A warm thank you to all the partner organizations, community activists and staff who contributed their ideas, experiences and reflections to this publication. Many thanks to Stephen Lewis Foundation for its generous support.

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Women are disproportionately impacted by HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, making up 60% of estimated infections.
Violence against Women

Violence against women is a major public health and human rights issue throughout Africa and the world. For example, around 35% of women in Namibia, 56% of women in rural Tanzania, and over 70% of women in Uganda report that they have experienced physical or sexual violence at some time in their lives. These rates are even more astounding when we consider the fact that most violence tends to be underreported. Although many people think that rape by a stranger is the most common type of violence against women, the vast majority of violence against women is committed by a male intimate partner. Violence against women has devastating effects on individuals, families and communities, including long-term health and economic consequences.

Around the world, women are at increased risk of experiencing violence if they live in communities with norms that accept violence and value men over women. While factors such as alcohol use or poverty contribute to the perpetration of violence, the imbalance of power between women and men is a root cause of violence against women.

Violence against Women and HIV

Violence against women is both a cause and consequence of HIV and AIDS. Women can become infected with HIV as a result of violence and an imbalance of power, particularly in their intimate relationships. A recent study in South Africa attributed one in seven new HIV infections among women to violence from a male partner or lack of relationship power. In addition, women may experience violence as a result of telling their partners that they are HIV positive.

“If there is no violence, then women are able to negotiate for safe sex, able to protect themselves, able to say no [to sex], able to choose who they want to have sex with, and able to choose a method that they want to use to keep themselves safe.”
Staff Member, Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention, Uganda
Background

Josephine’s Story

My marriage was full of problems, because my husband was very violent.

I was very worried because I was hearing rumors. People were telling me about my husband’s actions. Even some of the women he was having sex with had lost their partners.

Whenever I would try to ask anything, especially about health, when I had started worrying that maybe we would get HIV, he wouldn’t give me the time. He wouldn’t give me a chance to talk to him about it. He told me that he could not use a condom, because he paid bride price for me. And I came to produce children for him, and he did not know how we could use condoms and still produce children.

I told him, “Maybe you have HIV, because you’ve been having sex with other women.” He beat me.

He was the head of the family. I depended on him for everything. Whatever he decided had to be done. I found myself having sex with him by force. During that time, I had nothing to do. I had no power to refuse to have sex with him.

I had a friend. She became my great, great friend. That friend was the one who insisted I go and test. I wondered why she was telling me to go and test. I never had sex with men outside my marriage. The results showed that I was HIV positive.

I cried so much. I felt like the world was over. And yet my friend was telling me not to tell anyone. I was afraid of what my husband would do. I thought he would have killed me. And so I kept quiet. I feared to say.

Story taken from SASA! Film.

“I was afraid of what my husband would do. I thought he would have killed me. And so I kept quiet. I feared to say.”
The Need for a New Approach to Prevention

About 10 years ago, global researchers and policy makers began to call for community-based approaches to preventing violence against women which address social norms accepting violence and men’s power over women. Around the same time, those working directly with women experiencing violence began to emphasize the need to not only respond to violence against women but to prevent violence from happening. Although there was a growing recognition of the importance to prevent violence, many groups struggled to develop long-term, systematic strategies aimed at social norm change. Many prevention efforts, despite good intentions, focused on awareness raising without supporting community members through the stages of behavior change. While many groups recognized the problems of stopping with awareness raising, they did not necessarily have the time or resources to devote to developing strategies that support communities through the phases of changing social norms.

In addition, more health workers and activists began to recognize the need to engender HIV prevention approaches and link traditionally parallel prevention programs violence against women and HIV. A growing body of research showed the link between HIV and violence against women, resulting in a call for integrated HIV and VAW prevention efforts. Despite this call for action, a gap in knowledge existed on the practical aspects of an integrated approach. Prevention efforts which did incorporate both VAW and HIV tended to be focused on the individual and not the community. Thus, Raising Voices developed the Sasa! Activist Kit for Preventing Violence against Women and HIV to fill a gap in prevention approaches by addressing the root cause of the power imbalance between women and men.

Around the world, women are at increased risk of experiencing violence if they live in communities with norms that accept violence and value men over women. While factors such as alcohol use or poverty contribute to the perpetration of violence, the imbalance of power between women and men is a root cause of violence against women.
What is SASA!?

SASA! takes a benefits-based approach to violence prevention. Instead of blaming or negative messages, SASA! encourages community members to think about the positive effects of balancing power in relationships between men and women.
SASA! is a methodology for addressing the link between violence against women and HIV/AIDS. **SASA!** is meant to inspire, enable and structure effective community mobilization to prevent violence against women and HIV/AIDS.

