

Changing Gender Power Dynamics in Pakistan

A case study of Trócaire in Pakistan

Trócaire is an Irish-based organization committed to the advancement of human rights and justice that has been engaged with SASA! since the methodology's inception in 2008 (www.trocaire.org). In 2016, Trócaire in Pakistan selected SASA! as its approach to the primary prevention of violence against women (VAW) with support from the Australian Government. Given that SASA! was designed with East Africa in mind, Trócaire knew that significant adaptation would be needed to make SASA! a success in Pakistan. In particular, they needed to make careful changes to ensure that SASA! was accepted by Pakistan's diverse faith traditions. Program Coordinator, Saffiullah Khan explains: "We adapted some materials and pictures to ensure that they would be relevant to these communities' lived experiences." For example, the team removed images of condoms and HIV testing and replaced these with images related to early marriage, as this issue is deeply relevant to the context.

Another explicit adaptation by Trócaire in Pakistan is that instead of linking VAW to HIV, as in the original SASA!, they decided to focus even more intensively on patriarchal power imbalances that cause VAW. For example, they created additional training and discussion tools that could help communities better understand the link between power and patriarchy. Now, instead of seeing VAW as a 'private' or 'family issue' as commonly understood before SASA!, communities can readily identify systemic power imbalances between women and men as the root cause of VAW.

"Initially, I believed that there is no violence against women in our society, but . . . the [SASA!] team and the community activist group engagement has changed my understanding about violence and the use of power . . . There is an imbalance of power, which affects women mostly. This imbalance of power has a great impact on an individual as well as on family life. By balancing power we will help to build peace in families and communities." Male community activist

In Pakistan, Trócaire and three other partners are implementing SASA! in 31 villages across two provinces. They are preparing to enter the third phase of SASA! (Support) in mid-2018. In addition to adapting SASA! materials, Trócaire has been creative in adapting the methods through which community activists create change in their communities. For example, women's mobility is very limited in many communities in Northern Pakistan. The original SASA! is designed such that activists create change in their existing social circles (Circles of Influence). In Pakistan, however, many women activists are not able to be physically mobile to influence in public spheres. Instead, they focus on creating they change in their own families and clans, which may include several households of extended family in which they have tremendous influence.

One group requiring careful attention is religious leaders. Trócaire's experience suggests that it is critical to engage them, as they hold significant influence in communities and they have the power to change the direction of programming at any moment. Even within the same faith tradition, different religious interpretations can emerge. To address this, Trócaire is working with local religious scholars to help build a consensus on the power imbalances which contribute to VAW. "Initially, it's best to start work with like-minded religious leaders and special care should be observed when citing religious texts. It is best to work with uncontested scriptures and sayings." Saffiullah reports.

SASA! in action!

Early examples of change

When Hassan's* father died, property was going to be split among his male children, overlooking the daughters in the family. As a SASA! community activist, Hassan had participated in several SASA! trainings on power, VAW and women's legal rights to inheritance. Based on the knowledge gained during these trainings, the decision to exclude his sisters from their father's inheritance did not seem right to Hassan. He sat together with his sisters to strategize how best to respond, and together they talked with their other brothers about women's right to inheritance. Hassan's brothers were against the idea of giving land to their sisters. Hassan persisted, and the brothers agreed to give some land—the unproductive land which was of little value. Hassan continued to argue for equal land inheritance, and finally the other brothers conceded and all family members—female and male—received an equal parcel, both in quantity and quality.

Women community activists have been similarly impacted by their participation in SASA!. As Aisha* explains, "When I joined [SASA!], I became part of a number of interesting and thought-provoking activities that included meetings, exercises, discussions and games. I became aware of the concept of 'power-within' through these sessions, activities, community theatres and power poster sessions. I realized soon that I have rights, innate power and confidence to make decisions and ultimately support my family. I discussed the idea of opening a small shop inside our house with my husband. He first remained silent for some moments, and then agreed. Now I have a successful home business, and I am planning to expand it further in the near future. I feel empowered and I am confident that I can continue to improve my life and that of my family."

* While these are stories of real community activists, pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality.



The *Creating Change Series* are simple case studies of quality programming happening around the world to prevent violence against women and children.

Suggested citation: Raising Voices and Trocaire Pakistan (2018). "Changing gender power dynamics in Pakistan," *Creating Change Series No.5: Kampala, Uganda: Raising Voices*.