

# Implementing *SASA!* in Humanitarian Settings: Tips and Tools

## Background

*SASA!* is a community mobilization approach to prevent violence against women (VAW) and HIV, developed by Raising Voices in Uganda ([www.raisingvoices.org](http://www.raisingvoices.org)). A randomized controlled trial conducted with the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Makerere University, demonstrated *SASA!*'s community-level impacts on preventing intimate partner violence against women and reducing social acceptability of violence.<sup>1</sup>

### The Resonance of *SASA!* in Humanitarian Settings

*SASA!*'s focus on power and non-violence can resonate strongly in camp settings, where personal agency is often severely limited:

"*SASA!* gives you the ability to understand your individual power and strength, it has untapped our greatness and the right we have [...] as a result you become a person of high self-esteem."


- Female community leader, Dadaab Camp, Kenya

"[*SASA!*] makes our community live in peace and that is enough motivation [for participating]."

- Male community member, Dadaab Camp, Kenya

There is growing evidence that conflict/post-conflict environments are a risk factor for VAW—and that intimate partner violence (IPV) remains the most common form of violence against women in these settings. While humanitarian actors have historically focused on violence mitigation and response strategies, an emphasis on preventing VAW is gaining momentum. Emerging evidence also points to the potential for humanitarian programming to leverage the social upheaval that frequently accompanies conflict to achieve meaningful social change.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, community mobilization and the creation of community groups—through programming such as *SASA!*—can support the reactivation of societal and communal roles in camp settings.

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Although *SASA!* was originally designed for a development context, organizations are beginning to adapt and implement *SASA!* in various humanitarian settings around the world. These communities<sup>3</sup> share distinct characteristics that can both challenge and facilitate prevention programming, such as the experience of collective trauma, psychological distress, impermanence, restricted mobility, disrupted livelihoods and networks, as well as rapid shifts in social and gender norms (both positive and negative).

The strong humanitarian infrastructure, including the cluster system and existence of standardized guidelines and protocols to coordinate programs, offers a unique opportunity to implement *SASA!*, with the aim of transforming the attitudes and behaviors that underpin violence against women and gender inequality.

## Who Can Use this Program Brief?

This brief provides guidance for humanitarian actors to determine whether to use *SASA!*, and, if so, how to adapt and implement the program in a way that respects the dignity of crisis-affected communities and upholds the “Do No Harm” Principle. This brief can also assist donors and Technical Assistance providers in reviewing grant applications and supporting partners working to prevent VAW in humanitarian contexts.

## How was this Program Brief created?

In February 2018, Raising Voices convened a group of activists with extensive experience in humanitarian settings to discuss challenges and opportunities for *SASA!* within these specific contexts. This brief also draws from previous adaptations research conducted by Raising Voices, International Rescue Committee (IRC)-Kenya, the University of California, San Diego, Women Promotion Center (WPC) Tanzania and Beyond Borders Haiti. The workshop and research is part of a larger project, aimed at understanding *SASA!* adaptations (funded by the UN Trust Fund).