Sasa is a Kiswahili word that means *now*. Now is the time to prevent violence against women and HIV/AIDS. The name **SASA!** was chosen as a reminder of the urgency to act! **SASA!** offers tools, guidance and encouragement for individual activists and activist organizations ready to start a process of change.

**SASA! Phases and Power Concepts**

To address the root causes of violence against women, **SASA!** is an exploration of power—what it is, who has it, how it is used, how it is abused and how power dynamics between women and men can change for the better. **SASA!** demonstrates how understanding power and its effects can help us prevent violence against women and HIV/AIDS. Throughout **SASA!** activists focus on the “power” between “men” and “women”. By using simple, relevant language that is easily understood, rather than terminology like gender, rights-based or gender-based violence, activists and community members can meaningfully engage on the key issues.

“We have done domestic violence prevention for over 10 years but with **SASA!** we feel we are going to do better work. Talking about power really touches people and we want to use **SASA!** to really make people think about violence.”

**Staff Member, Kivulini, Tanzania**

**SASA!** is organized into four phases based on the Stages of Change Model. These four phases ensure that organizations can more effectively and systematically facilitate a process of change in the community. **SASA!** also serves as an acronym for the phases of the approach: **Start, Awareness, Support, and Action**.

“**SASA!** has been an eye opener to us. It has really changed the way we do things... We are now organized on talking about power, the power imbalance, we are just not going, confusing the contributing factors and the causes of violence. Now we are concentrating on the real root causes of violence, which is power imbalance. So now our programming is very systematic... and well thought-out.”

**Staff Member, Women Against Rape, Botswana**

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What is SASA!?

The Four Phases of SASA!

Start

During the first phase, community members are encouraged to begin thinking about violence against women and HIV/AIDS as interconnected issues and foster power within themselves to address these issues.

Awareness

The second phase of SASA! aims to raise awareness about how our communities accept men’s use of power over women, fueling the dual pandemics of violence against women and HIV/AIDS.

Support

The third phase focuses on how community members can support women experiencing violence, men committed to change, and activists speaking out on these issues by joining their power with others’.

Action

During the final phase, men and women take action using their power to prevent violence against women and HIV/AIDS.
SASA! Strategies

*SASA!* is based on the understanding that violence against women does not occur in isolation, but within families, communities, and societies. Thus, *SASA!* encourages engagement within all circles of influence across the Ecological Model (e.g., individuals, families and neighbors, community institutions and groups, and broader societal members such as the media or policy makers).

*SASA!* encourages activists to engage people in their community while they are involved in their day-to-day lives. This helps create continued interest of community members in the program and ensures the relevance of *SASA!* to the everyday lives of real people.

*SASA!* uses multiple strategies to reach diverse people and groups in a variety of ways. Not only do multiple strategies increase the opportunity for different types of people to engage with an idea, but people often need to hear an idea multiple times before fully understanding. These strategies include Local Activism, Media & Advocacy, Communication Materials, and Training. The content in each of these strategies changes as the community moves from one phase of *SASA!* to the next. Activists say that one of the most helpful aspects of *SASA!* is the well thought-out materials that are pre-made and ready to be translated, adapted or even used immediately, saving groups much time and ensuring that materials contain strong and focused content.

The Local Activism strategy includes grassroots initiatives that engage individuals, families, friends and neighbors in talking about issues often surrounded by silence and stigma. Informal opportunities are created for personal reflection, critical thinking and public dialogue about power, violence against women, and HIV/AIDS. Examples of activities in this strategy include community dramas, quick chats, community conversations, and soap opera discussion groups.

The Media & Advocacy strategy aims to influence public priorities by making violence against women and its connection to HIV/AIDS a popular media topic and a catalyst for new policies and practices. This strategy seeks to engage local leaders, policymakers, and journalists to effect wider change in the community. For example, the Media & Advocacy strategy includes pre-written and pre-recorded audio Soap Opera Drama for sharing with radio programs.

The Communication Materials strategy includes a wide range of creative materials, such as posters, comics and info sheets. These are designed to get people thinking and talking about power, violence against women, and HIV/AIDS in ways which are easily accessible, encouraging and appealing to a wide range of people. For example, each phase comes with a Power Poster and pre-written questions on the back of every material to guide the discussion with community members.

“Before [SASA!] we were having trouble just getting people to attend our sessions. But the way we are now addressing people is good…just to go to people who are there doing their business. Asking their permission and having very short discussions.”

