



learnings to inspire domestic violence prevention through faith institutions

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Writing/Editing: Stephanie Sauvé, with Seán Farrell and Lori Michau

Graphic Design: Samson Mwaka

Photography: Heidi Brady

#### Trócaire Raising Voices

Maynooth 16 Tufnell Drive, Kamwokya
Co. Kildare, Ireland PO Box 6770, Kampala, Uganda

www.trocaire.org info@raisingvoices.org, www.raisingvoices.org



### Overview

Since 2008, an unprecedented undertaking has taken shape in Uganda: a domestic violence prevention initiative driven through the voice of the Catholic Church.

Most unique and instrumental has been the rare collaboration that made it possible—a partnership between the Catholic Church, the women's rights NGO Raising Voices, and the Irish, church-based NGO Trócaire, with its commitment to justice and human rights.

Officially launched in late 2009, the initiative includes two levels of activity:

- 1. An annual national domestic violence prevention campaign held during the season of Advent.
- 2. An ongoing, comprehensive community engagement methodology for select dioceses.

The learnings from this initiative have provoked broad reflection about the power of faith in many countries of the Global South, and thus the potential of accelerating positive change at scale through effective collaboration with faith institutions. It is our hope that these learnings will provoke organizations of all interests and affiliations to rethink their assumptions and begin exploring new possibilities for preventing violence against women.

Herein lie the stories, the voices and the learnings. For each period of work, we present a snapshot of that time and the four key lessons that emerged.

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### The Road Less Travelled

learning from new relationships (2008 - 2009)

#### **How it Began**

Among government, media and the development community, results from the 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey were stirring up a socio-political storm: over 50% of women in Uganda had experienced physical violence since the age of 15, in some regions up to 70%, and mostly by male intimate partners.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Raising Voices—a Uganda-based NGO with international recognition—was preparing for the national roll-out of its long-awaited SASA methodology: an innovative approach for inspiring community-led activism to prevent violence against women and HIV. One of its funders, Irish Aid, was at the same time considering a domestic violence initiative with Trócaire—an Irish, church-based NGO with a commitment to justice and human rights.

When Irish Aid and Trócaire conducted a national scoping study of domestic violence and the international and local response, a critical gap came to light: the lack of a clear response from faithbased organizations and faith communities—within a country with high levels of religious practice and allegiance, and some 40% Catholics.

For a number of reasons, no real progress had been made between the major churches and a dedicated programmatic response to domestic violence. Until now.

<sup>1</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007. *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006*. Calverton, Maryland, USA: UBOS and Macro International Inc.

#### Find the courage to respond differently.

"We could have designed a typical domestic violence program. But the scoping study made it clear—Ugandans listen to their faith, and we ignore that at our peril," explains Trócaire Country Representative Seán Farrell. "To create a successful initiative with the Catholic Church, we needed two things: first, to gain the support of the Catholic Church leadership, and second, to find a respected methodology for domestic violence prevention."

Between 2008 and 2009, Trócaire initiated some pivotal dialogues, on the one hand with the leadership of the Catholic Church in Uganda, and on the other hand with the women's rights NGO Raising Voices. Using its identity as a faith-based organization, it secured the critical backing of Irish bishops and engaged in patient reflection with Ugandan bishops about domestic violence and its links to Catholic social teaching. Ultimately, Trócaire achieved unprecedented buy-in from the highest national Catholic authority—the Uganda Episcopal Conference—for a first-ever nationwide collaboration with the Catholic Church.

#### Discover potential in uncommon alliances.

Raising Voices was intrigued. "In early 2008, Trócaire invited us to participate in a women's 'week of prayer' organized by the Catholic Church," explains Raising Voices Co-Director Lori Michau. "We saw 3000 women gathered to pray for change; it was a captive Catholic audience like we had never known"

Trócaire knew that this new domestic violence initiative would need strong and unique leadership, and thus invited Raising Voices to join the steering committee, along with the Secretary General of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, the head of the Catholic Women's Bureau, and Irish Aid. All fundamentally committed to peace in families, they came ready to develop trust and to overcome assumptions about each other's work. Not surprisingly, the diversity in the partnership brought an inevitable but workable tension—one that only enhanced the collaboration through the rich dialogue it demanded.

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#### Engage voices of influence.

"Never before had Ugandan bishops and priests talked about domestic violence from the pulpit," explains Trócaire Gender Project Officer Farrah Kelly. However, these leaders were now moved by a new awareness of its prevalence. "Was I asleep?" asked the Secretary General of the Uganda Episcopal Conference.

