

Dadaab, Kenya Case Study: Learning from *SASA!* Adaptations in a Humanitarian Context

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 systematically explores 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!*'s 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 humanitarian landscape and the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) organizational structure influenced *SASA!*'s adaptation, implementation, and progress towards expected outcomes in the Dadaab refugee complex in northeastern Kenya. Dadaab opened in 1992 in response to an influx of Somali refugees fleeing civil war and sustained conflict in Somalia. It is currently the site of three refugee camps: Dagahaley, Hagadera, and Ifo.





The [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) is an international non-governmental humanitarian organization that responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises by meeting health, safety, education, economic wellbeing and empowerment outcomes for people devastated by conflict and disaster while narrowing the gender gap. IRC Kenya has been working with refugee and host communities in Kenya since 1992 and in Dadaab since 2009. Globally, IRC is one of the first humanitarian organizations to initiate programming for women survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) under its Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) program. Since 2012, IRC has been implementing *SASA!* in Hagadera, a Dadaab camp with an estimated population of 74,036 people (2018). The IRC WPE team implements *SASA!* alongside other VAW prevention and response activities. After approximately six years, *SASA!* programming in Hagadera is transitioning to the Support phase. This protracted timeline reflects various postponements and "restarts" required to accommodate large groups of incoming refugees, staff transitions, and shifts in available funding.

Several features of life in Dadaab are challenging for implementing prevention programming and also common to other humanitarian contexts. For example, the IRC team has had to address issues such as high turnover among staff and *SASA!* Community Activists (CAs), fluidity within the refugee community (i.e. repatriation, resettlement, and movement between camps), frequent insecurity, and restricted movement within the camp. The camp environment also creates a different kind of "community" as compared to non-humanitarian settings. Moreover, Dadaab has very limited livelihood opportunities. Despite these difficulties, it is helpful to acknowledge the opportunities available, such as the possibility for comprehensive outreach across organized residential sections, numerous (and frequent) points of contact between IRC and camp residents through its Health and WPE programs, and IRCs longstanding relationships with camp leadership. In addition, it is possible that the rapid fissures of social networks provoked by displacement and conflict can create space for new, more equitable social norms and practices to emerge.

Methods

The research team selected a case study approach to foster in-depth learning from both challenges and opportunities. We conducted two waves of qualitative data collection (March and November 2017) including focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 174 individuals (85 women, 89 men) including IRC staff, Refugee Community Workers (RCWs), *SASA!* CAs, community members living in the camp, religious leaders, other local leaders, and healthcare providers. Qualitative findings are contextualized through the secondary analysis of quantitative monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data from a *SASA!* Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS) with 505 Hagadera residents (264 women, 241 men) in March 2018. The RAS is part of the *SASA! Activist Kit*, designed to assess gender and violence-related knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors. Safety



and other sensitivities were carefully considered throughout the research, aligned with the World Health Organization (WHO) *Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies* and approved by ethical review boards at both the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI).

All data were collected in either Somali or English by a trained research team with experience collecting data in Dadaab. With participant consent, IDIs and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed, and subsequently translated from Somali to English. We used a framework approach, e.g. by summarizing the data in an Excel template organized according to common themes and respondent groups. The case study also benefited from iterative analysis over multiple waves, and comparison with the other project sites in Haiti and Tanzania. To enhance collaboration, in-person discussions were held with all Adaptations Project team members to engage with emerging findings. Additionally, we held an all-partners validation workshop to collectively draw out implications and meaning.

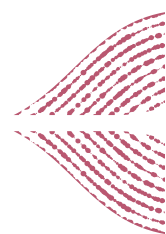
Adaptation Assessment

Developing successful violence prevention programs for new contexts requires 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. Given that the socio-cultural and political context in Hagadera differs sharply from the development settings for which *SASA!* was originally created, it was necessary to adapt *SASA!* for Hagadera.

IRC’s adaptation can be considered an “implementation innovations” modality, where *SASA!* is being implemented alongside other complementary VAW prevention and response activities rather than as a stand-alone program. As such, *SASA!*’s ideas have diffused throughout IRC’s WPE programming, including EMAP (Engaging Men in Accountable Practice); adolescent girls programming; life skills education for women (including training for income-generating activities and psychosocial support activities); and case management – creating a synergistic approach to prevention. This integrated approach has many advantages, such as amplifying opportunities for engagement, deepening trust and relationships, and establishing a trained group of activists in the community who can be mobilized for diverse activities. However, integration has the potential to confuse community members if core concepts are not well aligned and also limits our ability to isolate *SASA!* effects. For example, in practice, community members use “*SASA!*”, “GBV prevention” and, at times, “IRC” interchangeably. As such, findings are best interpreted as the cumulative influence of IRC’s GBV programming. It is also important to note how the humanitarian aid structure facilitates this kind of integration; as the “GBV implementing agency” in Hagadera, IRC has a mandate to address VAW comprehensively, precluding the possibility of implementing *SASA!* alone (i.e. without other prevention and response activities).