Staff Member, International Rescue Committee, Ethiopia
The **Training** strategy includes lively, in-depth training modules suitable for anyone exploring their potential as activists. The sessions can be used in workshops or short training sessions to guide participants in developing a passion for and practical skills in creating positive change. The Training strategy is unique in that it is a foundational strategy. Its activities will typically be the first used in each phase, since training will build the capacity of the SASA! Team and other individuals playing a lead role in SASA! efforts. In addition, the SASA! Training modules can be useful with many groups, such as journalists, police, local leaders, and others.

“[SASA!] sets out clear guidelines and strategies for engaging the community at all levels. The main strategies endorsed by SASA! are clear and easy to follow and gives the team the knowledge and helps to build their skills and capacity to implement the project effectively.”

Staff Member, Trocaire, Uganda

The **Start Phase Power Poster** discussion is an example of an activity that engages the community using images that show people using their power positively or negatively. On the back of the poster are questions that Community Activists use to open and focus the discussion with community members. The scenes in the poster are used to provoke reflection and elicit community members’ perceptions. After looking at this poster, Community Activists ask community members questions such as:

“What is happening in this poster? Do you see similar things happening in our community? Should men have more power than women in relationships? Why or why not? How do you use your power? Do you use power differently with different people?”

“Everyone has power! How are you using yours?”

SASA! Start Phase Power Poster
“SASA! has a number of activities so it doesn’t get monotonous. And sessions are short enough for people to understand and they are interactive. It’s engaging. It’s a discussion with the people, not lecturing.”

Staff Member, Center for Domestic Violence Prevention, Uganda
SASAI Monitoring and Assessment

Monitoring and assessment is a key component of SASAI. As any group working on violence against women prevention knows, monitoring and assessment is challenging. Much of the time activists will only record the number of participants or the number of activities aimed at changing social norms, without being able to determine the quality or impact of an activity. On the other hand, other groups spend considerable energy gathering narrative data about attitudes towards violence against women that is often difficult to collect systematically and analyze in a timely way.

To overcome these challenges, the monitoring and assessment tools used in SASAI are effective, straightforward, and easy-to-use for most organizations, not only those with special research expertise. Each phase in SASAI aims to influence one of four areas:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Indicator Areas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Start</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>Skills</td>
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<td>Action</td>
<td>Behaviors</td>
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Indicators developed for each SASAI phase are tracked using quantitative measures to assess the quality and impact of activities. The three primary monitoring and assessment tools are:

- **Rapid Assessment Survey** Conducted by program staff or M&E officers at the beginning of SASAI implementation and again when the organization wants to know whether or not the community is ready to move to the next phase. The Rapid Assessment Survey at the end of each phase uses the same questions each time, to help give comparable snapshot of change. To conduct the RAS, a small sample of male and female community members are selected from each community using a simple random sampling method.

- **Community Activity Report** Developed by staff to monitor activities that are facilitated by Community Activists. This report documents simple numbers such as attendance as well as helping track the process and quality of activities and those facilitating them so gaps can be identified and programmatic adjustments can be made.

- **Outcome Tracking Tool** Developed to assess the impact and/or shifts in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors of community members participating in community activities. To complete this form, a skilled member of staff attends an activity, observes and listens carefully to the discussions raised, and assesses the resistance to or acceptance of the SASAI ideas across a simple spectrum. Activities are selected through a simple random sampling method.
Using these tools, decisions about programming are made systematically, based on empirical evidence from monitoring activities. As groups have begun to implement SASA!, Raising Voices has continued learning more about effective and realistic ways to monitor and assess prevention activities. As a result, the monitoring and assessment piece is the one which has been revised most since the development of the original SASA! Activist Kit.

“The SASA! Kit provides a clear vision and allows us to see how we will meet objectives and goals and keep everyone on the same page. SASA! brings added value to our program, its systematic and this helps to ensure community and staff are touching every aspect in fighting GBV.”

Staff Member, CARE, Burundi

The SASA! Study

The SASA! Study is a collaboration between Raising Voices, CEDOVIP, Makerere University and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. It uses a rigorous research design (a cluster randomized controlled trial) to evaluate the effectiveness of SASA! in preventing VAW in communities in Kampala, Uganda. The SASA! Study will tell us if SASA! had an impact on the level of social acceptance and rates of violence against women in communities. By conducting the study, we hope to generate evidence so that other groups using SASA! will not have to carry out a full scale trial, but simply rely on the monitoring and assessment tools to know they are on the right track to preventing violence against women.
Herbert, a male community activist in Kampala, Uganda talks with a family in his neighborhood about the benefits of non-violence.
Today, SASA! has been adapted and is being used by activists and activist organizations throughout Africa. SASA! is also being adapted for use by activists in Haiti and Mongolia. Since beginning to use the SASA! approach, these groups have learned a lot about what works, the challenges of SASA!, and strategies for overcoming those obstacles. This section presents some of the key lessons learned and suggestions for groups thinking of using SASA! in their communities.

