



# Lessons learned from implementing Indashyikirwa in Rwanda- an adaptation of the *SASA!* approach to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews adaptation processes of the Indashyikirwa program in Rwanda, a four-year program to prevent intimate partner violence, implemented by CARE Rwanda, Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAMREC) and Rwanda Women's Network (RWN). Indashyikirwa is a blended approach of evidence-based programming, primarily drawing on *SASA!* developed by Raising Voices in Uganda, as well as program innovations. Indashyikirwa consists of four major components; 1) a five-month curriculum with couples to support equitable, non-violent relationships, 2) supporting a sub-set of trained couples to engage in community activism for an additional two years, 3) establishment of women's safe spaces for dedicated support and referral of IPV survivors, 4) training and engaging opinion leaders to support an enabling environment for IPV prevention and response. This paper is based on implementation experience and qualitative evaluation research conducted at various time points with trained couples, women's safe space attendees and facilitators, opinion leaders and programme staff, as well as observations of program activities. The *SASA!* fidelity brief, which highlights key principles for adaptation of the program, guided the framing of the findings. Lessons learned around adaptation of such programs are offered.

## 1. Background

Adaptation refers to the process of revising and re-implementing an established program in a new context in a way that maintains fidelity to the originally tested goals, activities, delivery techniques, intensity, and duration (Card, Solomon, & Cunningham, 2011). Although fidelity to evidence-based programs is encouraged to preserve the behavior change mechanisms that made the original program effective, some adaptation and contextualization is often needed and desirable (James Bell Associates, 2009). For example, language, images, or activities in an original program may be outdated, irrelevant or culturally inappropriate in another setting (Card et al., 2011). Different organizations may also lack funds, staffing, expertise, or other resources needed to implement the program as originally designed (Card et al., 2011). If organizations exclusively follow prescribed program components, opportunities for innovation and efficacy may be missed (Daro &

Donnelly, 2001). Indeed, flexibility in program implementation can increase local ownership, involvement, and sustainability (James Bell Associates, 2009). There should thus be a balance between fidelity to core components believed to be responsible for an intervention's effectiveness and adaptations to local contexts (Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004). Evaluations should also collect process evaluation data, examine the adaptations made, document the reasons for adaptations, and assess the impact of these on program outcomes (James Bell Associates, 2009). This paper describes lessons learned from designing and implementing the Indashyikirwa program in Rwanda, adapted from *SASA!*—an evidenced based methodology to prevent violence against women. Findings are based on implementation experiences, program monitoring as well as an external evaluation being conducted as part of the DFID-UK funded 'What Works to Prevent Violence and Women and Girls Program. The paper documents how Indashyikirwa heavily drew on the *SASA!* program, but is also an

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innovation and not direct replication. The paper unpacks how some of these differences were intended from inception, whereas some differences occurred during implementation in light of the program design and context.

### 1.1. Overview of Indashyikirwa

Indashyikirwa (meaning ‘agents for change’ in Kinyarwanda) is an intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention and response program funded by DFID Rwanda and implemented by CARE International in Rwanda, Rwanda Women’s Network (RWN) and Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre (RWAMREC) from August 2014 through August 2018. The program was implemented across seven districts<sup>1</sup>, fourteen sectors in Eastern, Northern and Western provinces of Rwanda, in predominantly rural, widely spread communities. There are four main components to the program: (1) Intensive participatory training with couples (couples’ curriculum); (2) Community-based activism with a sub-set of trained couples; (3) Direct support to survivors of IPV through the women’s safe spaces; and (4) Training and engagement of opinion leaders.

Seven districts were chosen based on the highest rates of IPV according to the 2010 Rwandan Demographic Health Survey (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (NISR) (2016)). From these districts, CARE Rwanda identified ‘clusters,’ comprised of at least three villages near each other, with at least one CARE Rwanda micro-finance Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) per village. This mapping approach ensured each sector was equally viable for the accompanying randomized control trial as an intervention or control area, which was conducted with couples and communities exposed and not exposed to the program respectively.

### 1.2. Rationale for indashyikirwa

An assessment conducted by CARE Rwanda (2012) found that many women were not fully benefitting from its VSLA program due to household gender inequalities and women’s experiences of IPV. In response, CARE Rwanda worked with partners RWAMREC and Promundo to develop Journeys of Transformation (JoT). JoT was a seventeen-session participatory curriculum that aimed to foster men’s support of their partners who were CARE VSLA members. The curriculum was facilitated with men, and sometimes with both partners. It was found to reduce household-level poverty and have a positive impact on partners’ collaboration around household and care work activities, family relations, and decision-making (Sleggh, Barker, Kimonyo, Ndolimana, & Bannerman, 2013). Many of the JoT couples engaged in organic forms of activism by creating MenEngage clubs, facilitating community mobilization activities and conducting home visits to other couples. The program partners, including the fourth author from CARE Rwanda, realized with hindsight how valuable it would have been to provide JoT couples with activism skills and more structured support for activism. In addition, the evaluation could not confirm reduced IPV (Sleggh et al., 2013). Therefore, the team decided to strengthen their programming by including a stronger focus on activism and learning from other evidenced-based approaches that have been shown to reduce IPV, specifically SASA!

### 1.3. Understanding SASA!

SASA! is a community mobilization approach to preventing violence against women and HIV, developed by Raising Voices and piloted by

<sup>1</sup> Sectors are the third level administrative sub-division in Rwanda. The Rwandan provinces are subdivided into 30 districts, and district is divided into sectors. There are 416 Sectors in total. Sectors are further divided into 2148 cells.

the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP) in Kampala, Uganda, which was evaluated through a randomized control trial. This study found significant shifts in acceptance of IPV, and a 52% reduction in past-year reports of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) among women (Abramsky et al., 2012; Kyegombe et al., 2014). SASA! has since been used and adapted in a wide range of contexts around the world (estimated by Raising Voices to be more than 60 countries). The ‘Fidelity to the SASA! Activist Kit’ brief guides adaptation of SASA! by detailing four essentials that are necessary for effective implementation of the approach (Raising Voices, 2017):

