-Saharan Africa and worldwide, this Brief outlines the four 'essentials' of the *SASA!* approach and gives practical suggestions on how to ensure they are meaningfully implemented. Finally, it provides a quiz that organizations can work through to assess a program's fidelity to the *SASA!* methodology.

## Who can use this Program Brief?

This Program Brief can be used by organizations who are planning for, or currently implementing, *SASA!* It can guide your organizations' *SASA!* planning process, or help make improvements to your existing *SASA!* programming. It can also be used by donors to analyze the fidelity to *SASA!* of grant applicants proposing use of *SASA!*, or grantee reports of *SASA!* implementation.

<sup>1</sup> Programming for Prevention Series, **Brief No. 2**

## Evidence of *SASA!*'s effectiveness

From 2008 to 2012, a randomized controlled trial of *SASA!*'s effectiveness was conducted. In four communities of Kampala, Uganda, community members and leaders used *SASA!* to mobilize their neighbors, friends, relatives and family members. In another four communities, life went on as usual—there was no *SASA!* in these communities. What happened? After three years, women's risk of physical violence from a partner was 52% lower in *SASA!* communities than in the control communities. Further, 76% of women and men in *SASA!* communities reported believing that physical violence against a partner is not acceptable, compared to 26% in control communities.<sup>1</sup>

## The what and why of program fidelity

Fidelity is the degree to which a methodology is used, based on the original design. Studies that look at the link between fidelity and program outcomes have shown that high levels of fidelity are associated with positive program outcomes. However, even when evidence-based programs are adopted, they are often implemented with low levels of fidelity.<sup>2,3</sup>

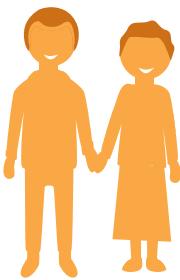
Quality implementation of any methodology requires adaptation or contextualization for different settings. There is a difference between lack of fidelity to a methodology due to inconsistent use or inability to implement, and additions or changes to the program (adaptation) based on intimate knowledge of the local community.<sup>2,3</sup> It is often not realistic or desirable to expect complete fidelity to a program – and in fact some contextualization is necessary and beneficial.<sup>3</sup>

Raising Voices' experience with partners implementing *SASA!* around the world has shown that there are 'essentials' for implementing *SASA!*, and that implementation styles can be made to ensure a better cultural and contextual 'fit'. For example, when Beyond Borders adapted *SASA!* in Haiti they changed the *SASA!* posters so the illustrations more closely resemble members of the community they were working with. They also changed colors of phases based on strong cultural meanings, included Haitian proverbs to explain certain concepts, and added a character to the dramas to help people better relate to them. However, they maintained all the essentials of the approach, as described below.

## What makes SASA! work?

Raising Voices is currently conducting research with a number of partner organizations in different settings to better understand fidelity and adaptation. However, our learning to date reveals four essentials to effective SASA! implementation:





## A Gender-Power Analysis

The root cause of violence against women is the power imbalance between women and men at both individual and structural levels. Women and men can learn to balance their power positively with one another, and community structures can be changed to reflect gender equality. This benefits everyone.

In practice this means:

- Each of the 4 phases in *SASA!* deals with a different type of power: power within (start), power over (awareness), power with (support) and power to (action).
- The *SASA!* team spends time exploring power, violence against women and activism in their own lives and the community.
- The *SASA!* team trains Community Activists (CAs).
- Community Activists facilitate informal activities with community members to critically reflect on power and violence and how it is used in relationships, families and the community.
- Where relevant, conversations about power imbalances and VAW are linked to HIV.
- Community Activists are regularly supported and mentored to increase their knowledge and build their facilitation skills to help community members critically reflect on and understand the four types of power in *SASA!*

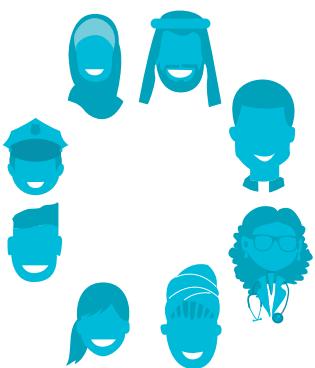


## A Phased-in Approach

In the Stages of Change Theory,<sup>4</sup> individuals first acknowledge there is a problem; they critically think about the problem and learn more about it. Then, they can look for alternatives and build skills and support to make a change, and finally, they can make change and try to sustain it. *SASA!* scales this individual behavior change theory to the community level. New ideas are phased-in over a period of time through four phases.