The Catholic community is built on a hierarchy of influence—from bishops to priests to catechists to parishioners. For the program to touch lives, it would need to be championed at the highest levels. To increase the sense of ownership within the Catholic community, Trócaire built personal relationships with all relevant church leaders, sharing values and visions, presenting ideas and opportunities, and explaining how Trócaire itself would provide guidance and support. Country Representative Seán Farrell remembers a milestone in this process: "We were meeting with all the bishops, presenting the program, when one bishop asked about the difference between this and the work of any well-known NGO. Before I could say anything, another bishop answered, 'the difference is that *it's ours*.""

#### Make choices that put women's safety first.

The steering committee began the intensive work of combining expertise to design an initiative that would test its vision. Raising Voices' methodologies, resources and wisdom were applied and adapted to particular aspects of Catholic culture, inspiring a two-part initiative: an annual national domestic violence prevention campaign, combined with a pilot in the Soroti diocese of ongoing, comprehensive engagement, using Raising Voices' SASAI methodology.

The potential was exciting. For the first time, parishioners would hear words from the pulpit breaking the silence around domestic violence. However, the steering committee knew that the potential effect would only be realized if the message came wholly from the Catholic Church. So they decided that only the logo of the Uganda Episcopal Conference would appear on the millions of materials to be distributed across all 19 dioceses—respecting the intimate relationship between church and parishioner. By many, this was seen as a radical departure in the development world, where logo placement and recognition has become paramount.

#### The National Domestic Violence Prevention Campaign

The first part of the initiative, a national domestic violence prevention campaign, strived to share key ideas with a maximum number of people. Advent was chosen as the most appropriate time for the campaign, as it is a time when Christians are asked to reflect on family, and the real meaning of faith and peace in their lives. The Advent period also has the advantage of coinciding with the annual and international "16 Days of Activism" on violence against women.

The campaign focused on delivering positive, benefits-based messages about domestic violence prevention, as well as about family harmony and peace. A well-coordinated campaign spreads messages on a scale and with a frequency that allow for multiple exposures to new ideas—sparking reflection, critical thinking and dialogue among community members. Translated into seven languages in its first year, the campaign would eventually require translation into twenty languages to keep up with its steady growth.

Core activities of the national campaign included the following:

- The distribution of six million prayer cards with a customized Advent prayer, which explicitly but appropriately addressed the prevention of violence in the family.
- The distribution of customized homily notes for all Catholic priests in Uganda to construct their weekly sermons during mass.
- Posters designed to link liturgy to key campaign messages, sent to the 25,000 Catholic churches across all 19 dioceses.
- The training of all Ugandan bishops, Catholic Women's Bureaus, Catholic Women's Guilds, as well as all national and diocesan pastoral coordinators—for facilitating dialogue about violence prevention and conducting complimentary initiatives within their dioceses.
- The training of 65 personnel from nine Catholic radio stations who would be backing the campaign through programs on domestic violence.
- By 2012, a domestic violence prevention *Info Book*, distributed to all participating stakeholders.

#### The SASA! Approach

The second part of the initiative, a pilot of the SASAI methodology in the Soroti diocese, strived to create an approach for using church structures in ongoing, comprehensive domestic violence prevention. A newly established Women's Desk would lead the Soroti SASAI pilot, with technical assistance from the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), a partner of Raising Voices.

SASA is designed to support community members in spearheading social norm change for the prevention of violence against women and HIV. SASA is a Kiswahili word for "now!" and also serves as an acronym for the major phases of the approach:

- During the **Start** phase, community participants are encouraged to begin thinking about violence against women and HIV as interconnected issues and foster *power within* themselves to address these issues.
- The second phase of SASAI aims to raise **Awareness** about how our communities accept men's use of *power over* women, fuelling the dual pandemics of violence against women and HIV.
- The third phase focuses on how community members can **Support** the women, men and activists directly affected by or involved in these interconnected issues, by joining their *power with* others'.
- During the final phase, men and women take **Action**, using their *power to* prevent violence against women and HIV.

All this is achieved through four key strategies, led by community members and community leaders themselves:

- (1) **Local Activism**: Creating "everyday" activists by engaging women, men and young people in interesting and creative activities at the grassroots.
- (2) **Media and Advocacy**: Spreading provocative stories and facts across the airwaves, in the newspapers and in the offices of leaders and policymakers.
- (3) **Communication Materials**: Using creative and fun materials like posters or comics to engage people spontaneously during their day-to-day activities.
- (4) **Training**: Strengthening people's understanding of the issues using interactive and thought-provoking exercises.