- 1 *Gender-power analysis*. This maintains that the root cause of violence against women is power imbalance between women and men at individual and structural levels, and that men and women can balance power positively in their relationships and communities. SASA! explores different types of power through four phases, supporting staff and community members to reflect upon how they use power in their relationships and communities.
- 2 *A phased-in approach*. SASA! is implemented over four phases that reflect Stages of Change theory. The Start phase nurtures one’s ‘power within,’ the Awareness phase deepens analysis of men’s ‘power over’ women and how this is tolerated within communities, the Support phase encourages joining ‘power with’ others, and the Action phase equips the use of ‘power to’ enact and sustain positive change. Monitoring and evaluation tools assess progress at each phase and determine readiness for the subsequent phase. It is important to complete all four phases, which means programming takes between three to five years.
- 3 *Holistic community engagement (circles of influence)*. SASA! engages members of the community across individual, relationship, community and society levels. Community asset mapping is conducted to identify important individuals, groups and institutions, and differing strategies (i) communication materials, ii) media and advocacy, iii) training and iv) local activism) and activities are used to reach diverse individuals and groups.
- 4 *Activism*. “SASA! moves beyond information giving and gets personal, encouraging critical self-reflection with the aim of inspiring women and men to feel compelled to action, in their own lives and in the community.”<sup>2</sup> Activists meet community members for informal discussions using creative communication materials and techniques, rather than in trainings or formal public events. Activists regularly reach more than 50% of the total population of a community, and there are an equal number of male and female activists representing a diversity of community members and groups with whom an organization is working with (e.g., religious leaders, health care providers). Though they focus on prevention, they are equipped with basic training and a referral list to be able to refer survivors of violence for services.

### 1.4. Indashyikirwa program design

The Indashyikirwa team worked in collaboration with the What Works evaluation team during a lengthy inception period, to design a new program that would build upon their own learning as well as the latest research and evidence-based practices. Indashyikirwa adapted elements of the four essentials of SASA!, specifically SASA! materials (local activism and training), monitoring and evaluation tools, and the program structure. Indashyikirwa also added unique components including women’s safe spaces and a combination of intensive curriculum-based work with the more diffuse style of community-based activism. The four components of the Indashyikirwa program are: 1) couples’ curriculum, 2) community-based activism with couples, 3)

<sup>2</sup> Raising Voices (2017). Fidelity to the SASA! Activist Kit, Programming for Prevention Series, Brief No.2, Kampala, Uganda

training and engagement of opinion leaders, and 4) women's safe spaces. The Indashyikirwa theory of change anticipated that this combination of interventions would reduce the incidence of IPV, and improve well-being of IPV survivors through access to and satisfaction with services and support in their communities.

#### 1.4.1. Couples' curriculum

Intensive work with heterosexual couples is fundamental to the Indashyikirwa theory of change. To be eligible to participate in the curriculum, couples had to be married or living together for at least six months, and at least one partner had to be an active CARE VSLA member (often the female partner). In this way, the program builds upon its prior experience as well as promising global evidence indicating the importance of linking economic empowerment with gender transformative programming (Fulu, Kerr-Wilson, & Lang, 2014). There is also evidence that some of the ways SASA! worked was to strengthen communication and reduce conflict among couples (Starmann et al., 2017), although working with couples was not a central focus of SASA! The couples' curriculum strongly drew on SASA! ideas and concepts, notably its emphasis on positive and negative types and uses of power, critical personal reflection and moving incrementally from knowledge, attitudes, skills and actions. However, Indashyikirwa also works more explicitly to address emerging evidence from the field about the triggers of IPV and the importance of skills-building to create positive alternatives to violence. The curriculum explores three major triggers of IPV as identified through the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women evidence review (Heise, 2011). These include disagreements about money, jealousy, and men's alcohol abuse. The curriculum situates these within the root cause of power imbalance, and supports skills building to manage these triggers, for healthy, equitable relationships, and to engage in community action. RWAMREC staff (one male and one female facilitator) facilitated the 20-session curriculum with fifteen couples per group, on a weekly basis. In total, 840 adult heterosexual couples completed the curriculum.

#### 1.4.2. Community-based activism with couples

The results from SASA! indicate the power of community activism to transform acceptance of and prevent IPV. Social norms theory also highlights the need for diffusion of ideas, while implementing partners' experiences with JoT showed that program participants were eager to engage and support others. Therefore, after the Couples Curriculum, four hundred and twenty partners of couples were identified to carry on community-based activism for the duration of the program (approximately two years), based on SASA!'s local activism strategy. RWAMREC staff offered community activists (CAs) an initial ten-day training in activism skills, and coordinated monthly meetings to offer ongoing support to CAs. RWAMREC staff also offered a series of refresher trainings to CAs around the use of SASA!-adapted activism activities and materials. Criteria to be CAs were availability to conduct at least three activism activities per month. More trained couples than the program had budgeted for expressed their interest to be CAs. As a result, RWAMREC staff encouraged CAs to involve their spouses in activism activities, and coordinated meetings with trained couples that did not continue as CAs a few times each year for the duration of the program. In 2017, RWAMREC staff offered the ten-day activist training to an additional eighty partners of trained couples who had shown ongoing dedication to the program, in order to widen the available pool of CAs. Throughout the activism component, RWAMREC staff hosted monthly meetings with CAs to report on activism activities completed, reflect on successes and address challenges. RWAMREC staff also conducted regular observations of CAs conducting activities, in order to provide constructive feedback to CAs. Observations were documented through an adapted version of the SASA! monitoring and evaluation community activism report form<sup>3</sup>.

#### 1.4.3. Training and engagement of opinion leaders

To ensure an enabling environment for community activism led by couples, RWN trained approximately forty opinion leaders per intervention sector at the beginning of the program (e.g. local government, service providers and religious leaders), using a two-week curriculum for opinion leaders, which was also developed for Indashyikirwa. A diversity of leaders were identified through a process of stakeholder mapping. Their training included a condensed version of the core content from the Couples' Curriculum around gender, power and IPV, and had a dedicated session to encourage opinion leaders to identify their use of 'power over' in their work and relationships, and consider alternatives of using positive power and taking actions in their communities including 'power to'. Throughout the intervention, RWN staff hosted quarterly meetings with trained opinion leaders, where they would collectively identify opportunities to support the community activism efforts, and to promote more effective IPV prevention and response on a personal level and in their role as opinion leaders. RWN also offered refresher trainings with opinion leaders once a year based on the initial curriculum, and to engage newly elected government leaders after local elections were held in mid-2016.

