Social Norms Change at Scale: Insights from *SASA!*

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The Approach

SASA! is a holistic community mobilization approach to preventing violence against women (VAW). It is designed to catalyze community-led change of norms and behaviors that perpetuate gender inequality, violence, and increased vulnerability of women to HIV. At its foundation, *SASA!* is a gendered analysis of power and power inequalities—not only of the ways men use power over women and the consequences for intimate relationships and communities but also of how women and men can use their power positively to effect and sustain change at the individual and community levels.

The *SASA!* approach was developed over many years of working with communities to prevent VAW. The process, structure, and content of *SASA!* emerged through trial and error, listening carefully to what resonated in communities, how women and men reacted and responded to ideas and activities, and what communities and organizations supporting social change processes needed to be successful. Further, due to core funding from donor partners who believed in our vision, Raising Voices had the opportunity and creative freedom to develop *SASA!* over time and based on the sustained use of these ideas in communities rather than an external mandate with a predetermined time frame and donor approval. This enabled us to prioritize accountability to communities and to ethical principles held by the VAW prevention field.

SASA! means "now" in Kiswahili and is an acronym for the approach's four phases: start, awareness, support, and action. The first step is to train and mentor non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, who in turn train, mentor, and support community activists ("regular" women and men in the communities) and resource persons (such as police, health care providers, and local leaders). These activists then lead informal, benefits-based activities (such as community conversations, games, poster discussions, and where applicable, strengthening of workplace policies and procedures) within their existing social networks—fostering open discussions, critical thinking, and supportive person-to-person and public activism among their families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Together, they introduce the community and its institutions to basic information on VAW and to new concepts related to power, as well as encourage a gendered analysis of power imbalances.

Through a combination of strategies community members are exposed to *SASA!* ideas repeatedly and in diverse ways in their daily lives, from people they know and trust as well as from more formal sources within the community such as local government leaders and service providers. Each phase builds on the others and addresses a different concept of power, with an increasing number of individuals and groups involved, strengthening a critical mass committed and able to create social norms change. Three years is the recommended time frame for *SASA!* implementation.

Where and How it is Being Used

Raising Voices, at times in partnership with the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), works with organizations to provide technical assistance at their request. We do not use an implementing partner model in which organizations are recruited and financially supported to implement *SASA!* Early on, groups approaching Raising Voices were primarily community-based organizations and women's organizations already working on VAW in their communities in the Horn, East, and Southern Africa, as well as some international NGOs (INGOs) in humanitarian settings interested in developing their prevention programming.

Today, *SASA!* continues to be used by community-based and national organizations and is also increasingly used by actors in development and humanitarian settings such as United Nations agencies, global financial institutions, and INGOs, as well as being included in large funding calls such as those of the UK's Department for International Development, the US Agency for International Development, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the European Union and United Nations' Spotlight Initiative. *SASA!* is currently being implemented in over 25 countries in every region, with many translations across the Horn, East, and Southern Africa and major adaptations completed or underway in Urdu, Arabic, French, Haitian Creole, and Spanish. *SASA!* is free and available on the Raising Voices website; however, to maintain quality and fidelity, Raising Voices requires a memorandum of understanding with any organization interested in undertaking an adaptation of *SASA!*

Understanding Scale

At Raising Voices and CEDOVIP, we define scale-up as **a systematic effort to increase the uptake of piloted and tested methodologies to prevent violence against women and children and create lasting social change.** Over the past 10-plus years, Raising Voices has experimented with different modalities to support quality implementation and adaptation of our work, beginning with a strong foundation in the design and piloting stages. Cumulatively, these engagements have generated learning for scaling *SASA!*, the *Good School Toolkit*, and other Raising Voices methodologies. We believe that scaling social change programs is not linear or a single step—rather, it requires multiple, long-term strategies with substantial investment in developing local expertise. *SASA!* could be considered an approach "at scale" within a community, as it impacts population- as well as individual-level change by working across the ecological model to effect social change through a gendered, women's rights perspective. However, increasingly, *SASA!* is being implemented across wide geographic areas (e.g., multiple districts or nationwide) through horizontal, diversification and spontaneous scale-up.[1]

Going to Scale: Elements for Success

Determining what it takes to scale *SASA!* is an ongoing learning process, and no one type of scale or program can yet be held up as a "model" of successful scale that could be applied

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[1]   ExpandNet. (2010). *Nine steps for developing a scaling-up strategy*. World Health Organization.