## If and When to Implement *SASA!*

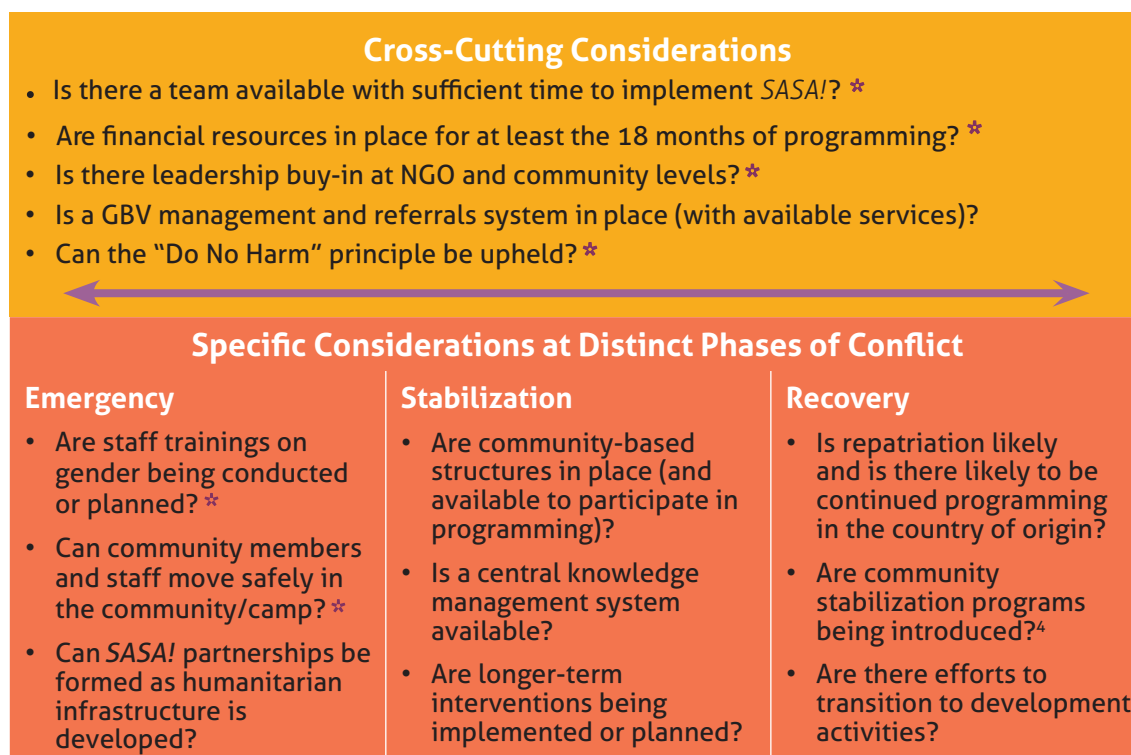
While each organization will ultimately decide if and when to implement *SASA!*, there are cross-cutting questions to consider at any phase of the emergency, as well as specific factors for each phase (see Figure 1). Although Stabilization is generally considered the most appropriate time for beginning *SASA!* implementation, aspects of the methodology can also be integrated during the Emergency Stage, such as integrating *SASA!* materials alongside standard trainings on gender and protection.

## Moving Forward with SASA! in Myanmar

Recognizing that conflict was exacerbating VAW in many parts of Northern Shan and Kachin, Trócaire and UNFPA embarked on a scoping study to assess the feasibility of implementing SASA! and needs for adaptation. Strong leadership and financial commitment coupled with robust preparation cultivated an opportune moment for a successful SASA! adaptation, as Garry Walsh (former Head of Development at Trócaire) shared:

“The Trócaire Myanmar team decided to adapt SASA! for our work in Myanmar for a number of reasons, the main one being the huge need in the country. Our research and that of other INGOs and local organizations was showing that VAW was a serious issue, given decades of conflict and deeply entrenched traditional gender norms ... Given our experience with the SASA! model in other countries, and our long-standing partnership with Raising Voices, we began to explore the idea of bringing SASA! to Myanmar. As we had both humanitarian and development programs in Kachin state, where there is active and ongoing conflict, we decided to begin the process of adapting the model there. We were supported financially and encouraged by UNFPA—who had previous experience with SASA!—and were committed to an adaptation process that would be in-depth and as impactful and locally appropriate as possible.”

**Figure 1: Deciding If and When to Use SASA!**



\* It is advised to refrain from implementing SASA! if you can't answer “yes” to these questions

# Getting Started with *SASA!*

## Establishing Commitment

Before starting with *SASA!*, your organizational leadership needs to be on board with the methodology's content and process. This includes:

### \* **Appreciating the *SASA!* essentials**

*SASA!*'s 4 essentials are: understanding a gender-power analysis, using a phased-in approach, reaching people in different circles of influence, and fostering activism (to learn more, see: [Fidelity to the \*SASA!\* Activist Kit Brief](#)).