#### 1.4.4. Women's safe spaces

As many of the program areas had limited access to or awareness of health, legal, social and counselling services, it was necessary to have dedicated safe spaces for survivors of IPV as part of the program model. Fourteen women's safe spaces (one per sector) were established, building off of RWN's experience implementing the Polyclinic of Hope spaces since 1997, which are designed to address the health, psycho-social, shelter and socio-economic needs of survivors of gender based violence (GBV). At each women's safe space, twenty-two facilitators were recruited from the intervention communities to offer dedicated support to women and men that report IPV, educate women about their rights, and refer or accompany individuals who wish to report abuse or seek health or social services. The women's safe space facilitators (WSF) completed a two-week training at the beginning of the program, facilitated by RWN staff. This included a condensed version of the core content from the Couples' Curriculum around power, gender and IPV, and dedicated modules on the role of WSF, participatory facilitation, communication skills for providing support, foundations of advocacy and reporting skills. The WSF received ongoing support and refresher trainings from RWN staff throughout the program, including to facilitate participatory dialogues with the support of SASA! adapted communication materials.

## 2. Adaptation process of Indashyikirwa

The inception and adaptation phase of Indashyikirwa took one year, which was the time needed to finalize the theory of change and program design, identify viable clusters for the intervention and accompanying randomized control trial, design and pre-test the couples' curriculum and trainings with opinion leaders and women's safe space facilitators. The last author of this paper, who has significant familiarity and experience with SASA! was hired to develop—in collaboration with the implementing partners—the couples' curriculum and a set of activist skills-building modules and intensively train all program staff in curricula facilitation. The training materials were pre-tested at the community-level over a condensed, one-month period. The What Works evaluation team observed the pre-test trainings facilitated with couples, opinion leaders, and women's safe space facilitators. After each session, focus groups were conducted with participants and interviews were conducted with facilitators to obtain their feedback on the sessions. The pre-test critically informed the need to provide more psycho-social

<sup>3</sup> This tool can be accessed on the Raising Voices website: <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>

support for staff, the importance of having a male and female facilitator for the Couples Curriculum, timing (i.e. for the opinion leaders curriculum to be ten half days instead of originally planned five full days), strengthened contextual content (i.e. more use and examples of Kinyarwanda proverbs), and improved translations. For instance, the pre-test indicated how the four different types of power were not clearly translated into Kinyarwanda, especially the positive forms of power, and the program team revised the translations of these fundamental concepts.

Awareness through Action phases focused on community-based activism implemented by couples, women's safe space facilitators, and supported by opinion leaders. For adaptation of this component, formative social norms research conducted as part of the evaluation informed the necessary revisions of the original SASA! activism materials, such as profiling the recent 'equality head of spouses' law in Rwanda<sup>4</sup>, detailing Rwandan rights and laws, and use of Kinyarwanda proverbs. Images from the SASA! activism materials with an emphasis on HIV were removed, as this is not a core component of Indashyikirwa, and were replaced with images around women's economic empowerment, such as men and women working together for the economic benefit of the household, or couples registering for equal rights to property. This emphasis also challenged the salient social norm identified of men as primary breadwinners (Stern, Heise, & McLean, 2017). For the Support and Action phase activism materials, images from the original SASA! materials showing individuals taking action to prevent or respond to IPV, were sometimes changed to couples taking action together, given the more explicit emphasis on couples for Indashyikirwa. The program engaged religious scholars and leaders to support the development of religious messages and scriptures to promote gender equality, which also included adapting the SASA! Faith<sup>5</sup> Christian and Muslim posters. The program partners tested the appropriateness and relevance of the adapted materials at the beginning of the activism component, before the awareness phase, with 70 male and female community members across two intervention sectors. Feedback was gathered through a set of questions including 'do the scenarios depict what is common in your community?' and 'can anything be improved or revised to more clearly communicate the images?' Feedback from the community members was used to further revise and strengthen the adapted materials (Image 1).

### 3. Methods

This paper presents ongoing feedback gathered from Indashyikirwa participants and from RWN and RWAMREC program staff, which was conducted as part of the impact evaluation of the program. Although the data was not collected explicitly to assess adaptation, these qualitative interviews captured how participants engaged with the program, which is important to document for adaptation purposes, as this may play a direct role in outcomes (James Bell Associates, 2009). The interviews with participants took place in three intervention sectors (Rurembo Sector, Western Province; Gishari Sector, Eastern Province; and Gacaca Sector, Northern Province), which were purposefully selected to represent a diversity of environments including rural and peri-urban locations. As self-report data may be limited by the ability of participants to accurately recall information (James Bell Associates, 2009), participants were interviewed at different intervals throughout the program. In November 2015, thirty interviews were conducted separately with both partners of couples enrolled in but before having begun the Couples Curriculum. The first author informed staff from the Rwandan research company Laterite, which conducted the randomized control trial with couples, of recruitment criteria, and aims of the study,

so that these could be disseminated to potential participants. Laterite staff provided the qualitative researchers with couples' contact details after obtaining their consent to do so. Couples were purposefully selected to include a diversity of informally and formally married couples, for being the primary distinction among couples enrolled in the curriculum. The interviews assessed couples' expectations of the program, their experiences of conflict and IPV, communication skills and joint decision-making. Twenty-eight midline interviews were conducted with the same sub-set of couples immediately after the curriculum in May 2016 (due to one couple being lost to follow up) to assess their impressions of and impact of the curriculum. Twenty-eight endline interviews were also conducted with the same sub-set of couples in May 2017, one year after the midline interviews. Couples were asked how their involvement with Indashyikirwa has continued to impact their relationships.

Nine baseline interviews (three per sector) were conducted with opinion leaders enrolled in and before completing the Indashyikirwa opinion leader module in November 2015. RWN staff members purposefully suggested a diversity of opinion leaders to include government leaders, members of anti-GBV committees or the National Women's Council<sup>6</sup> and religious leaders. Opinion leaders were asked about their expectations of the Indashyikirwa program, and their experiences around IPV prevention and response. Six midline interviews were conducted with the same sub-set of opinion leaders after twelve months (November 2016), as three opinion leaders were lost to follow up due to being replaced as local leaders after re-elections. Three additional opinion leaders were interviewed in June 2017, after completing a refresher training and being incorporated into the program. These interviews assessed opinion leaders' impressions of the Indashyikirwa training and whether their involvement in the program has influenced their actions for IPV prevention and response. In May 2016, three WSF (one per safe space) were interviewed to assess their motivations as facilitators and their impressions of the training they received. RWN staff supported recruitment of WSF and attendees. In September 2016, six women who attend the safe spaces (two per sector) were interviewed to assess why they visit the safe spaces, and the difference the spaces make in their lives (if any). In June 2017, three different WSF (one per sector) were interviewed to assess their perceived impact of the safe spaces and the support they receive as facilitators. Six female attendees (two per sector), one male attendee in the Northern Province and one male attendee in the Western Province were also interviewed to assess their impressions of the women's safe spaces. Twelve partners of couples who were elected and trained as CAs (four per sector) were interviewed in November 2016, after having completed the activist training and started conducting activism activities. They were recruited through RWAMREC staff and were asked about their impressions of the activism training, what motivated them to continue as CAs, what they had been doing recently as CAs, and whether they had faced any challenges.