## Breaking the Silence

learning to leverage faith | year | (2010)

#### The Private Becomes Public

Alongside bishops from Ireland and Uganda, the Archbishop of Kampala, Archbishop Lwanga speaks to a packed and curious crowd of Ugandans. In a single breadth he makes the private public:

"All of us have the right to be loved, educated and be given a decent life. When domestic violence is practiced, this basic right, which we all share and has been bestowed by God, is denied. . . .. The Church cannot keep quiet when the domestic church, the family, is being ravaged by the evil of domestic violence. . . . Today, we the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, launch our Advent Programme to tackle and respond to domestic violence."

For the Catholic community, the strength of this message was in the higher authority from which it came: the symbol of Irish and Ugandan Bishops standing side by side, a reference in the speech to the 2009 African Synod and its focus on the church in service of reconciliation, peace and justice.

As one pastoral coordinator later said, "the campaign gave a clear signal from the higher authority, and this is important for people in the Catholic Church."

While the domestic violence initiative was underway, the power of Archbishop Lwanga's words still echoed, proving to have a significant impact on the wider society.

#### Find common ground in faith teaching.

It seemed radical yet critical that the ideas underpinning domestic violence prevention find a natural place within Catholic teaching.

SASA is an exploration of power—what it is, who has it, how it is used, how it is abused and how power dynamics between women and men can change for the better. While emerging from a different ideological framework, this methodology resonates with key elements of Catholic social teaching, in particular the Common Good, and the Life and Dignity of the Human Person.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, a focus on the family apostolate in the national campaign allowed a women's rights message to appropriately emerge within a familiar frame of reference. Both prayer and homily provided a vision for how the family can be "a place of love and nurturing . . . to foster and nurture life and to be examples and role models of peace for our children."

#### Achieve change in small steps.

It was important in the beginning to not say and do it all, but to send messages that were a natural next step for parishioners—nudging existing knowledge and values slightly further along the path of change. This equally applied to training for clergy, who were working largely from broad conceptual understandings and biblical text.

For the first year, the most critical step was taking conceptual, Catholic commitments to family, peace, harmony and justice, and connecting these to a practical understanding of women's lived realities. Change would rely on women being "seen" by the Church—having their experiences of violence recognized in more practical ways. Transitioning the Church from asserting high-level values to explicitly acknowledging women's lived experiences did not unfold without resistance from some dioceses. A slow and steady approach framed within Catholic values allowed for this resistance to be met with dialogue—which enabled understanding and eased change.

<sup>2</sup> Programme note: Catholic Social Teaching and Gender: Trócaire's experiences

#### Harness existing faith infrastructure.

The private nature of prayer exists in stark contrast to the community activism so central to Raising Voices' work. Yet prayer cards became central to the national campaign, because every Catholic in Uganda who goes to church gets one. Trócaire and the Catholic Church understood that, for practicing Catholics, prayer is the most sacred space for personal reflection, as well as a source of courage in times of change. For the entire steering committee, it was about rethinking typical communication pathways and using the power of Catholic infrastructure to increase its impact. Trócaire Gender Project Officer Farrah Kelly was told frequently of a man in Soroti who read the Advent prayer every day for months after the campaign had ended, eventually ending his use of violence in his home.

#### Prepare for the best possible results.

The level of response from using Catholic infrastructure surprised the steering committee more than once. For example, in Uganda the best way to reach people, and particularly men, is through the radio. The country's nine Catholic radio stations were essential to the national campaign, and created a quickly popular opportunity to phone in. With the silence about domestic violence now broken—and bishops addressing the issue on the radio themselves—parishioners' courage to speak burst forth.

The demand was so great that the training of media personnel proved insufficient, and many radio hosts felt overwhelmed. "One Catholic radio has carried on running the daily chat shows on domestic violence because of the demand, contributing dramas and bringing on guests," explained a member of the Uganda Catholic Secretariat (UCS) Communications. "In another diocese, the presenter did not feel confident about his own skills to sustain the programme despite demand. He wasn't sure whether he had the skills to help men and women listen to each other." This was a valuable lesson and an ongoing challenge: how to meet the growing demand for response and engagement generated by the campaign.



# Thoughtful Growth learning to seize potential year 2 (2011)

#### An Urgent Call for More

"People are really interested!" explained a member of USC Communications. "But it feels like we, as a Church, are not doing enough."

In little time, this sentiment prevailed across dioceses. The shift from a piecemeal response to domestic violence within the Catholic Church was creating the foundation and demand for a national, coordinated approach.