(with adaptations) across contexts. However, we have found some patterns in terms of critical elements to successful scale-up of *SASA!* Key elements include:

- **Engaging with Raising Voices.** Our team has over a decade of learning what works for effective *SASA!* implementation. When going to scale, some funders and organizations have approached Raising Voices to learn from and build on what works and avoid common mistakes. This engagement and learning contribute significantly to the quality of scale-up.

- **Maintaining *SASA!* "essentials."** Effective VAW prevention programming is not a collection of activities but rather a systematic and theoretically grounded approach with key elements that, together, make it effective. Fidelity to *SASA!* means ensuring that groups maintain the essential elements: a gender-power analysis, a phased-in approach, and holistic community engagement and activism. Fidelity to what makes *SASA!* effective promotes quality and impact.

- **Ensuring strong organizational buy-in.** *SASA!* unpacks and questions power. Organizations in which leadership is willing to take the time to hold reflections and difficult discussions about power dynamics within the organization—including its own leadership—can more likely facilitate and sustain meaningful, deep conversations about power in communities.

- **Providing meaningful preparation and ongoing support.** The work of discussing power, intimate relationships, violence, and sexuality is challenging at best. Groups that spend considerable time preparing their staff, resource persons, and community activists to understand these issues, analyze their own lives with a gender-power lens, and support them through their own process of change are most effective in facilitating change in others. Organizations that have sufficient funding to retain the *SASA!* team (skilled staff and community activists) have experienced an easier and more timely transition from one *SASA!* phase to another.

- **Allowing time and funding for adaptation.** Strong scale-up of *SASA!* means identifying the type of adaptation needed and producing thorough adaptations that incorporate language, images, and community piloting and testing of materials.

So, what makes *SASA!* at scale a success? First, it requires understanding the *SASA!* approach and what it takes to implement it meaningfully and with fidelity. Second, it means engagement with Raising Voices to learn lessons and build on accumulated knowledge and expertise rather than guessing or starting from scratch. Additionally, as funders and organizations continue to include *SASA!* in scale-up efforts, our hope is that comprehensive planning, implementation, and evaluation will be done for *SASA!* at scale to rigorously learn what works and what could be improved.

Going to Scale: A Challenging Story

As we gather knowledge on what it takes to successfully scale *SASA!*, we can also learn from experiences in which *SASA!* has not been scaled well. Poor programming at any level—particularly at scale, when the number of people impacted multiplies—has deep implications for women and their communities and undermines the basic principle of doing no harm in VAW prevention programming. The following is an unsuccessful example of *SASA!* being taken to scale.
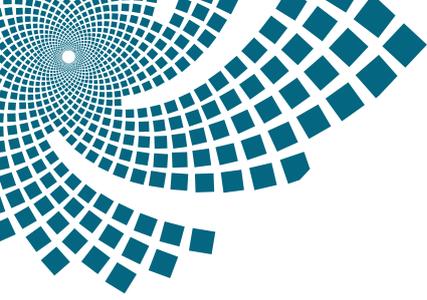
A large bilateral funder recommended *SASA!* as an evidence-based community mobilization approach to be considered for implementation by grantees in Africa, although Raising Voices was not involved in designing the strategy or aware of the inclusion of *SASA!* After grantees were funded and included *SASA!* in their work plans, this funder, through its coordinating agency, asked Raising Voices to conduct a training for the grantees. Despite short notice, Raising Voices conducted the training based on the understanding that it would not be a one-off engagement— that is, that Raising Voices would provide the training as a first step in a broader technical assistance partnership with the grantees to support quality programming. The individuals sent for the training were mostly senior managers and not those who would be programmatically supporting *SASA!* After the training, despite many attempts to follow up with the coordinating agency, Raising Voices was informed that all *SASA!* technical assistance would be handled by a group in Southern Africa that lacked *SASA!* training and experience, and was not in contact with Raising Voices. Raising Voices was also told not to communicate directly with implementing agencies, even though many of them reached out to us independently for support.

The result? *SASA!* was "adapted for scale," which meant *SASA!*'s three-year holistic, community-wide program was reduced to a three-day training with community activists, with a requirement for those activists to have 10 "contact hours" with community members. The technical assistance providers, staff, and community activists had inadequate training to raise sensitive discussions about violence, power, and women in communities, and they had no mandate or support to sustain these discussions. There was also a lack of meaningful monitoring of intended or unintended impact. This type of programming hurts women and communities. It can raise expectations and hope in communities, yet without support mechanisms and sustained engagement, women experiencing violence and activists speaking out can experience backlash and feel abandoned, further emboldening men using violence and fostering a culture of apathy within communities.