Interviews with providers are a good way to supplement fidelity data obtained through participants' self-reports (Lee et al., 2008). In May 2016, six in-depth interviews were conducted with RWN field officers and supervisors across all intervention sectors, which assessed their perspectives of successes and lessons learned from facilitating the opinion leader and women's space facilitator modules. Another round of interviews were conducted with seven RWN staff in May 2017, where they were asked to describe key successes and challenges of the women's safe spaces and engagement of opinion leaders. Interviews were conducted with ten RWAMREC field officers and supervisors in May-

<sup>4</sup> The 2016 Family Law Article 206 'Equality of spouses', for the first time in Rwanda mandates joint headship by both members of a couple.

<sup>5</sup> SASA! Faith is a guide for faith communities to prevent violence against women, and was another adaptation of SASA! by Raising Voices and Trochaire.

<sup>6</sup> The National Women's Council in Rwanda, which was established in 1996, is a social forum where girls and women pool their ideas to solve their problems and participate in the development of the country. The council has structures from the grassroots up to the national level, and allows for women's participation in local governance at all administrative levels.

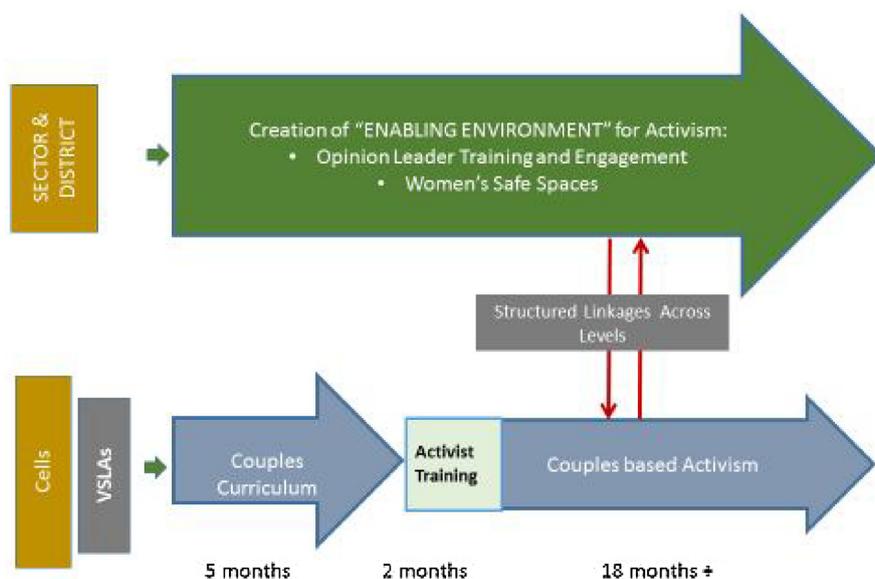


Image 1. Timeline and Activities for Indashyikirwa.

June 2016 across all intervention sectors, which assessed their perspectives of successes and lessons learned from facilitating the Couples Curriculum. Eight RWAMREC field supervisors and officers were also interviewed in May 2017, where they were asked to describe key successes and challenges of the community activism component.

The interviews with program beneficiaries and staff lasted approximately 1–1.5 hours and were conducted at locations deemed appropriate and private for participants. Two female Rwandan qualitative researchers external to the program conducted the interviews with women's safe space facilitators, attendees, opinion leaders, CAs and female partners of couples. Two male Rwandan qualitative researchers conducted the interviews with opinion leaders and male partners of couples. All of these interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda and audio recorded. The first author conducted both rounds of interviews with RWAMREC and RWN staff in English.

Self-reports of programming may be biased, and tend to be skewed in a positive light due to social desirability (James Bell Associates, 2009; Hansen, Bishop, & Bryant, 2009). Behavioral observations can often provide a more objective assessment of program implementation, including whether facilitators appropriately delivery methods, or actively engage participants (James Bell Associates, 2009). The Rwandan female qualitative researchers observed two women's safe space activities per research sector (six in total) in September 2016, and two women's safe space activities per sector (six in total) in June 2017. In December 2017, one of these researchers observed twelve CAs (four per sector) facilitating various activism activities. For the observations, the researchers took structured notes on participation levels and engagement, participant comprehension, and facilitator skills.

### 3.1. Ethics

Ethical approval to undertake the study was obtained from the Rwandan National Ethics Committee (RNEC) (REF: 340/RNEC/2015) and the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (REF:0738/2015/10/NISR). Secondary approval was also obtained from the South Africa Medical Research Council (REF: EC033-10/2015) and from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Before each interview, informed written consent was obtained from participants in adherence with the ethical approval guidelines given by the respective review boards. All participants were given 2000 Rwandan Francs (approximately USD 2.50) as a token of appreciation for their participation. All interviewees were informed of their guaranteed confidentiality and that

no identifying information would be used in presentation of the data. During the baseline, midline and endline qualitative and quantitative interviews, participants could be referred to a professional counselor who was hired to accompany the research. For the midline and endline interviews in intervention communities, participants could also be referred to the women's safe spaces.

### 3.2. Analysis

The first author debriefed with the qualitative researchers after data collection to capture their initial impressions, non-verbal and contextual insights. These research summaries were used to inform the analysis. Using the audio files, the data was transcribed and translated verbatim into English by a language specialist and professional translator. After carefully reading the transcripts, the first author established a preliminary coding structure to analyze the data. All of the transcripts were analysed by the first author using this thematic coding framework with the assistance of NVIVO 11 software. The first author regularly workshopped the emerging findings with the Indashyikirwa senior program staff to allow for their insights to the interpretation of the data and to validate programmatic insights. The second, third, fourth and final authors supported the Indashyikirwa program design, monitoring and evaluation, and provided valuable insights to the analysis presented in this paper.