### \* **Recognizing the program's long-term approach**

Long-term programming differs considerably from the typical intervention timeframe in humanitarian settings. Leadership must commit to securing sustainable funding (minimum 18 months initial funding in place) and refrain from short-term implementation. In highly transient refugee contexts an extended program timeframe may be required, as new community members arrive with no previous engagement with *SASA!* (and Community Activists (CAs) and other team members are resettled or repatriated).

### \* **Familiarizing the entire team**

*SASA!* is about holistic engagement, which starts within your organization. Provide organizational space to critically reflect on your own power and existing hierarchies within communities, your organization, and the humanitarian context.

### \* **Identifying at least two<sup>5</sup> dedicated staff members and/or a core team for implementation**

While it is important that the entire team is familiar with *SASA!*, successful implementation requires full-time commitment. Having *SASA!* focal points (at least two staff members) in place is essential for well-coordinated, quality programming.

## Safety & Ethics

Raising Voices' [Critical Issues in Ethical \*SASA!\* Implementation Brief](#) has recommendations around minimizing harm with *SASA!* in development settings. In addition, several humanitarian standards, principles and guidelines enshrine the "do no harm" principle in humanitarian action. These resources should be referenced and prioritized throughout all the *SASA!* phases to uphold the ethics and considerations of humanitarian interventions, including:

### \* **Service referrals**

Implementing *SASA!* without a GBV case management and referrals system in place is not recommended. Additionally, organizations can train *SASA!* CAs to ensure that they are familiar with the referral system and services available to survivors and/or at-risk groups, and confident in handling disclosures.

### \* **Safety of team**

Prioritize the security of *SASA!*'s implementing team. For example, develop safety protocols and engage in ongoing dialogue on risk perceptions and/or experiences.

### \* **Intervention delivery**

Interventions can cause unintended harm to the community. Identify and plan for unexpected outcomes early on, and regularly and proactively solicit feedback from different parts of the community to determine if and how interventions should be altered, or even halted.

# Adapting *SASA!* to Your Context

## Adaptation Basics

The *SASA!* adaptation process will look different in each type of humanitarian context (conflict, natural disaster, refugee, internally displaced, etc.) and within each individual community, depending on the specific context and needs. Modalities of adaptation can range from translating language, altering the artwork and graphics, integrating new issues into program materials, or other changes that enable *SASA!* to resonate more strongly in the community. For an in-depth look at *SASA!* adaptation modalities, please see Raising Voices' [SASA! Adaptations Guidelines Brief](#).

### Innovations from IRC Ethiopia

During their adaptation for a refugee context, IRC Ethiopia trained illustrators on *SASA!* concepts so that they could better understand the program prior to adapting *SASA!* illustrations. IRC also added new partners to their *SASA!* team—local musicians—to help with mobilization activities.

Translations of key *SASA!* concepts, such as “VAW,” “power,” and “men’s power over women,” require specific attention, pretesting and consistency. The appropriate language often extends beyond literal translations, in order to maintain *SASA!*’s gender-based analysis and tone. In Myanmar, for example, Trocaire’s adaptation committee—which included representation from local artists and community activists—developed a translation of key terms (list available from Raising Voices) to maintain consistent usage throughout *SASA!*’s four phases.

The adaptation process also provides an opportunity to flag and address any context-specific programming challenges and outline contingency plans in case of renewed conflict or another emergency.<sup>5</sup> For example, in some settings, it is not safe for women to leave their shelters/tents. Rather than calling community members to communal spaces, consider holding dramas in residential areas where women can sit in their doorways and participate in *SASA!* without leaving home.