Bishops and priests, awakened to their role in prevention, were calling for the full spectrum of programmatic responses—from sensitization linked to the liturgical year, to working with local government and other services, to providing organized shelter for women in need, to cutting short the Soroti pilot to launch immediately in every diocese.

Some wanted to see a slower, more incremental pace, while others were concerned that if the Church did not respond promptly and comprehensively, the momentum would be lost or, worse still, a hiatus would generate conflict without the tools to respond.

The bishops were becoming more and more involved. Speaking out at public events, from the pulpit, at weddings and at church functions. In those dioceses where the bishop was publically on board, momentum was all the more accelerated, causing an even greater call for more.

The steering committee, by virtue of this initial success, had created a new type of challenge—determining how to scale up responsibly while not losing the gains achieved. "We needed to do enough to do good, but not so little that it did harm," explains Raising Voices Co-Director Lori Michau.

#### Use every opportunity to learn.

During December 2010 and January 2011, student priests undertook a quantitative survey of people's experience of the national campaign. A total of 1,864 questionnaires were completed in all 19 dioceses, with nearly equal representation of women and men. The findings revealed that 72% of people interviewed saw the poster in their church and heard about domestic violence on their local Catholic radio station; 88% heard their priest/catechist speak on domestic violence; 63% said the prayer at home. Most interesting is the fact that nearly half of respondents reported going on to discuss violence in their family, and over half said they made a personal commitment not to use violence in their relationship.

#### Establish a baseline for monitoring impact.

"What's unique about this program is its focus on prevention," explains Áine Doody, head of the Gender Unit at Irish Aid. "It's about the challenging work of changing attitudes and behaviors and measuring those results. Raising Voices has always been willing to grapple with these issues; Trócaire had the courage and insight to see the value in this approach."

To monitor change over time, the SASA process starts with a baseline survey of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors, which is then periodically repeated to measure progress. The study in Soroti revealed that both *men and women* in the diocese maintain attitudes that accept and justify violence against women, with many believing that women should tolerate and are to blame for the violence their partners use against them. Most survey participants would not support others in preventing violence against women. And, most revealing of all, only 5% of women said that they have had more say than their partners in making important decisions, compared to 98% of men.<sup>3</sup> After two years of conducting SASA activities, 64% of women said that they have had more say than their partners in making important decisions, compared to 72% of men.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Carlson, Cady (2009) Violence against Women and HIV/AIDS in Soroti and Serere Districts, Uganda: A Baseline Report, Raising Voices.

<sup>4</sup> Carlson, Cady (forthcoming 2013) *Preventing violence against women:Initial findings of the effectiveness of SASAI in Soroti and Serere Districts,* Raising Voices.

#### Share promising practices across faiths.

Trócaire, through its participation in SASA trainings, established a pivotal connection with the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL). "They were targetting 30 mosques using a similar model to us, influencing Muslim leaders of all sects," explains Trócaire Gender Project Officer Farrah Kelly. While still young, the MCJL was making its presence felt, by being innovative in filling gaps to enable a thoughtful reponse to domestic violence. For example, with no Koranic reference to the treatment of women, it was bringing clerics and imams together to debate their own faith. In response to barriers for Muslim women in using police services, it established a conflict resolution committee plus a collaboration with local police for resolving cases at mosque level. "It seemed logical to include the MCJL as a partner in this program, to harness learnings across faiths," explains Farrah Kelly.

## Allow faith to inspire new approaches to violence prevention.

One year in, the SASA pilot in Soroti was proving an imperfect fit. Details, like suggestions of condom use on posters, were derailing what would otherwise have been rich dialogue. This sparked strategic discussion about removing such references in future work, so as not to distract from an examination of power in relationships.

Moreover, SASA was not taking full advantage of church structures. "Because we were used to working at the community level, and not with institutions, we were forgetting to capitalize on the unique opportunities that were right in front of us," explains Raising Voices Co-Director Lori Michau. Specifically, the fundamental idea behind SASA/—of engaging a group of community members in becoming community activists—was not leveraging the influence of the Catholic Church. Who then should be engaged? Bishops and priests, although influential, had no personal experience with marriage. This left the catechists: assistants to the priest, three or four per church, with a voice of authority, and predominantly married men. Through the ongoing and intensive SASA/ process, the catechists would be challenged to consider the benefits of balancing power in their own relationships and leading by example. The solution could not have been better.



## Looking Ahead

learning to evolve a vision | year 3+ (2012 - 2017)

#### A Vision Takes Flight

With two years of programming complete, all partners make a five-year commitment, allowing for robust implementation of their vision. By this point, the steering committee has learned some important lessons about prevention and how, if core pieces are in place, it can happen in all types of settings.