## 4. Findings on fidelity to SASA!

The findings are presented according to how the Indashyikirwa program adapted the four essential criterion detailed by the SASA! fidelity brief.

### 4.1. A gender-power analysis

**Key Finding: The four types of power explored in SASA! (power over; power with; power within; power to) were essential to the Indashyikirwa curricula and activism activities.**

The majority of staff and participants related how fundamental the concepts of positive and negative types of power were to the program: "The session of power was amazing for people. Everyone is talking about it. This is the key to all the changes they have achieved or started to realize where to change, how to do it and what to change." (RWAMREC Field Officer 01, Western Province) A few field officers noted that the concept

of different types of power, especially positive forms of power, was innovative and initially challenging for some participants that completed the curricula:

“At the beginning it was hard to understand the distinctions between the types of power. They understand power over immediately! Because it is a root cause of GBV and they understood this type of power based on their experience. Other types of power were difficult immediately to understand but with exercises and personal experience, discussing the meaning of all types, they understood better.” (RWAMREC Field Officer 02, Northern Province)

The *SASA!* power posters contain images of how people use power in positive and negative ways, according to the four phases. All the *SASA!* power posters were used and adapted for the Rwandan context, which included adapting the posters to the Rwandan style of dress, language, inserting common images such as traditional baskets or motorcycles, and removing uncommon images, such as of people cooking or eating outside. The use of *SASA!* adapted communication materials including the power posters, were found to support community members to recognize the multiple ways power imbalances play out beyond a typical focus on gender roles. A RWAMREC field officer noted how this framing was particularly valuable for engaging men, for moving beyond a binary of men as solely perpetrators and women as solely victims of abuses of power. The trainings and activism activities maintained *SASA!*'s approach of supporting people to use their power in positive ways. As one female CA in the Northern Province noted: “It is about showing people that they have power, and then we ask them how they use it, until they get to know that they have power. After having known their power, they ask themselves, am I using my power properly or not?” Several female partners of couples, WSF and attendees and a few staff members discussed how women's self-confidence improved through learning about their ‘power within’, which especially resonated with the women's safe spaces: “Now I openly speak out and I use the power that I have in me and I feel there is something that I can do to make my family developed. That is a very big thing.” (Female partner of couple 04 Eastern Province, midline interview) The concept of ‘power over’ especially resonated with opinion leaders. However, many opinion leaders also struggled to minimize their use of ‘power over’ given the nature of their work and/or their perceptions that this can be positive:

“When it comes to opinion leaders like headmasters of schools, religious leaders, security organs, they used to think it is their right to use their power the way they want. But with knowledge of how they can positively use their power, they are witnessing change, although it is still a process. They keep telling us about the notion of power, it shows it touched them.” (RWN Field Supervisor, Western Province)

Regarding ‘power with’ and ‘power to’, several couples that participated in the curriculum, WSF, and opinion leaders reflected on the value of identifying their power to prevent and respond to IPV among their families and communities. Many participants also related learning the benefits of balancing power among couples through the curricula:

“The type of power that helped me is the ‘power with’, which is about allowing your partner to have time to discuss and share ideas. You could see that the type of power we were using was that type that doesn't allow your partner to be part of decision making.” (Opinion Leader 01 Northern Province, midline interview)

#### 4.2. A phased-in approach

**Key Finding: Indashyikirwa aimed to retain a phased-in approach, yet made substantive adjustments: (1) the more explicit curriculum focus at the beginning of the program included elements from all phases (2) for the local activism component, the Start and Action phases, and Support and Awareness phases were merged given that adaptation-related needs and processes took**

**longer than originally expected.**

The couples' curriculum, WSF and opinion leader trainings were designed to move through topics incrementally to shift knowledge and attitudes underlying IPV, and support skills and actions to combat IPV - an idea that derives from the phases of *SASA!*, but was condensed to fit curriculum-based work. There was extremely high retention and regular attendance at all of the curriculum sessions, with 99.1% of couples, 100% of opinion leaders and WSF completing the curriculums, indicative of their commitment and interest. A RWAMREC field supervisor related how the sequential design of the curriculum and relevant topics supported such active engagement: “The way these sessions were aligned for starting the journey; the concept of power, triggers of violence, overcoming excessive alcohol, gender, sexuality, all these concepts were logically answering their questions to the extent that no one could dare miss a session because every day was a hit.” The majority of partners of couples, opinion leaders, and WSF expressed their appreciation of learning not only the consequences of IPV, but to identify triggers and build skills to manage IPV. Conflict resolution skills encouraged and practiced through the trainings included constructive communication, taking time out to cool down amidst conflict, admitting to mistakes and asking for forgiveness. One male partner of a couple reflected on the value of learning to identify and manage triggers of IPV during his endline interview:

“Thanks to the training we received, we saw that there is something that triggers those mistakes. Old behaviors may happen for a while but the one who makes mistakes asks for forgiveness in a humble way. The reason why we never apologized to each other before is that when I made a mistake or when she made a mistake, I thought I shouldn't ask for forgiveness and I felt that I reserved the right to give orders as a husband.”

A few staff members, opinion leaders, partners of couples and WSF also shared their appreciation of learning community IPV prevention and response skills including how to actively listen, provide non-judgmental responses to those experiencing IPV, and more safely intervene in conflicts. The couples' curriculum had a significant emphasis on skills building, with weekly take-home exercises that couples were encouraged to complete, such as practicing constructive communication or conflict resolution. This component was especially appreciated, and supported couples' processes of change and comprehension of the curriculum topics:

“We were given homework and when we came for the next lesson, we first answered the questions we were given in the homework so even the one who had not understood it, had an opportunity to understand. So there is no lesson I didn't understand.” (Female partner of couple 05 Eastern Province, Midline interview)

The local activism activities facilitated by CAs and WSF were originally intended to be implemented according to the four *SASA!* phases. However, in practice, it was challenging to move fluidly and effectively through the phases. Phased-in activism programming was a new approach to the majority of implementing partners, and it took more time than expected to choose and adapt the *SASA!* activist tool kit materials required for each phase. Certain key Start phase activities, such as briefing all local leaders about the program, were unintentionally overlooked. The program partners assumed it would be sufficient to have intensively trained opinion leaders, which included some local leaders. However, the majority of CAs and WSF were not comfortable delivering activism activities until each local village leader had been briefed about the program. Program staff responded to this request, but this delayed the start of the activism activities. The inception period to finalize the program design and pre-test the curricula also took longer than anticipated, and as a result, the time to cover all four phases became quite restricted. One RWAMREC field officer in the Western Province lamented the limited time for covering all of the phases adequately:

*“I don’t think we have enough time for activism. It is not long enough. Skipping from this phase to the other, I think it should require a certain long time. If we are copying SASA!, we are a bit squeezed for time.”*

Given these delays, the program combined the Start and Awareness phases together, and the Support and Action phases together. Programmatic monitoring and evaluation tools were adapted from SASA! including the Outcome Tracking Tool to assess community responsiveness to the activism and readiness for the next phase. The challenges of knowing what kind of preparation, time, and technical assistance is needed and how long it will take when underway are common to organizations adapting SASA! and/or when phased programming are new approaches.

