

Guidance Note 5:

How can *SASA!* / *SASA! Faith* / *SASA! Together* adapt?

Series on Preventing Violence against Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Guidance Note 5 provides programmatic suggestions for adjusting your SASA! program to better align with, and address, emerging realities during the pandemic. Note: we use "SASA!" to represent all SASA! / SASA! Faith / SASA! Together programming.

COVID-19 Challenges for Community Mobilization

SASA! programming (www.raisingvoices.org) uses a community mobilization approach to prevent violence against women (VAW), reaching a critical mass of community members through sustained, person-to-person and community-level activism. In response to COVID-19, governments are issuing a range of emergency directives that may limit (or completely ban) community organizing—such as social distancing, limits on the number of people who can gather, and more restrictive steps such as curfews and stay-at-home/lockdown orders. While such restrictions are necessary to control the spread of the virus, they are likely to disrupt your SASA! program at a critical time when women are at increased risk of experiencing violence. Further, staff may not be available for coordination and support, and community members, activists and leaders are likely to be diverted by additional responsibilities and stress, limiting the time and emotional space available to engage with SASA!

Considerations & Creative Problem-solving

SASA! is currently being used in over 30 countries, many of which are at different stages of the pandemic. While some contexts may be unaffected, most organizations will need to adapt their SASA! program during COVID-19 and establish realistic expectations about what is possible. It is critical to support physical and emotional well-being as a first priority with staff, community members and partners. As we all settle into this "new normal," it may be possible to re-engage with SASA! programming, albeit in a different way. Where it is safe and feasible, continuing with SASA!—with adaptations—can provide much needed solidarity and support throughout the crisis. Now more than ever, it is important to raise the issue of preventing VAW in the community and send a message that violence is not acceptable.

Guidance for all SASA! Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

If your organization has not started SASA! programming in communities, we encourage you to delay community-based activities until the situation has normalized. Focus instead on internal preparations (learning the approach, translation, redrawing of artwork, etc.).

If you have already started SASA! programming and have trained community activists, leaders and/or allies, consider the following:

- Prepare your organization to maintain strong systems, communications and make a mental shift to adjust for the crisis ([Guidance Note 2](#)).
- Share and discuss specific risks for women during COVID-19 with staff and all SASA! team members ([Guidance Note 1](#)).
- Establish (or deepen) commitment to self- and collective care ([Guidance Note 3](#)).
- Carefully assess safety and feasibility of continuing with any VAW prevention activities ([Guidance Note 4](#)).

In addition:

- Have staff/partners been sufficiently trained in and have experience with SASA! programming to be able to work with only remote support?
- Do staff/partners have well established relationships with community activists, leaders and allies that can allow for a shift to more remote support?
 - If so, is there adequate communication infrastructure to enable this (e.g., most activists/leaders/allies have phones, ability to get airtime, able to read text messages, etc.)?
- How would you identify and mitigate any backlash that may emerge?

If it feels safe to continue with *SASA!* programming, the following adaptations may be relevant for your context:

- Strengthen relationships and deepen trust across your entire *SASA!* team (community activists, faith and other community leaders, institutional allies, etc.). Reach out regularly to:
 - Ask about their safety and wellbeing, discuss ideas and strategies that are emerging in their communities/institutions, and any specific needs. Make a plan to stay connected (consider virtual check-ins, WhatsApp groups, or phone calls). If resources allow, provide airtime/data to team members.
 - Provide updated referral lists highlighting existing and new services that are available at this time.
 - Ask about any increase in cases of VAW—and how they are managing. A rapid increase in women needing support can be overwhelming and is happening in some communities. Remind *SASA!* team members that they are not service providers or counselors. Encourage them to refer women to services with the relevant expertise, as this is necessary for survivor safety and their own emotional wellbeing.
 - Discuss and decide on how to structure direct outreach to women who are known to be in violent relationships, or have other crucial economic, social or emotional needs (Box 1).
 - Explain how *SASA!* programming is being adapted and explore what roles they could play. Avoid assuming that everyone is able and interested to continue. Emphasize that it is okay if they are unable to participate and that it will not impact their future involvement in *SASA!*
 - Ask each *SASA!* team member what they feel they can do during this time – the best ideas will likely come from them!
- Adjust activity plans with activists, leaders and allies. This will likely require a shift to virtual/remote discussions on WhatsApp or another platform – if the team is able. Remember to keep activities light and feasible; expect and accept a reduction in *SASA!* activities.
- During COVID-19, be cautious about using any images that show violence or could be potentially sensitive, especially from the Awareness phase. This phase focuses on men's power over women and it may increase risk for women and/or cause backlash. In particular, do not use the Awareness Power Poster, Picture Card or Comic as person-to-person discussion and support is important when raising sensitive issues.
- Strengthen (or initiate) relationships with any media partners or amplify media components of your program. Media (social and traditional) will be the safest way to share information, facilitate discussion and offer support during the pandemic.

