how to develop
communication materials[1]

Designing communication materials can be fun and exciting; it need not be a daunting task. The following are several key ideas that can help you develop engaging, positive, and effective communication materials.

Key Ideas

Maintain the Dignity of the Characters

When creating communication materials about violence, it is tempting to use images that show women being abused. This approach needs to be used carefully, if done at all. Avoid showing women in undignified positions (i.e., naked, laying on the ground, in the middle of experiencing rape, etc.). Explicit images of acts of violence show women in powerless and exposed situations and, while it may accurately reflect reality, it is rarely effective in helping change people's attitudes. Similarly, avoid showing men being highly aggressive or violent, these are undignified portrayals of men. Women and men viewing explicit images such as these rarely want to identify with the characters or the issue that is being represented. Many people may feel ashamed to look at the image and, as a result, will either ignore it or make jokes to diminish feelings of shame and embarrassment. The use of explicit images can further marginalize the issue, keeping it taboo instead of encouraging people to discuss it. Try instead to show women and men as reasonable and thoughtful characters who are able to make positive decisions.

Portray the Positive

When discussing violence, instead of telling people that violence is bad, show the benefits of non-violence. For example, instead of showing a picture of a woman being beaten that reads "Stop Domestic Violence", it may be more effective to show a picture of a woman and man sitting together discussing a problem with the male character saying "I respect my wife, we talk about our problems together. Do you?" Materials that portray the positive and role model respectful and alternative ways of thinking and behaving are more engaging and can help facilitate a process of change, more so than just showing the violence.

1.* Adapted from: Michau, L., Naker, D., (2003). *Mobilizing Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence: A Resource Guide for Organisations in East and Southern Africa,* Raising Voices, Kampala.

Help Viewers Engage

When viewers see themselves in the materials and characters, they are more likely to think about the issue and reflect on how it affects them. Materials that show 'regular' women and men will help more people identify with the characters. Avoid stereotypes. When showing women and men in materials, try to make the characters look just like 'regular' people in your community. Make them different ages and sizes, from different economic levels, or having a disability. The characters should represent the range of people in your community.
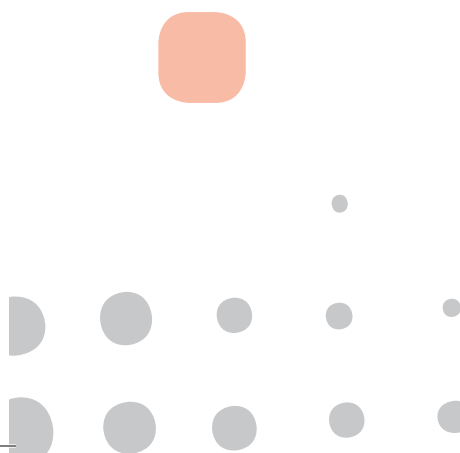
Avoid Blaming and Accusations

Communication materials should avoid blaming women or men for violence. This does not mean that the issue of male responsibility for domestic violence should not be explored, but accusing men of violence and publicly shaming men in materials often only increases resistance and backlash. It is important to hold men accountable yet not to insult, demean, or demonize them. This will only make them defensive and unengaged.

Get People Talking!

Materials that tell people what to think rarely have meaningful impact on the attitudes or behavior of their viewers. Try to make materials controversial, inject new ideas, ask questions, encourage people to think and feel something about the issue being portrayed. Don't be afraid to raise taboo or hidden topics; materials that tell people what they already know are rarely useful. Be willing to stir things up!

Consider making your own materials! Here are some steps you can follow when you want to design positive and effective communication materials to reach a specific audience.

Steps

1. With the *SASA!* Team and activists brainstorm specific topics and issues you want to address with your community/specific group, and record the ideas on a flipchart.

2. Discuss the ideas. Ask yourselves:
   - Which are most compelling?
   - Which are most appropriate for the audience?
   - Which should be avoided?

3. In a smaller group (no more than four), further discuss the results of the brainstorm. Choose the one idea that is most appropriate for the audience at this time. Save the other interesting ideas, as you may want to use them later.

4. Discuss the desired format for the communication materials (e.g., comic, poster, info sheet, mural, billboard, etc.) by considering the interests of the audience, the required durability, your budget and which format might be most appropriate with the ideas you want to share. For example, detailed information on ARVs would be better in an info sheet than a mural.

5. Still working with this smaller group, brainstorm images and words for the communication material. For many people, it helps to make pencil sketches (even of stick people) to get a sense of what type(s) of image(s) you may use. Note: When designing comics, you may choose to first develop a general outline of the story and then add detail and images after.

6. Once you have an idea, discuss it with an artist. Get her/his feedback on the design and layout. You may choose to show your pencil sketches. Note: When designing murals, you may want to show the artist the proposed site for the mural as this may affect the types of image(s) used.

7. Describe to the artist what you imagine the communication material will look like, and then ask for a pencil prototype/sample. Give feedback on the prototype, and ask the artist to make the appropriate changes.

8. Test the design with members of the primary audience. Decide which of the suggested changes you will make. (If the changes are significant, you may need to conduct a second test with the audience.)