#### 4.3. Holistic community engagement

**Key Finding: The Indashyikirwa program engaged specific groups of people at various levels of the ecological model including couples, opinion leaders, IPV survivors, WSF and community members, and adapted three of the four SASA! strategies.**

Three of the four SASA! strategies were adapted for use according to different community circles of influence, to support holistic community engagement. The SASA! Training strategy includes modules suitable for anyone exploring their potential as activists, designed to guide participants in developing a passion for and skills in creating positive change. This strategy informed the initial trainings with opinion leaders, WSF, and couples, the activism training with couples selected as CAs, and ongoing refresher trainings with these diverse stakeholders. However, the refresher trainings were not implemented in a phased approach as done by SASA!, but rather conducted on a more ad-hoc basis in response to identified needs of these stakeholders.

The SASA! Communication Materials strategy includes a wide range of creative and positive materials, such as posters, comics and info sheets, to support community members to think and talk about power and violence against women. From this strategy, the power posters, community posters and picture cards from various phases were adapted for use by CAs to engage community members, and for WSF use at the women’s safe spaces. Some materials from this strategy were not adapted for being less relevant to the Rwandan context, such as the card games and comic strips. The SASA! Local Activism strategy includes grassroots initiatives that create informal opportunities for personal reflection, critical thinking and public dialogue about power and violence against women. From this strategy, community conversations, community dramas and quick chats (including revised healthy relationship chats to have a stronger emphasis on couples) were adapted for use by CAs. Although the content and illustrations of the communication and local advocacy materials were revised for Indashyikirwa, the materials maintained a benefits based approach to support community members strive towards positive, non-violent alternatives. Several staff, CAs, couples and opinion leaders emphasized that this approach was highly motivating for community members’ engagement. All Indashyikirwa activities also maintained the participatory approach of SASA!, which was a new area for many program staff and participants, and took significant practice and support:

*“Participants are the ones who should find the answers but sometimes one could forget and give the answer instead of the participants. I think that has reduced considerably thanks to the experience. At the beginning, it was hard but as time passes, it changes.”*  
(Male activist 02, Eastern province)

The SASA! Media & Advocacy strategy aims to influence public priorities, by making violence against women a popular media topic and a catalyst for new policies and practices by engaging local leaders, policymakers and journalists. The materials from this strategy, such as soap operas, fact sheets, PowerPoints, and leadership leaflets, were not included in Indashyikirwa. The program rather used other innovations

to engage opinion leaders through the initial training, refresher trainings, and hosting quarterly meetings with trained opinion leaders to identify and plan IPV prevention and response commitments. Moreover, at the beginning of the program, RWN staff delivered a four-day training to local journalists to reflect on fundamental concepts of power and violence and encourage gender sensitive reporting and dissemination. Unlike the CAs and WSF, opinion leaders were not given activism materials or trainings to use these tools. This was attributed to the various other commitments of opinion leaders, and the challenge for RWN staff to monitor or supervise the work of opinion leaders:

*“They commit, we discuss in the meetings, we agree what to do, but when we are back at the following meeting, they keep telling us they have improved, but we don’t have a tool to track and ensure that what they are saying reflects what they do. It is not under our mandate to monitor what they are doing. When we try to ask them to ensure what they are telling us is matching up, they tend to take it as ‘who are these people, our bosses? We are not their bosses, but their partners.”* (RWN Field Supervisor, Western Province)

Holding opinion leaders accountable to their commitments was one of the most pressing challenges identified in the interviews with RWN staff, and speaks to the fact that the program may have benefitted from adapting the SASA! Media & Advocacy strategy activities. Nonetheless, the program was found to entail support from opinion leaders, which helped boost the confidence of CAs and provided valuable opportunities for their activism activities, such as at community meetings. Interviews with RWN staff and opinion leaders indicated that opinion leaders regularly offered informal discussions around core program elements, and were critical allies around program advocacy issues, such as to ensure health care providers provide services to survivors of IPV free of charge rather than fining them for violence related accidents. Another critical component and innovation related to this strategy were advocacy efforts facilitated by RWN staff to ensure that GBV is resourced and included in the intervention district Imihigo performance contracts, which are signed between the president of Rwanda and local authorities, and include targets and measurements for districts to achieve each year.

Holistic community engagement also included work with survivors of GBV through the women’s safe spaces. This is an innovative component of Indashyikirwa, as SASA! emphasizes the importance of safe space, but does not include the establishment of safe spaces. Each Indashyikirwa space had a district level referral list of healthcare, justice or social services and support mechanisms for survivors of violence, which were regularly updated, as suggested in the SASA! fidelity brief. Three mornings per week, the women’s safe spaces were open to provide dedicated, private spaces for men or women, whereby WSFs could offer support, referral and/or accompaniment to services. Interviews with RWN staff, WSF and attendees indicated attendee’s significant appreciation of the support they received at the safe spaces, and that many individuals prefer reporting to these over other options. Reasons for this given were having dedicated time, confidential and non-judgmental spaces, being offered solutions, and not fearing consequences for reporting, such as their experience being shared publicly, having to pay a fine, or their partner being arrested. As one male women’s safe space attendee noted:

*“Another woman will never stop and listen to that problem, in some case she might even laugh at those having problems. On contrary, the WSF will stop by, listen, understand and provide.”*

As a further component for holistic community engagement, RWN and RWAMREC staff facilitated a series of community outreach activities, with the involvement of CAs, WSF and opinion leaders. Outreach activities were intended for organized diffusion with wider and more varied audiences and included community debates, government level meetings, and national events to share learnings from the program.