As many community mobilization activities will not be possible, consider using this time to further strengthen your organizational capacity to implement *SASA!* in the future:

- Hold virtual trainings and practice sessions.
- Read different sections of *SASA!* and discuss regularly to expand staff's understanding of the methodology.
- Deepen, explore and reflect on the organization's values and how these align with *SASA!*
- Address any work that may be pending, such as translating materials and the Learning and Assessment (L&A) tools; collaborating with artists on any necessary adaptations so they are ready to test when the lockdown is lifted, etc.
- Get in touch with your TA provider at Raising Voices – schedule sessions for talking through unfamiliar sections of *SASA!*, learning how to use the L&A databases, making specific adaptations for the COVID-19 pandemic, and/or planning or any implementation support.

BOX 1: Safety planning discussion points for women experiencing (or at risk of) violence

* Prior to lockdown/stay-at-home orders:

- Is there a safe place where you (and your children) can stay away from a violent partner/father, such as a nearby friend, neighbor or relative, a maternal home in the village, a shelter, a religious institution, etc.?
- Are any organizations providing financial support for travel, emergency services or to stock-up on food?
- Are there any weapons in the home that can be removed?
- Is it possible to obtain/hide extra money?

* During lockdown orders:

- Is there a trusted neighbor who you can ask to remain vigilant of any disturbances from your home?
- Can you pack a small bag with essential papers, money, medications, and extra clothes in case you need to leave in an emergency?
- Where could you (and your children) go for safety in an emergency?
- Who can you call for emotional support?
- Is there anyone (friend, religious or community leader) who can call / talk to the person using (or threatening to use) violence?

** Always check that it is safe to talk before starting the discussion, and be prepared to change topics in case of any interruptions.*

Considerations for Specific SASA! Methodologies

**Note: only proceed with in-person engagement or distribution of materials if it is possible to do so safely in your context, while adhering to all relevant COVID-19 health directives.*

SASA!

In the Local Activism strategy:

- Share copies of a few positive and aspirational Community Conversations (hard copies or virtually). Include one or two questions on the back and encourage community activists to share with families living close to them (while social distancing).*
- Share copies of the Card Game, Posters and Comics if possible. Encourage family discussions during this time.*
- Encourage community activists to transform the Community Action Groups already established to “Safety Circles,” or establish these if none exists. Safety Circles are small single-sex groups that can be connected by phone, text or other virtual platform. These can be with women particularly at risk for violence (or who have experienced violence in the past), and with men who have used violence.
- Encourage each community activist to set up “Chat Groups” via text or other virtual platform. Encourage them to send out a positive question or idea every few days (consider taking ideas from the Quick Chats, Card Game or Comics).
- Plan with community activists to show solidarity through a collective action in the community such as lighting a candle in the window every evening or pinning a white handkerchief to the doorway.
- Share the Soap Operas (if available in local languages, or contact Raising Voices for English versions) via audio file with community activists, and encourage them to share with others.*

In the Media & Advocacy strategy:

- Consider airing the Soap Operas with radio stations or even local government officials who control public address systems.
- Consider creating/adapting new content for radio: host talk shows using the Quick Chats; share the Dramas with radio stations and encourage them to read or animate the dramas and host the call-in segments with the discussion questions.
- Share content from Media and Advocacy materials through social media, if relevant in your context.

In the Communication Materials strategy:

- If safe,* share materials in hard copy when available (see Local Activism above) or via social media, email, webinars, etc. If smartphones are not common in your community, consider sending a simple text message every few days with a simple question or idea.
- Encourage TV stations to show the SASA! Film.

In the Training strategy:

- If possible, modify training modules to accommodate virtual facilitation with staff.
- Hold virtual staff practice sessions to strengthen capacity to facilitate SASA! activities. If this isn't possible, ask staff to practice with their families!

Additional considerations:

- If you are mid-way or near the end of the Awareness phase but haven't completed it, consider incorporating Support phase materials (Community Conversations, Power Poster, Community Poster, etc.) to encourage "power with" for increased solidarity and connection during this difficult time. You can resume Awareness phase activities when lockdowns have ended.
- You may also want to repeat some activities/content from the Start phase that emphasizes "power within" which may be helpful to community members at this time.