## Incentives: You Decide

At the heart of *SASA!* is the spirit of activism, which values community leadership and individual action motivated by a passionate commitment to prevent VAW. To help catalyze this activism, *SASA!* trains and mentors CAs to facilitate most community-based activities. Generally, the CA approach does not include financial compensation, in order to better foster and inspire personal commitment and program sustainability. In humanitarian settings, it is often a challenge to maintain this aspect of volunteerism, due to a lack of formal earning opportunities for community members and widespread use of financial incentives among humanitarian organizations. However, the decision to provide incentives for CAs should not be taken lightly. In the event that financial compensation is utilized, please ensure extra effort is given to nurture a sense personal commitment and responsibility among CAs. Irrespective of the decision around incentives, CAs will benefit from including an aspect of self-reflection and discussion on incentive culture, and the consequential power dynamics within the community in trainings.

Consider alternatives to traditional financial incentives such as:

### ★ Distributing in-kind materials

A *SASA!* program in Kyangawli Refugee Settlement in Uganda provided CAs bicycles, enhancing the efficiency of their community work.

### ★ Integration with existing activities

In Ethiopia, IRC used food distribution sites for *SASA!* activities, so community members could be engaged where they were already assembled, avoiding any transport-related expenses. In addition, to ensure that CAs had sufficient financial resources, IRC introduced a new criterion for CAs: all were required to be employed in another sector or have a full-time job. As such, many CAs could integrate *SASA!* into their day-to-day activities.

### ★ **Providing opportunities to enhance CAs' status in the community**

Appreciating the successes of CAs through public recognition, provision of additional responsibilities, and/or building new skillsets can often strengthen motivation and commitment levels.

### **Maximizing your Community Asset Mapping**

Community mapping is key in leveraging community leadership and entry points, locating existing resources and human capacity, and identifying any social tensions in humanitarian settings. *SASA!*'s Start phase uses the Circles of Influence to identify stakeholders. This activity can be expanded in humanitarian settings to include the unique set of actors/influences that often exist, such as refugee welfare councils, host communities, informal management structures, military/armed actors, as well as physical infrastructure such as water points and food distribution sites.

## **Helpful Tips for Implementation**

### **Sustain Knowledge Transfer**

#### **Organizational Level**

Humanitarian staff often have high turnover rates, which can hinder *SASA!*'s success. The "Getting Started" section above discusses the importance of organizational commitment and understanding *SASA!* concepts. Knowledge management mechanisms documenting *SASA!* and *SASA!*-related activities can help mitigate the potential consequences of staff turnover on program momentum. Where possible, prioritizing staff hires with prior *SASA!* experience can save time and minimize gaps in programming. In addition, inductions with all new staff will ideally include *SASA!*-specific training and any incoming *SASA!* focal person/team must be oriented to all existing *SASA!* materials, progress reports, and notes from meetings and feedback sessions.

#### **Community Level**

The transient nature of communities in many humanitarian settings can act as a barrier to sustainable knowledge transfer and may particularly hinder progress with *SASA!*, in light of the program's phased-in approach (which assumes that the community has realized certain changes before moving to subsequent phases). Intensifying *SASA!* activities for incoming community members—using a variety of strategies—may help sustain forward momentum and collective shifts within the community.

Repatriation is also a unique opportunity to leverage the humanitarian and development nexus for sustainable development.<sup>8</sup> *SASA!* programming sets a strong foundation for challenging harmful social norms, which can be carried back to "home" communities. Connecting with women's organizations in communities of origin can act as a bridge to continue *SASA!* across new communities. If possible, humanitarian actors can consider budgeting for grants to these local organizations.

## Prioritize Learning and Evaluation

[SASA! Learning and Evaluation \(L&E\) Guidelines](#) are carefully designed to track and understand how community members use, adopt and interpret SASA! ideas. As SASA! progresses, routine reflections and feedback through “L&E Review Meetings” offer an opportunity to capture direct experiences with the program over time. It is critical to track unintended consequences, including potential backlash and security concerns, and address these issues as soon as possible.

### Innovations from IRC Kenya

IRC Kenya is engaging in qualitative research to better understand the adaptation process in a refugee setting with lingering security and political tensions. The first wave of findings were discussed in a half-day workshop with the entire Women’s Protection & Empowerment (WPE) team—including refugee staff—to tease out program implications. Based on this feedback, the team identified concrete steps to better appreciate CAs, as focus groups suggested this lack of motivation was limiting their activism.