In practice this means:

- There are four phases of *SASA!* – start, awareness, support and action.
- The start phase nurtures one's 'power within', the awareness phase deepens analysis of men's 'power over' women and the community's silence about this, the support phase fosters joining 'power with' others, and action encourages the use of 'power to' make and sustain positive change.
- New activities and a different type of power are introduced in each of the four phases.
- *SASA!* monitoring and evaluation tools are used to assess progress throughout the phase, and at the end of each phase a Rapid Assessment Survey helps determine if the community is ready to move to the next phase.
- Each phase focuses on a different outcome: start (knowledge), awareness (attitude), support (skills), action (behavior).
- It is important to complete all four phases – this means programming is longer term and takes between three and five years to complete.



## Holistic Community Engagement (circles of influence)

Social norm change requires action at all levels of community life. SASA! engages members of the community across all four circles of the Ecological Model<sup>5</sup> (i.e., individual, relationship, community, society) and builds a critical mass for change, by inspiring individuals and groups from each circle to influence those around them.

In practice this means:

- Community asset mapping is conducted at the start of SASA! implementation to identify important individuals, groups and institutions in each layer of the circles of influence.
- All four of the SASA! strategies are used: communication materials, media and advocacy, training and local activism.
- A variety of activities within each strategy reach out to diverse individuals and groups within the circles of influence.
- Activities are frequent with several conducted each week in a neighborhood / community.



## Activism

For change to be sustainable it needs to be truly owned by the community. To foster this, SASA! moves beyond information giving and gets personal, encouraging critical self-reflection with the aim of inspiring women and men to feel compelled to action, in their own lives and in the community. There are equal numbers of male and female community activists, who represent a diverse spectrum of community members. Similarly, community activists are also selected within the professional groups (e.g., religious leaders, health care providers, police, etc) an organization is working with.

In practice this means:

- Community activists live within approximately 30 minutes walking distance of the neighbors they engage. Each SASA! community has several community activists.
- NGO staff are present in the SASA! communities regularly and provide mentoring to all community activists.
- Activists meet community members or colleagues where they are (e.g. in the market place, at home, the workplace, mechanics shop, near the water pump, etc.) for informal discussion, rather than in trainings or formal public events.
- Activities spark repeated reflection and dialogue in their communities on the issues of power and VAW.
- Community activists use a referral list with services and support mechanisms for survivors of violence.
- NGO staff build and maintain positive relationships with the SASA! community, and there are regular opportunities for community members to share feedback with the organization.



# Fidelity quiz

## How faithful are you to SASA!?

While SASA! can be used and adapted in many different contexts, understanding the essentials of the methodology and how to maintain fidelity to these will help to ensure positive outcomes. This quiz is designed to help organizations assess to what extent their implementation maintains fidelity to the original model, and to use this information for reflection on their programming.

To use the quiz go through each section and tick a, b or c depending on what seems most reflective of your SASA! implementation. Then read the 'what this means' section. You can use the information to generate further discussion within your organization about how you are implementing SASA!, and to help strengthen your future SASA! programming.

### 1. To what extent does your SASA! implementation use a gender-power analysis?

- a.  Power is not talked about.
- b.  Power is mentioned in some activities but is not always the focus of discussions.
- c.  The majority of activities focus on the type of power relevant to each phase of SASA!

### 2. To what extent do you engage each of the circles of influence (individual, relationship, community, society) in your SASA! implementation?

- a.  Activities primarily focus on one layer of the circles of influence in the community (i.e. male or female community members only, police, health care providers, local officials, religious leaders, or media, etc.)
- b.  Activities focus on at least two groups from at least two circles of influence.
- c.  Activities focus on at least two groups from each of the four circles of influence, and involve both men and women.

### 3. To what extent is your SASA! implementation using a phased-in approach?

- a.  Activities are conducted from the various phases of the SASA! Activist Kit, and there is not always a connection between which activities are being implemented and which SASA! phase the community is in.
- b.  Each SASA! phase is worked through systematically. An assessment of whether the community is ready to move to the next phase (using the Rapid Assessment survey) does not always take place.

- c.  Each SASA! phase is worked through systematically, and movement between phases takes place once a Rapid Assessment Survey has established that the sufficient change in attitude, skills or behavior change has been achieved.