With this understanding and motivation, Raising Voices offers its SASA/ methodology for a first-of-its-kind adaptation, customizing its contents for the Catholic Church.

Core programs going forward include the following:

- 1. **The Continuation of the National Campaign,** which has grown year-to-year and now includes substantial grants to dioceses for implementation and associated programs—along with more extensive training for radio personnel.
- 2. **Collaboration with the Various National Church Commissions,** which can set strategies for domestic violence at national and diocesan level. They include commissions for Lay Apostolate, Education, Youth, Family Life, Justice and Peace, etc.
- 3. **The Creation of SASA! Lite,** maintaining the core elements, ideas and theoretical foundations of SASA!, while simplifying and adapting its contents to align with Catholic structures, teachings and traditions, in ways that can increase its effectiveness and impact.
- 4. **The Roll-Out of SASA! And SASA! Lite** in six to eight other dioceses, with the continued use and sharing of baseline studies and monitoring.
- 5. **Continued Work with the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law,** to support research on the Muslim experiences of and responses to domestic violence, testing the effectiveness of broadening a domestic violence campaign to other faiths.
- 6. **Continued Sharing and Publishing** of learning and promising practice.

#### Accommodate the need to work differently.

This process has called on everyone—at every level, and of every allegiance—to think differently. Not just about beliefs and assumption, but about their very jobs. Raising Voices and CEDOVIP have needed to re-examine the essentials of community activism and learn the details of Catholicism. The dioceses are having to learn how to run intensive community programs on a largely unfamiliar topic. Trócaire has been tasked with managing it all. With everyone experiencing new roles, the program going forward will require flexibility and space for more learning and accommodations.

Working differently also means navigating the risks of the unknown; for example, what breadth versus depth of programming will strike the optimal balance? The steering committee is now venturing into new terrain, with dioceses designing their own activities to supplement the national campaign, while some prepare to implement the new lighter version of SASA! The following questions remain to be answered: What level of programming will allow meaningful change to happen? How much support do dioceses need? How "lite" is too light? And, does the power of faith compensate for a trimmed approach?

# Move from passionate individuals to grassroots ownership.

This initiative is succeeding, in part, thanks to its unique blend of partners: a funder willing to support experimentation and innovation, a progressive faith-affiliated NGO willing to broker unlikely collaborations, a women's rights NGO and a faith steeped in history and tradition open to combining expertise in ways that put women first.

Though the success of the program makes the case for more of these qualities in development, the next steps rely on establishing grassroots ownership. It is time to further invest in the lower level structures of the Catholic Church, while maintaining the well-established relationships with senior Catholic leaders. It is time to build on the readiness in dioceses to have this work instituted in their church, and linked to their faith journey—increasing their capacity and willingness to change.

#### Accept the inevitable complexities of power.

Violence prevention is challenging in and of itself. It asks us to unpack everything we know and consider it anew. SASA sends a message of power and sparks positive power in each of us. At the same time, the Catholic Church is an institution of power, preaching on behalf of the power of God. Through its support of this program, the Catholic Church of Uganda acknowledges that to use its influence to create peace in the name of God, it must strengthen and empower those it calls its followers. The inherent tension in this relationship could be both an opportunity and an obstacle going forward.

In addition to this, the Church is a product of the society it seeks to change. Just as some catechists have been engaged in looking at their own behaviors and attitudes, priests and other church leaders will need to be guided in doing the same, especially as the initiative grows in scale. As one member of the Ugandan Catholic Women's Bureau said, "The Campaign landed on fertile ground. It was enriching for all of us. But offensive beliefs and practices are evident everywhere, not just in marriage, even here in the Church. We will need to address this further down the line."

#### Remember that faith can last a lifetime.

"Everyone was approaching domestic violence in a different way," a parish priest explained. "Now we have something in common, a consistent message across our diocese. We needed a kind of syllabus to engage."

Domestic violence prevention is about fostering activism among a critical mass, resulting in deeply held ideas and sustained behavior change. If activism emerges from within faith institutions—the very institutions dictating values and behaviors—this arguably achieves the greatest community penetration and the broadest possible reach.

This initiative has taught us one thing above all else: by working with faith institutions we touch people's hearts and minds and create programs that leave legacies greater than the programs themselves.





Maynooth Co. Kildare, Ireland www.trocaire.org **Raising Voices** 

16 Tufnell Drive, Kamwokya, PO Box 6770, Kampala Uganda info@raisingvoices.org, www.raisingvoices.org with generous support from