Other notable aspects of IRC’s *SASA!* adaptation that emerged from the research include:

- Explicit integration of referrals and case management into *SASA!* activities (reflecting IRC’s organizational focus on response services).





- Use of RCWs who have a contract with IRC and are provided a modest monthly stipend as lead SASA! facilitators instead of unpaid CAs. IRC opted for this strategy for both pragmatic and ethical reasons, given the widespread “incentive culture” within humanitarian programming as well as the lack of formal earning opportunities in Hagadera that make it difficult to request substantial contributions of personal time on a volunteer basis.
- Initially, limited formal translation of SASA! materials into Somali and/or revision of artwork to resemble the community in Hagadera (efforts to translate and contextualize underway since 2018).
- Intensifying SASA!’s recommended engagement with religious leaders by hiring a religious scholar to link SASA!’s core messages to Qur’anic texts.



You ask, ‘Which religion do you believe?’ And they say ‘Islam.’ [You ask] ‘So whom do you love most?’ They say, ‘A prophet of Islam.’ So you ask and say, ‘Your prophet who you love most, you also believe He washed the clothes of his wife, fetched water, cooked food for her and even cut the nails of his wife. So why don’t you follow that way to help? Because you are not better than him.’ . . . So we are the ones to come up in a religious way to bring them on board.

- Male Refugee Community Worker

Implementation Assessment

Several aspects of IRC’s organizational structure and programming approach have been critical for implementing SASA! effectively and enhancing program quality, including: IRC’s longstanding presence in, and trust from, the community; their explicit mandate around VAW prevention; and existing service infrastructure, which allows for timely, survivor-centered referrals. Additional implementation strengths include:

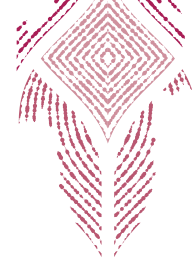
- A strong, committed team of RCWs, systematically implementing SASA! through its phase-specific approach.
- Detailed workplans for comprehensive mobilization across all Hagadera sections and blocks. IRC’s “implementation innovations” approach (e.g. integrating SASA! with other WPE programs) created diverse entry points for engagement in VAW prevention activities and contributed to SASA!’s expansive program reach. For example, 45% of women and 59% of men reported having seen SASA! materials in the community.
- Clear resonance of SASA! approaches in the community, particularly around the concepts of “peace” and “power within,” enhancing motivation for participation.



SASA! is not for one person, neither women nor men . . . It is for everyone like sheikhs, leaders, the youth, the elderly or for a person of the highest rank, like the president, all the way to the lowest rank. For them to understand about the power everyone has, and how to use this power in positive way. It means we have rights.

- Male Community Activist





In terms of implementation challenges, several community members pointed to a strong pattern of initial resistance, largely centered around the perception of SASA! as a “foreign” program and/or in contradiction to local culture, which at times culminated in verbal and physical violence against RCWs. Although IRC was able to manage and eventually overcome much of the backlash through steady engagement and by soliciting support from influential community leaders, some of these tensions may have been mitigated by linguistic and cultural adaptation at the outset.



People were against us when SASA! was starting; there were a lot of challenges like beating up of the staff [RCWs]. The community used to tell us that we were the cause of their break ups [divorce] and that the IRC office is for violence.

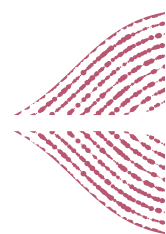
- Female Refugee Community Worker

Additional challenges disrupted SASA! momentum and contributed to IRC’s extended duration in the Start and Awareness phases, including:

- High turnover of IRC staff, a common characteristic of humanitarian work in areas with active insecurity.
- Large and occasionally rapid influxes of refugees unacquainted with SASA!, particularly during renewed conflict in Somalia and following the closure of nearby camps (Kambioos and Ifo 2).
- The government of Kenya’s Dadaab camp closure announcement in 2016, which intensified anxiety among the community and prompted more movement out of the camp.
- A small number of SASA! facilitators relative to Hagadera’s population, resulting in relatively low intensity of programming (e.g. infrequent visits to the same residential blocks).