#### 4.4. Activism

**Key Finding: Activism heavily relied on the SASA! model but was more formalized and relied on less frequent support, in response to the environmental and programmatic context.**

The community activism component of the program primarily relied on activities facilitated by CAs and WSFs, using a variety of SASA!-adapted materials. The fact that CAs and WSF are from the communities was given as critical for harnessing trust and rapport, as community members can witness their change first hand and draw on their support. The majority of staff members related the dedication and commitment of CAs and WSF given how they personally benefitted from the intensive trainings. Initially, CAs primarily conducted activist activities at more formalized venues, including at VSLA meetings, community meetings, umuganda<sup>7</sup>, or parents evening forums<sup>8</sup>, and were often invited to return regularly to these community forums. Although a few staff and CAs noted how this was gradually shifting through being encouraged to use more informal venues (i.e. markets), the majority related the ongoing contextual difficulties for CAs to engage in more informal activism:

“The [CAs] do not do informal activism. We push them to go to markets, churches, bus stations but they are shy. They don’t dare go there. When we ask local leaders or pastors, they say we have those opportunities but when we ask community activists to go there, they are still shy. I think this is related to the new approach because Rwandans are not familiar with this kind of thing. At first people were scared to talk in public but there is improvement, slowly.” (RWAMREC Field Supervisor, Eastern Province)

A staff member further reflected on the difficulty to ensure safe spaces for activism in informal locations:

“Rwandans are not used to discuss their issues in public. You need to choose a safer place to help people gain their trust. On the side of the road or at a market it will be hard.” (RWAMREC Field Supervisor, Western Province)

Observations of CAs and WSF facilitating activism activities found that participants were actively engaged and fairly open to discuss private, culturally sensitive issues (i.e. condom use, sexual violence). CAs and WSF had good facilitation and public speaking skills, but ongoing support and training was essential, especially to use participatory approaches. The SASA! adapted communication materials, such as the power posters, were said to be an extremely valuable tool for CAs and WSF for detailing common issues communities face, not requiring literacy, highlighting the benefits of non-violent relationships, and promoting critical thinking:

“People like the posters so much because it reflects their everyday life! For women’s space facilitators, it guides them and for those who are a bit shy, it helps them have a conversation. It helps them be more participatory; people talk and ask questions.” (RWN Field Supervisor, Eastern Province)

However, the majority of staff members and CAs identified the challenge of having too many images on the power posters, which could

<sup>7</sup> Umuganda refers to community work where traditionally people gather as a group to provide free labour for the vulnerable members of the community (Rwiyereka, 2014). It takes place on the last Saturday of the month where people gather including ministers and leaders from all levels to sit and discuss national goals, issues and possible solutions and apply these to their local contexts. This allows for rapid and effective communication between central and local leaders.

<sup>8</sup> Parents evening forums or ‘Umugoroba w’ababyeyi’ allow issues concerning family welfare including child abuse, domestic violence and family conflict to be identified and solved at the village level during regular meetings, apart from those which require the law to intervene.

be distracting for community members, make it difficult for them to agree upon an image to discuss, and/or because the same image continued to be chosen for discussion. In response to this challenge, the Indashyikirwa program team adapted SASA!’s singular power posters with multiple images to a calendar format with each image printed on a separate page. This was more appropriate for larger groups (e.g. visibility), and for returning multiple times to the same group. A few staff members mentioned that some CAs acted out images from the posters, which was a powerful avenue to engage community members, and could also respond to challenge of having limited, small posters with a large number of people:

“People in Rwanda really like drama! It helps them feel comfortable. Before they were using the posters, people were shy to discuss. People were saying maybe they think it’s my neighbor I am pointing at, but with dramas, everyone was laughing and started to exchange their experiences.” (RWAMREC Field Supervisor, Eastern Province)

The SASA! fidelity brief suggests that for successful activism, at least one dedicated staff member be available to regularly support and mentor twenty-five community activists. For Indashyikirwa, there was one RWN staff member for every twenty-two WSF, but only one RWAMREC staff member for every forty CAs, due to budgetary constraints. Given that many RWAMREC staff lived far from the villages where the activism took place, it was difficult to have the same level of frequent interaction with and mentorship of CAs as per the SASA! model. Several staff members reflected on the difficulty to monitor the activism activities of CAs for various reasons including that many of them conduct activities early mornings, evenings or weekends after cultivating, CAs’ poor access to electricity to charge their phones to be in contact with staff, and/or when local leaders change activism meeting times or locations last minute. Moreover, some intervention communities had no CAs due to the randomized approach to select the clusters, which meant that some CAs had the challenge of covering more than one village. One year into the activism activities, the program included an additional eighty partners of couples into the pool of CAs to help mitigate this challenge. These situations do not meet the SASA! fidelity brief recommendations for CAs to facilitate activities close to where they live and for activism activities to take place regularly (several days a week) and consistently across program communities.

Despite these contextual limitations, the support offered to CAs via the monthly meetings coordinated by RWAMREC, weekly support to WSF offered by RWN staff, and ongoing refresher trainings were said to be critical to address challenges facilitating activism:

“We exchange the challenges we have faced. If there is someone having a better idea about a certain challenge, we help each other. We also talk to our trainers where we show them the challenges we had and how we overcame them.” (Male Activist 02 Eastern Province)

The extent to which CAs and WSF support each other, after having developed close relationships through the initial trainings, was also identified as a valuable source of support by some of the staff, couples and WSF. Moreover, the majority of CAs shared their commitment and confidence to facilitate activism given how much they had benefitted and learned from the initial curriculum. As one CA said:

“What motivated me to become an activist is how the curriculum lessons took me from one point and brought me to another point, and helped me to know what I didn’t know and to make some changes.” (Female Activist 01, Western Province)

This speaks to the value of the Indashyikirwa innovation of an intensive curriculum as a platform for community activism, especially in rural, widespread areas where it may be more difficult for program staff to be as actively present as mandated by the SASA! model.