#### **4. To what extent does your SASA! implementation prioritize community-led activism?**

- a.  Staff lead the majority of activities in the community.
- b.  The majority of SASA! activities are led by community activists, however staff sometimes lead activities that require strong facilitation skills.
- c.  SASA! activities are led by community activists living in the SASA! communities. This community activist group is made up of fairly equal numbers of men and women and diverse community members (e.g., mixed ages, faiths, education levels, physical ability, etc.)

#### **5. To what extent does your SASA! implementation ensure a benefits-based approach to community engagement?**

- a.  Communication materials and activities are directive (telling community members what to think and how to change), and/or sometimes depict graphic portrayals of violence.
- b.  Some communication materials and activities are directive while others promote critical thinking, and help community members to imagine alternative uses of power.
- c.  Activities help community members to imagine and strive towards positive, non-violent alternatives through asking questions rather than giving messages. The communication materials maintain the dignity of both women and men.

#### **6. To what extent does your SASA! implementation focus on VAW?**

- a.  Activities use the language of GBV (gender based violence) rather than VAW (violence against women), and include discussions of women being violent toward men as well as men being violent toward women.
- b.  Programming focuses on discussing many types and consequences of VAW without addressing the root cause (the power imbalance between men and women).
- c.  Programming focuses on discussing power imbalance as the root cause of violence against women, and especially in relation to intimate partner violence.

#### **7. What is the ratio of staff to Community Activists in your SASA! implementation?**

- a.  There is no core SASA! team – SASA! activities are supported by staff from other projects.
- b.  There is a minimal SASA! team in place with one staff member expected to support more than 50 CAs in different locations.
- c.  There is a dedicated SASA! staff team that has enough time to regularly support and mentor CAs in SASA! communities (at least one staff member for every 25 community activists).



## **8. To what extent does your SASA! implementation reach a critical mass for change?**

- a.  Community size is unclear or unconsidered. Community Activists (CAs) and Community Action Groups (CAGs) are spread thinly across large geographical areas, too large to regularly reach a critical mass of community members.
- b.  There are several CAs and CAGs working within the same community, however limited attention has been paid to how many activists will be needed in each community in order to regularly reach a critical mass of community members.
- c.  There are enough CAs and CAGs in each SASA! community to regularly reach more than 50% of the total population of the community. All of them live within 30 minutes walking distance of where activities are conducted.

## **9. To what extent does your SASA! implementation prioritize staff training?**

- a.  Staff are briefed on SASA! at the start of the program. No modules from SASA! are done with the team.
- b.  Staff training is done at the start of SASA! with some SASA! modules but there is no time for regular staff practice and skills building.
- c.  Staff are trained at the beginning of each SASA! phase with most/all of the SASA! phase modules, and there is ongoing staff practice and skills building throughout.

## **10. How often do SASA! activities take place in your community?**

- a.  Activities in the SASA! communities are conducted infrequently (i.e. once a month or less).
- b.  There are SASA! activities running most weeks in most of the SASA! communities.
- c.  Activities take place regularly (several days a week) and consistently across SASA! communities.

## **11. To what extent does your SASA! programming utilize the four SASA! strategies (i.e. local activism, media and advocacy, communication materials, training)?**

- a.  Your program uses one of the SASA! strategies.
- b.  Your program uses two or three of the SASA! strategies.
- c.  Your program uses all four of the SASA! strategies.

**12. To what extent does your SASA! implementation gather data and use it to inform programming?**

- a.  Some data is collected, but this data is not often used to inform programming.
- b.  SASA! M&E tools are used inconsistently. This data is sometimes used to inform reflections on programming.
- c.  SASA! M&E tools are used consistently; data is regularly recorded, analyzed and shared with staff and the SASA! team, and used to make decisions about programming.

**13. Does your SASA! team (staff and community activists) have access to a referral list for women experiencing violence?**

- a.  There is no referral list available.
- b.  A referral list of basic services has been created, but no quality check on the services listed has been conducted, and there has been no training for service providers on the list.
- c.  A referral list of services and support mechanisms for survivors of violence is regularly updated – staff and community activists regularly refer to it, and service providers listed have been trained by the organisation.

