

Creative Partnership

A case study of Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP)

The Civil Society Support Program (CSSP) is a capacity development program designed to support Ethiopia's civil society and strengthen its contribution to the country's national development. The program is aligned with the Government's goal of achieving national development, poverty reduction and the advancement of good governance and democratization processes. It is financed by a group of Ethiopia's development partners comprising of Irish Aid, UKAID/DFID, The Netherlands Embassy, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Embassy of Sweden and DFATD/Canada, and managed by the British Council.

In 2012, CSSP approached Raising Voices to introduce *SASA!* to Ethiopia where government policies on gender equality and violence against women and girls are strong, but implementation and enforcement have not met expectations. This is because the structural causes of violence are very deep in society and require a range of different approaches which help both women and men to reflect and act on unjust power relationships. Although *SASA!* has been tried before in Ethiopia, CSSP has sought to pilot *SASA!* through three Women's Associations which have strong relationships with government structures, thereby increasing the potential for much wider application of the methodology. This process will be helped by the recently published Demographic and Health Survey which has produced more reliable data on the high prevalence of domestic violence in Ethiopian society. CSSP is partnering with 4 organizations to implement *SASA!* throughout three diverse areas of Ethiopia. All together *SASA!* is in 11 communities, all in the Awareness phase of *SASA!*. Two key innovations in the CSSP model include: (1) engaging the government in using *SASA!* and (2) introducing *SASA!* school clubs, which fit into the existing club structure in Ethiopian schools.

According to Sosena Lemma, Senior Capacity Development Manager, "Working with *SASA!* through the government provides one main advantage: sustainability." CSSP's partners have successfully engaged the respective government sectors as one of the key stakeholders in reducing VAW, a number of whom have expressed their own frustration with the lack of progress in addressing the issue through policy alone. Sosena reflects: "*SASA!* helps to ensure that everyone becomes part of an on-going conversation about how equality benefits both men and women, and what needs to change to achieve this. This process helps to ensure that the agenda is not diverted away from a women's rights conversation." CSSP's experience overall is promising, suggesting that government officials can become deeply engaged and committed to the idea that violence against women prevention is for everyone, and benefits society as a whole.

Government engagement in CSSP's *SASA!* implementation also illustrates how this civil society-government partnership can lead to well-coordinated change. For example:



"In one community where we work, many girls cannot go to school because of the high rate of abductions for marriage. [Since SASA! started], there is a SASA! club in one school, and the community and government around that school do not tolerate abductions for marriage. By joint effort, the abduction rate and school dropout rates are starting to decrease. The change is very small, but according to our evaluation, it is moving in the right direction. For example, the parents of one boy in school were preparing his young sister for marriage. The girl was not yet 18, and the boy reported this to the school directors and the SASA! community activists, who stopped the marriage because it was illegal."

One important recommendation in these well-coordinated efforts is that the community activists should not act as police. As Sosena explains, if community activists take on police work, "people will then start to hide issues from them." While community activists coordinate closely with education, health offices, and other service providers, by leaving official functions to their government partners they can maintain trust and open communications with the community—critical for achieving their SASA! work.



People's ideas of women's and men's roles begin to change in the SASA! awareness phase. For one couple, when the woman got pregnant, her husband wanted to help her fetch water. It was not accepted in his community for a man to fetch water, so he left home early in the morning to ensure that no one would see him. When the man became a SASA! community activist, he got the courage to fetch water in the open—where his neighbors could see him. When people questioned him about why he was behaving "like a woman," he tried to help people think about gender roles, and use his own example to talk about shifting what women and men are "supposed" to do. He would also encourage his wife to learn from the SASA! materials. Another female community activist started to give a "girl's responsibility" to her boys—asking one of her sons to make food, or perform other work typically considered to be a girls' responsibility. Because this community activist is someone the community respects and trusts, some of the younger generation are even starting to follow her example, giving the SASA! team motivation to feel optimistic.



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

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