Progress Towards Outcomes

Participants across the FGDs and IDIs were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about SASA! and other IRC programs, and shared examples of meaningful individual-, family-, and community-level changes. For example, several community members described SASA! as an “eye-opening” experience that challenged the acceptability of violence and common traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early and forced marriage. Importantly, a gender-power analysis is taking shape in the community, with most participants expressing intolerance for VAW (with the exception of rape within marriage, where views are more ambiguous) and linking violence to power inequalities between women and men. We also find promising signs of more support for women experiencing violence, men’s increased contributions in domestic work, and perceptions of lower levels of violence overall compared to six years prior. Analysing the drivers of these positive shifts suggests the importance of positive role modelling in the community, introspection prompted by SASA!’s personal and relatable approach, and the validating and reinforcing experience of more intimate and communicative relationships. This transformation, however, remains in process. Patriarchal attitudes remain, with participants narrating experiences of stigma around survivors of sexual violence, blaming women for violence in certain instances, and at times expressing a belief in women’s “innate” inferiority .





The focus of SASA! is for men and women to know their power, and to support each other thereafter. We stand on that value, that what a man can do, a woman can do . . .

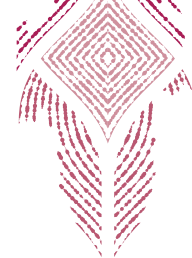
- Female community leader

Recommendations

This Adaptations Project case study reveals the diverse strengths and challenges involved in adapting SASA! for the Dadaab refugee camp setting. IRC has taken an innovative approach, integrating SASA! ideas across their WPE program and implementing SASA! alongside other VAW prevention and response activities. Programming highlights include a detailed and well-coordinated community mobilization strategy that resulted in widespread reach; explicit integration of referrals and response services (which strengthened support for survivors); and effective management of community opposition through a process of steady engagement, particularly with religious leaders. We draw on this case study's findings to propose five recommendations for strengthening SASA! within humanitarian contexts:

- 1. Starting SASA!:** SASA! may not be suitable for all humanitarian settings and, particularly during acute emergencies, it may not be safe or ethical to begin such programming. Prior to deciding whether to move forward with SASA!, consider if sufficient stability, organizational commitment, and community engagement is in place as a foundation for programming. In addition, it is essential that the '[Do No Harm](#)' principle can be upheld, both for the SASA! team and the community.
- 2. Clear vision for adaptation:** Consider different adaptation modalities and make explicit decisions about your focus, timeline and process from the outset. If possible, implement SASA! as a stand-alone program that can be effectively embedded within in the community. When, as in Hagadera, integration is the most appropriate option, ensure that key concepts are synergistic across the different programming modalities. Recognize that integration will complicate evaluation and attribution of impacts to any one individual intervention.
- 3. Contextualized design:** At the outset of your SASA! adaptation, identify any content, language, artwork, and/or mode of delivery that requires revision to better resonate and reflect the local community. As you revise, strive for a balance of fidelity, feasibility, and leveraging unique opportunities available in the context. Keep in mind that challenging power imbalances between women and men through SASA! often provokes community pushback, irrespective of the specific setting. As part of the contextualized strategy, anticipate likely resistance and consider mitigating steps. Invest in monitoring both intended and unintended consequences.
- 4. Comprehensive implementation planning:** Engage in careful reflection around how best to introduce SASA! and promote momentum and sustainability, considering likely transience within the organization and the community. For example, how will your strategy shift if new violence (or other insecurity) emerges? How will you accommodate a large influx of refugees, or large-scale resettlement or repatriation? Although there are no set answers to these questions, discussing them early – and ideally with your Raising Voices technical support partner – and monitoring the community response closely can help minimize program disruptions if/when humanitarian-related challenges are exacerbated.



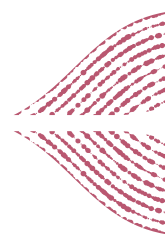


- 5. Incentive culture:** Recognize the potential implications of relying on refugee staff with formal contracts and stipends and, if an incentive structure is used, ensure extra effort to nurture a sense of personal commitment and responsibility among SASA! facilitators. For the majority of SASA! partners, the community activism approach does not include financial compensation in order to better promote and sustain activism. In humanitarian settings – especially with displaced populations where communities are fully dependent on aid to meet basic needs – it is often a challenge to maintain this aspect of volunteerism, given the lack of formal earning opportunities and widespread use of incentives. Consider including dialogues around “incentive culture” as part of your SASA! programming.

Final Word

Humanitarian settings have distinct structures, characteristics and practices that will influence SASA!’s adaptation and implementation. Findings highlight unique aspects within the humanitarian refugee camp context which require specific consideration, including frequent disruptions and mobility (with implications for SASA! timeframes), the role of RCWs and material incentives, and the opportunity for organized, comprehensive engagement of community members. IRC’s experience in Dadaab demonstrates the feasibility of an “implementation innovations” type of SASA! adaptation and reaffirms that community-wide mobilization and engagement is a viable and potentially transformative VAW prevention approach within humanitarian programming. To learn more about the findings from Dadaab, please see the full case study report, available at:

<http://raisingvoices.org/innovation/disseminating-ideas/>





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