Further, the effort branded its work as *SASA!* despite a complete disregard for the core elements and ethics of the approach. This has implications for the broader field because it affects research on and evaluation of the impact of VAW prevention programming. If a program claims to be *SASA!* yet isn't, and doesn't effect positive change, this could be used to draw the mistaken conclusion that *SASA!* or community mobilization programming is ineffective, setting back progress about what works to prevent VAW.

The Takeaway: What Made it Ineffective?

- **Donor-driven scale-up.** Using *SASA!* or other approaches requires commitment from an organization that must come from within. When funders require a particular approach, organizations lack the buy-in, ownership, and interest to meaningfully and ethically scale the methodology.

- **Ignoring the evidence.** *SASA!* and other evidence-based social norms change approaches have elements and principles that make them successful. A lack of fidelity to these elements and disregard for the broader body of knowledge in the VAW prevention field is unsafe and costly.

- **Unconducive requirements.** External limitations such as short project time frames, monitoring systems focused on numbers reached rather than quality and impact, rapid funding cycles, and assumptions that results emerge without attention to process set organizations and communities up for failure.

- **Insufficiently trained staff and community members.** Technical assistance is most effective when given by people who have experience. Staff and community activists need time, training, and support to explore the complex dynamics of power, gender, and rights in their own lives before they can meaningfully support others to do the same.

Reflections

The opportunity for large-scale VAW prevention programming to impact women's lives holds much promise and also comes with considerable risk, and therefore, responsibility. Collectively, we can use this moment to significantly move thought and practice on preventing VAW forward:

- **Program originators** can bring their creativity and years of practice-based experience to help shape adaptation and implementation strategies for their work at scale, as well as engage with partners (such as funders and implementing organizations) to grapple with the challenging questions of geographic coverage, program delivery modalities, intensity of programming, and applicability and adaptation of program activities.

- **Funders and policymakers** can ensure funding and programming strategies that recommend taking existing methodologies at scale include the necessary ingredients for success: ample, longer-term funding, engagement with the program originators, fidelity to their approach, sufficient time for meaningful adaptation and training, and authentic buy-in from implementing organizations or institutions, and monitoring systems that move beyond numbers reached to impact felt.

- **Implementing organizations** can honestly consider whether they are ready to make the organizational shifts necessary to implement VAW prevention programming, such as initiating and sustaining internal reflections on power, committing to interacting with communities as partners and not beneficiaries, investing ample time in training and ongoing mentoring of staff and community activists, and reconceptualizing their programming style when possible from a project-based orientation to movement-building.

For Reference: *SASA!* Scale-Up Framework

HOW *SASA!* can be scaled	WHO should be involved	WHAT needs to happen	WHEN should it happen
Prospective partners engage with Raising Voices for initial discussions and assess whether *SASA!* is a good fit for their organization and community; this includes deepening their understanding of *SASA!*'s approach (i.e., gender-power analysis, phased-in approach, and holistic community engagement and activism). Partners mobilize resources, prepare for implementation, identify key staff, and enter a technical assistance agreement with Raising Voices.	The *SASA!* team is established with core staff: program managers/supervisors, program staff, community activists and resource persons. This should include women and men from implementation communities equally and be inclusive (e.g., age, ability, HIV status, ethnicity, gender, and religion). The organization and community activists develop a simple agreement defining their partnership. The *SASA!* team and stakeholders conduct community mapping to determine the groups, structures, and institutions critical to preventing and responding to VAW.	The *SASA!* team internalizes *SASA!* before community-based programming begins, reflecting on their perceptions and use of power through rigorous training and ongoing mentoring and learning how to use the *SASA! Activist Kit*. The team secures sufficient funds to implement all four phases of *SASA!* and has: a) work plans developed by staff and community activists; b) context-specific adaptations and translations of *SASA!* materials; and c) systematic learning through regular monitoring of process and impact, as well as end-of-phase rapid assessments to inform programming.	An average of three years is recommended to allow for meaningful change. Building time at the outset to train and mentor staff and community activists is essential to enable them to internalize *SASA!* concepts.