**14. Does your SASA! implementation include mechanisms for community feedback to ensure implementation and materials seem relevant, safe and respectful?**

- a.  Organizations keep in touch with communities, but there is no specific plan or follow up to ensure this.
- b.  Community activists and other key community members have regular opportunities to share experiences with staff, but this typically stays with community-based staff; therefore programming may not be responsive to community concerns.
- c.  Community activists and other key community members have regular opportunities to share feedback and experiences. There are mechanisms in reporting, staff reflections and other strategic discussions that take community feedback into consideration and make needed adjustments to implementation and materials.

**15. Does your SASA! implementation include cultural and language adaptation?**

- a.  There has been no culture or language adaptation.
- b.  Adaptation and/or translation is done by staff without community testing and feedback.
- c.  Adaptation includes community testing and time to incorporate feedback to improve materials and implementation.

# Understanding your answers

This quiz was designed as a tool for reflection rather than an exact measure of a program's fidelity to the *SASA!* methodology. The guidance below can be used as a prompt for deeper team reflection and analysis of your *SASA!* programming.

## If you ticked 8 or more As: Your program is *SASA!*-influenced

Your violence prevention programming has been influenced by some *SASA!* ideas and activities, yet also relies heavily on other input and programming approaches. You may have taken some of the core principles of *SASA!*, or activities from the *SASA! Activist Kit*, and integrated them into your existing programming on GBV or other issues.

In each place in the quiz you answered "a" are there ways that you can move toward "c"? After working through some program options take the quiz again. If you continue to combine approaches, look at how the underlying theories for each approach fit together and ensure that the different materials you are using are a methodological fit.

## If you ticked 8 or more Bs: Your program has *SASA!* building blocks in place

Your violence against women prevention programming has integrated some or many of the core components of the *SASA!* methodology. You are using the *SASA!* methodology, you may not achieve similar impact as the *SASA!* study because there are several components that still need to be considered. In each place in the quiz you answered "a" or "b" are there ways that you can move toward "c"? After working through some program options, take the quiz again.

## If you ticked 8 or more Cs: Your program demonstrates fidelity to the *SASA!* methodology

Your violence against women prevention programming is based on the *SASA!* methodology. Your fidelity to the *SASA!* is relatively high, which means you have adapted *SASA!* to your context, but have kept what is core to the methodology. You are likely to achieve positive outcomes, similar to those found in the *SASA!* study. You have strong monitoring and evaluation systems in place that can help you track *SASA!* impact in your communities. You will be learning a lot about how *SASA!* works in your own context - make sure to document and share that learning with the violence prevention field and keep up the good work!



## Moving forward

Working to prevent violence against women and HIV is urgent and important work. It also takes care and attention to ensure that programming is really creating safer relationships and communities where women are at less risk of violence. This Program Brief on fidelity provides some key reflection points for ensuring that organizations using SASA! can make it as effective as possible in their own context.

Please share with us your experiences at [info@raisingvoices.org](mailto:info@raisingvoices.org) and join the global community using SASA!

Other resources that can help you reflect on the quality of your SASA! programming include:

Raising Voices (2012) Welcome to SASA!: *Getting Started is Simple*, Kampala, Uganda  
Available online at <http://raisingvoices.org/resources/>

Raising Voices (2017) Critical issues in ethical SASA! implementation, *Prevention Programming Series, Brief No. 1*, Kampala, Uganda  
Available online at <http://raisingvoices.org/resources/>

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The *Programming for Prevention Series* is a collection of briefs designed to address critical challenges and questions in VAW prevention programming.

Suggested citation: Raising Voices (2017). Fidelity to the SASA! Activist Kit, *Programming for Prevention Series, Brief No.2*, Kampala, Uganda

## Endnotes

1. Raising Voices, LSHTM & CEDOVIP (2015). Is Violence Against Women Preventable? Findings from the SASA! Study summarized for general audiences. Kampala, Uganda: Raising Voices.
2. Berkel, C., Mauricio, A., Schoenfelder, E., Sandler, L. (2014). Putting the Pieces Together: An intergrated model for program implementation. *Prevention Science*, 12:23-33.
3. James Bell Associates. (2009). *Evaluation Brief: Measuring implementation fidelity*. Arlington, VA.
4. Prochaska J, DiClemente, C., Norcross,J. (1992). In search of how people change – applications to addictive behaviours. *American Psychologist*, 47:1102-1114.
5. Heise, L. (1998). An Integrated, Ecological Framework, Violence Against Women. *Violence Against Women*, 4: 262-290.

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