## Practice Self-care

The work to prevent VAW in humanitarian contexts is demanding, both physically and emotionally. Sharing tools for self-care, or ideally, budgeting for self-care activities and including these in formal work plans, is important for staff and CAs to avoid burnout within the team, facilitate team-building, and generate new energy for transforming gender norms.

## Harness Existing Infrastructure

### Coordination & Clusters

Clusters make up a robust coordination system that reduces gaps and minimizes overlap in humanitarian assistance. Gender-based violence (GBV) sub-clusters or working groups can serve as an oversight structure for SASA! implementation. Sub-clusters or working groups may also be able to provide technical guidance to organizations deciding if and when to implement SASA!, identify service providers, and participate in the adaptation process itself. It may also be possible for sub-clusters to adopt a consortium approach to implementation. For example, sub-cluster members could each engage distinct communities with SASA!, or work alongside one another using different strategies (for instance, one partner might lead the SASA! Local Activism strategy, while another focuses on strengthening the health sector through SASA! trainings, etc.).

### Government

The primary responsibility for the protection of a civilian population lies with the government where the community is located. The level of governmental engagement (or disengagement) can vary across settings, particularly in relation to community members’ status in terms of refugee, internally displaced or host community. Consider the political, social, cultural and economic implications of implementing SASA! alongside government activities (or gaps). Furthermore, organizations can proactively involve government in SASA! by offering trainings to governmental departments, engaging members of the police force in community activities, and sharing information about program progress.

### Community Entry Points

During the Start Phase of SASA!, you will have mapped physical and social assets existing in the community. Use your findings to identify optimal spaces and strong champions for SASA! activities. Mapping is especially important to secure safe spaces for women and girls, which can often be scarce in humanitarian settings.

# Finding Inspiration

*SASA!* can be effectively adapted and used in humanitarian settings, provided that partners minimize potential harms and give careful consideration to the unique sensitivities related to programming in conflict and—or disaster affected communities.

*SASA!*'s emphasis on power—how it can be used both positively and negatively—provides an important opening for positive social norm change. *SASA!* is designed to resonate with everyone, and can provoke transformative reflection for humanitarian communities.

*SASA!* offers an opportunity to build upon the work of humanitarian actors in protecting human rights, building resilience in the face of adversity, and strengthening the gap between humanitarian and development programming.

Are you implementing *SASA!* in a humanitarian context? We would love to hear about your experience! Contact us: [info@raisingvoices.org](mailto:info@raisingvoices.org)



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## Endnotes

- 1 Raising Voices, LSHTM & CEDOVIP (2015). *Is Violence Against Women Preventable? Findings from the SASA! Study Summarized for General Audiences*. Kampala, Uganda: Raising Voices.
- 2 For more information, see: Sophie Read-Hamilton & Mendy Marsh (2016) *The Communities Care programme: changing social norms to end violence against women and girls in conflict-affected communities*, *Gender & Development*, 24:2, 261-276, DOI:10.1080/13552074.2016.1195579
- 3 We use “communities” to describe a range of experiences and settings, referring to a group of individuals who are living alongside one another (short or long term) during and/or after humanitarian crises.
- 4 Stabilization programs are intended to assist governments and civil society to address the needs of host and receiving communities and mitigate the impacts of large-scale flows of migrants and displaced communities. See more at IOM- <https://www.iom.int/stabilization-and-resilience>
- 5 Precise number of leadership staff needed depends on size of the program (geographic coverage, population size, etc.).
- 6 See the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Gender Handbook for Humanitarian action, among others.
- 7 See SPHERE’s Guidance Note for assessing and anticipating the consequences of humanitarian action.
- 8 See Core Responsibility #4 in the Agenda for Humanity <https://agendaforhumanity.org/cr/4>

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