## 5. Implications

In terms of a fidelity assessment, Indashyikirwa reflects aspects of the four *SASA!* essentials, as well as significant differences. The program also clearly benefitted from the inclusion of novel components that are not part of the *SASA!* approach. Although the endline evaluation findings to assess whether and how the program reduced IPV are not yet available, reflecting on the process of adaptation yields a rich understanding of the value and effectiveness of the program. The data suggests that participant responsiveness to the Indashyikirwa program was significantly enhanced by drawing on some of the essentials of the *SASA!* model, including the foundational concepts of positive and negative types of power, engaging diverse community stakeholders, and having a supply of creative, dynamic and well thought-out materials. The findings also attest to the value of a group-based curriculum with couples using a skills building, benefits based, participatory approach as a platform for community activism. The curriculum enhanced couples' commitment to and capacity for activism, ensured a pool of other trained couples they could draw on for support, while equipping community wide changes beyond the couples trained. The fact that the WSF facilitators and opinion leaders also completed a curriculum with similar fundamental topics to the couples curriculum supported cohesion of the program, such as all stakeholders having similar understandings of identifying and managing triggers of IPV.

The insights also speak to the value of dedicated safe spaces for survivors of IPV as a comprehensive part of an IPV prevention program that raises awareness of forms and consequences of GBV, especially in contexts with limited awareness of/ access to GBV services. The findings also indicate the need for identification of and dedicated engagement of opinion leaders to ensure opportunities for and support for community activism. While not all intervention village leaders completed the initial training, it was essential for staff to meet with all village leaders to ensure their support, and the program would have benefitted from identifying this from the outset.

The application of phased in approaches differed from *SASA!*, with the initial couples' curriculum and other trainings covering elements from all four phases, and the local activism phases being more fluid in content and approach. It was challenging to sufficiently cover all four phases recommended for the activism component, with different activities and messages, in less than two years. For instance, certain tools were only developed towards the end of the program, such as adapting *SASA!* quick chats to Indashyikirwa healthy relationship chats. The curriculum approach was one of the major differences between *SASA!* and Indashyikirwa, and it was overall easier for the program to move ahead with the curricula, and more challenging to implement activism that is not curriculum based. Yet, the combination of curricula with community activism appeared to be an effective model for the context. Through being responsive to the contextual realities for community activism, and the active engagement of opinion leaders, the activism component ensured significant and regular levels of community diffusion.

## 6. Lessons learned

The analysis has generated several lessons for adaptation and piloting of evidence-based programmes:

- 1 *The importance of a substantial inception period, especially for new programs.* The inception period of Indashyikirwa took over one year, which was longer than anticipated, for being longer than most program partners were used to. Yet this inception period was critical to design a strong program, including relevant and appropriate curricula and activism activities. The inception phase involved active learning from those who have used *SASA!* including support and advice from Raising Voices, a learning workshop with Raising Voices and CEDOVIP in Uganda, CEDOVIP's participation in the

program's first inception workshop and theory of change development, and the last author of this paper providing insights into the theory of change and curricula development. The long inception period meant the program had less time for the community activism component, and the program would have benefitted from additional time as well as greater appreciation of the various steps and support needed to develop unfamiliar program approaches. In addition, more time may be needed when adapting an evidence-based program to revise and test materials, which means it may not be possible to complete a program in the same timeframe as the original model.

- 2 *The need for careful consideration of how to maintain fidelity to key principles while responding to contextual factors.* For the Indashyikirwa program, contextual considerations were most pronounced regarding diverse forms of and opportunities for community activism. Many participants and program staff related how community activism is an unfamiliar approach in Rwanda, and this area of programming was the most challenging. *SASA!* activism materials had to be adapted according to the rural context, Rwandan culture, and for use in more formalized, regular venues, with buy in from local leaders. This was found to be necessary to ensure access and openness among community members and CAs. The program responded to the political environment and governance structure of Rwanda to best deliver activism, such as drawing on the many existing formalized, community groups, and advocating through the government Imihigos. The rural and widespread program locations, clustered approach and trial randomization meant the program could not always follow the *SASA!* model that each community has several CAs.
- 3 *Adaptation is a skill in and of itself, which requires internal and external support and dedicated leadership.* The involvement of Rwandan program partners as co-designers and facilitators ensured that the adapted version of the program was more likely culturally relevant (Berkel, Mauricio, Schoenfelder, & Sandler, 2011), and sustainable (Castro et al., 2004). For instance, Rwandan partners were actively involved in adapting the *SASA!* activism materials for the context, including dress, style of housing, and common activities. The adaptation and development of the program and theory of change also heavily drew on external support, including from the evaluation team and the last author. A limitation is that the program had a few disparate consultants working on different pieces and not one key person driving the adaptation process throughout the program. The time and effort it takes to bring various stakeholders together for adaptation processes should be accounted for in programming design, monitoring and evaluation.
- 4 *New programs need to stay open to adjustments according to emerging findings.* The Indashyikirwa program was open to adjustments through the evaluation research regularly informing the program. Program partners were also critically involved in the external evaluation design, and provided with regular opportunities to interpret and validate the program findings. Insights from beneficiaries and staff were used to inform the program, including adaptation to the cultural context, content of the refresher trainings, responses to contextual challenges, and design of the activism materials. Staff were generally more open about implementation challenges than beneficiaries, and provided a valuable perspective that is often neglected in evaluations. The program was also able to be open to adjustments because of the adaptive management approach taken by the funder DFID-Rwanda, which included a flexible budget, workplan, timing and logframe.
- 5 *A coherent theory of change should underlie the process of adaptation.* The Indashyikirwa theory of change helped identify aspects of evidence-based programs to prioritize (e.g. gender analysis of power) and areas for changes or innovation (e.g. stronger emphasis on couples programming). Yet, it was challenging to develop a clear theory of change across all program components, in ways that

maintained the core components and integrity of the interventions adapted to become a new, cohesive approach. For instance, there was a lack of commitment around phased programming, which is not reflected in the theory of change. This relates to the importance of a coherent theory of change, including what is being adapted and how.

- 6 *The benefit of a blended approach to retain innovation alongside adaptation.* The findings speak to value of flexibility in terms of drawing on established and proven methodologies, while also maintaining the spirit of innovation. The unique aspects of Indashyikirwa, including the couples' curriculum and women's safe spaces, were vital to the program, alongside the thoughtful, contextual adaptation of SASA! essentials.

Overall, an assessment of adaptation fidelity is a valuable component of a comprehensive evaluation and can help unpack the strengths and limitations of a program and elements that have the greatest effect on outcomes (James Bell Associates, 2009). With the growth of GBV prevention programs being rigorously evaluated, adapted and taken to scale, it is warranted to document, reflect and share adaptation processes and experiences. This provides a platform to support programmatic creativity and responses to contextual needs.

### Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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