9. Discuss the changes with the artist, and supervise through all stages of drawing. Make sure you check the final pencil design before the ink/color is applied. This can save considerable time and money!
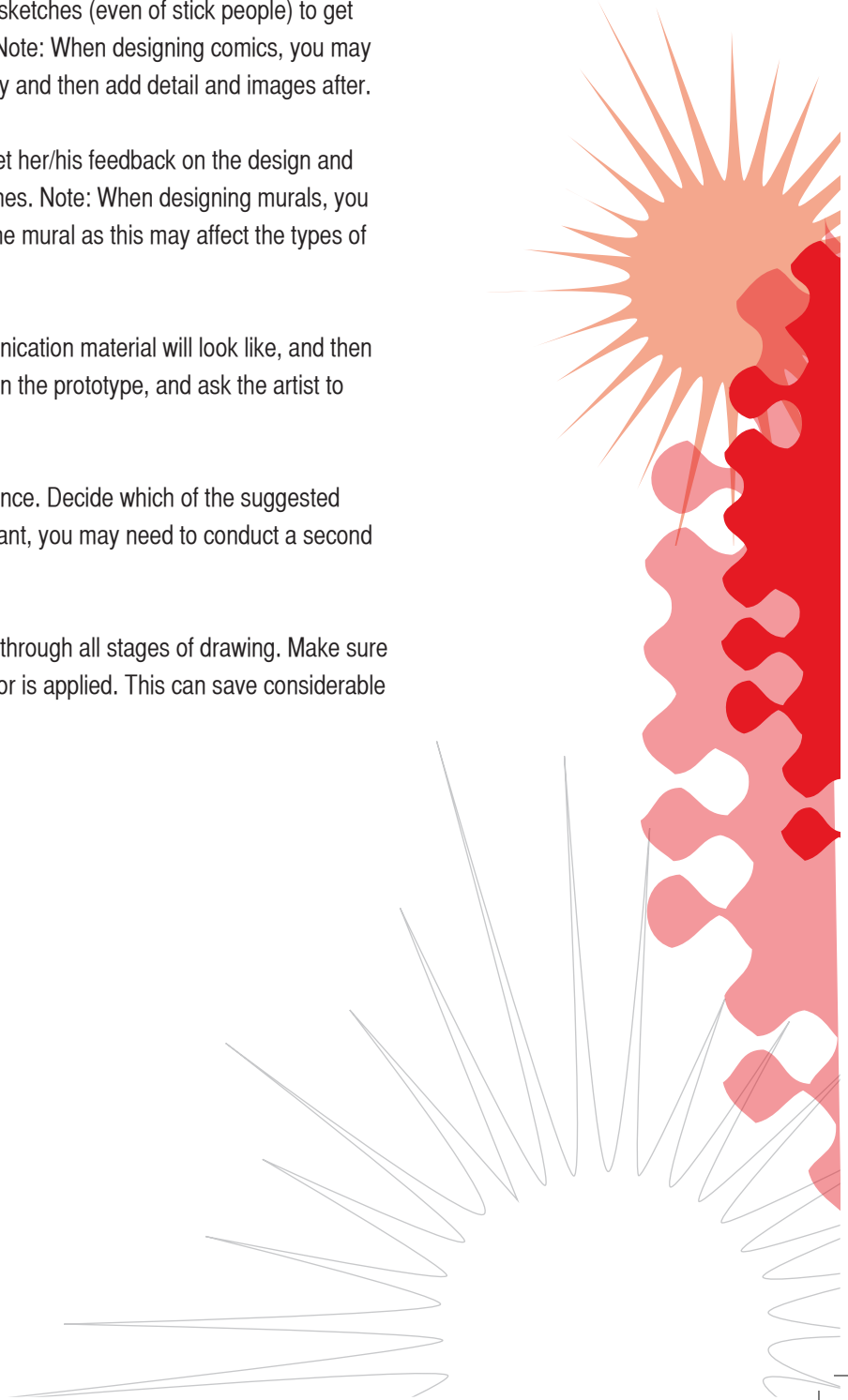
Communication Material Checklist

If you make you own communication materials, use this checklist to ensure your communication materials fit with the *SASA!* approach.

Content

Does your communication material . . .

- ☐ raise a controversial or thought-provoking issue?
- ☐ avoid telling people what to think and encourage people to think differently?
- ☐ avoid stereotyping?
- ☐ maintain the dignity of the characters?
- ☐ encourage viewers to think for themselves?
- ☐ avoid showing women as powerless victims?
- ☐ reinforce the concept of human and women's rights?
- ☐ encourage personal reflection?
- ☐ use characters and situations that viewers can identify with?

Language

Does your communication material . . .

- ☐ avoid blaming or accusations?
- ☐ use language that is informal and familiar to the community?
- ☐ have a design that is accessible to low-literacy viewers?
- ☐ use language that is simple and straightforward?
- ☐ make provocative statements or ask provocative questions?
- ☐ use an attention grabbing caption, slogan or question?

Illustrations

Does your communication material . . .

- ☐ avoid graphic images or those that provoke fear?
- ☐ use images that community members can and want to identify with?
- ☐ show characters being active and thoughtful?
- ☐ use images to enhance the information?
- ☐ use images to help low-literate viewers understand the ideas?

Design

Does your communication material . . .

- ☐ have organized information so that it looks appealing on the page (not too crowded or wordy)?
- ☐ have large enough writing to be read at a distance (if appropriate)?
- ☐ place the attention grabbing caption, slogan or question in a prominent location on the page?
- ☐ use creative and easy to read fonts?
- ☐ avoid using all capital letters, underline, shadowed text?
- ☐ use bright and vibrant colors?
- ☐ use a consistent style?
- ☐ identify your organization's contact information and logo?

SASA!
Preventing Violence Against Women and HIV