Please click [here](#) to access some of the suggested SASA! materials

SASA! Faith

- Check-in with all faith leaders and SASA! Faith team members, and adjust activity plans together.
- Encourage religious leaders and other community members involved in SASA! Faith to learn how COVID-19 affects women and increases their risk for violence.
- Discuss any opportunities for outreach or services to women experiencing violence. Places of worship may have funds that can support women in urgent need of shelter, food or transport to a safer place.
- Work with religious leaders to provide accurate information to community members about COVID-19, and proactively respond to any myths/harmful information that may be circulating in the community.
- Share copies of the Discussion Guides to lay persons and community members – many families will be practicing their faith at home and these materials may allow them to deepen their Bible/Quran studies during this time.*
- If religious leaders are using media to conduct services (online or via public speaker or radio), encourage them to use the Sermon Notes.
- If social media or virtual platforms (such as WhatsApp) are used in your community, consider sending out regular messages (see [Guidance Note 1](#) for ideas) or the Sermon Notes.
- If a faith-based radio station is involved, encourage them to use the Dramas or the Story Ideas to host radio programs on these topics, as well as highlighting heightened risk to women during the pandemic and any available services.
- Encourage acts of solidarity: consider ringing church bells or a special call from the Muezzin once a week calling for an end to violence against women or to demonstrate solidarity with women experiencing violence.

Additional Considerations:

- Remind religious leaders that many community members will first turn to them in this time of crisis—and that how they respond will send a strong message to the community. Calm and compassionate leadership is critical, as is practical guidance on how to maintain the values of justice, peace and dignity in all relationships, especially intimate ones during this tumultuous time.

Please click [here](#) to access some of the suggested *SASA! Faith* materials

SASA! Together

In the *Local Activism Strategy*:

- See *SASA!*, Local Activism box above for tips on checking in with activists and general guidance for working with activists during this time.
- Share copies of Posters, Community Conversations and the Bingo Games (hard copies or virtual). Encourage discussions with family members, in compounds or virtually.* Remember, do not use Awareness Power Posters or sensitive Awareness Community Conversations during COVID-19.
- If feasible in your community, encourage the community activists to use the Social Media memes.
- Share the Leadership Leaflets (hard copies or virtual) with the community activists to encourage personal reflection on the use of power and their leadership potential.*
- Consider sharing the Drama Sketches with radio stations for production into radio dramas or even simple story lines that will then spark discussion or audience call-ins.
- Do not use the Deeper Discussions during this time. The content is sensitive and requires significant training, support and oversight.

In the *Community Leadership Strategy*:

- Distribute copies of phase-appropriate Leadership Leaflets and Community Talking Points (hard copies or virtual).*
- Encourage community leaders to be vigilant to identify and support women experiencing violence. Support them to provide quality referrals.
- Initiate or continue with your virtual check-ins and mentoring of community leaders.
- Use the Social Media memes with community leaders and support them to post the memes on their own platforms, and/or share with community organizations they collaborate with.

In the *Institutional Strengthening Strategy*:


- As some institutions will be providing essential services during the COVID-19 crisis, it might be very difficult to continue with *SASA! Together* work. Give them any support possible and assure them that you will continue to work with them on *SASA! Together* after this crisis passes. Other institutions may transition to working from home. Discuss the particular situation, needs and availability of the institutions you are working with and tailor your engagement accordingly.
- If possible, engage your institution in discussion about how COVID-19 could disrupt or deprioritize services for women. Share [Guidance Note 1](#) with them. Create a plan for maintaining VAW response and case management, where relevant.¹
- If the institution has produced any information/guidelines on COVID-19, share and disseminate these to community members and partners in solidarity and mutual support.

Additional Considerations:

- Many programs are in the early stages of *SASA! Together* programming. Remain in the Start phase where the positive use of “power within” is emphasized. Organizations can prepare materials for the Awareness phase but avoid sharing these until their programming can return to normal in the community.

- Reach out to [Raising Voices](#) if you need support, we are here for you!

Please click [here](#) to access some of the suggested *SASA! Together* materials



SASA! activists, faith and community leaders, and institutional allies are visible and trusted members of the community and play an essential role in promoting women’s dignity and safety during the pandemic. While it is important to respect our scope of work as prevention organizations (and refer to VAW response organizations for the provision of direct services), by adjusting program activities we can maintain an emphasis on VAW prevention and help mitigate newly emerging risks to women during COVID-19.

Endnote

- 1 For more guidance on addressing VAW in the health service sector during COVID-19, see the GBV AoR GBV Helpdesk ([GBV Case Management and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) and [Securing the Safety and Wellbeing of Women Frontline Healthcare Workers](#)) and the WHO: ([COVID-19 and Violence against Women What the Health Sector/System Can Do](#)).

Suggested Citation: Raising Voices (2020) *Guidance Note 5: How can SASA! / SASA! Faith / SASA! Together programming adapt?* Series on Preventing Violence against Women during COVID-19. Kampala, Uganda.