### Involving Everyone

SASA! encourages activists to talk to men, women, and youth. While other approaches often target only men or only women, SASA! demonstrates the benefits of engaging the entire community. By including men and women and focusing on power, men are less likely to dismiss the discussion as a “women’s issue.” At the same time, SASA! does not focus only on engaging men. Preventing violence against women and HIV are problems that hurt the entire community. Thus, preventing violence against women and HIV requires a holistic strategy that includes everyone.

### Making Systematic, Long-term Prevention Possible

As anyone who has worked to prevent violence against women knows, it is not easy and will not happen overnight. SASA! breaks down violence against women prevention work into manageable pieces to be done in a systematic and comprehensive way. While some activists feel SASA! is overwhelming at first, they later feel relieved that the approach is already thought-through and there is such a wide range of materials ready-to-use.

SASA! is changing the way that many organizations are working to prevent violence against women and HIV/AIDS. Many groups say that it has fundamentally changed the way they approach prevention work. They are now more systematic in their work, phasing in different discussions at the right point in time and not getting stuck in chronic awareness-raising. Groups have learned that once they start SASA!, it is important and possible to work consistently with communities through the process of change.

### Making SASA! Your Own

Part of the reason that SASA! can feel overwhelming is because groups may assume that they have to do all aspects of SASA! and/or or in many communities at once. Actually, activists have found that it is better to choose one or two communities in which they can work really well and focus their prevention work there. Furthermore, the diverse activities in SASA! allow organizations to think through what might work best within their communities and use only those activities which are relevant. Others have worked to find ways to integrate particular aspects of SASA! into their preexisting programs. These are all ways to make SASA! your own.

#### What resources will we need to do SASA!?

Because SASA! relies heavily on community activists, beginning SASA! does not require much money or physical resources. SASA! does, however, require significant commitment and planning. Raising Voices is currently undertaking a cost analysis to help other groups better plan their implementation of SASA!
Using **SASA!** in your Community

**Integrating **SASA!** into your current work – An example from CARE, Burundi**

People often ask if **SASA!** can be integrated into other programming. The answer is Yes! **SASA!** can, but does not have to be a stand-alone prevention approach. For example, CARE Burundi is integrating **SASA!** into their savings and loans program by engaging loan members in **SASA!** activities during regular sessions on financial issues.
Working with Community Activists

Community Activists play a vital role in SASA. Being an activist is different from being a volunteer. A volunteer gives of his/her time to an organization, while an activist strives to create social change in his or her community by demonstrating taking action in one’s own life and mobilizing others to do the same. SASA teams identify, select and train community members who live and work in those communities and express interest in violence prevention. Then, SASA encourages community activists to spearhead community mobilization efforts because they want to make positive change in their communities. SASA does not offer monetary incentive to community activists. We have found that there are other ways to motivate activists, such as fostering their own power to be change agents in their communities, providing access to skill building and learning processes, increasing their recognition and status in the community, creating realistic structures and expectations, recognizing and appreciating their work, and respecting them as colleagues. In fact, we found these strategies can be even more motivating, and certainly more sustainable, than monetary incentives.

Susanne is a community activist in Kampala, Uganda. In addition to being a mother, grandmother, and owning her own charcoal business, she leads activities in her community on balancing power and preventing violence against women.
Activists’ and Community Safety

SASA! works within a benefits framework. This means that SASA! focuses on the positive outcomes that can be achieved by working together to prevent violence against women and HIV. Other approaches which highlight the negative outcomes of violence or blame those who use violence can make people feel defensive or angry, putting activists at risk of violence themselves. Promoting positive, inclusive ideas about power and focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, can reduce community backlash typically found when addressing these sensitive issues. In addition, SASA! includes sessions for staff and activists about how to stay safe while doing prevention work in their communities.

“SASA! is not only about talking, but reflecting…critical reflection within yourself about how you are really being, how is your relationship…and then go out to speak to others.”
Staff Member, CARE Burundi

“I like the positive communication materials because they make it easy to talk about VAW. I keep thinking about how the community we live in will be like if families were living happily.”
Staff Member, Soroti Catholic Diocese, Uganda

SASA! Begins with You

SASA! challenges staff and community members to consider power in their own lives and relationships before talking with others about power and violence. Thus, groups should be ready to take the difficult challenge of reflecting on power in their own lives and within their own organizations before beginning SASA! By acknowledging that we are all challenged to use our power positively in our personal lives, individuals feel more attached to the work and see it as a personal commitment. Violence against women and holding power over another person becomes not something that happens to others, but an issue that we all struggle with on a daily basis.

“SASA! is not only about talking, but reflecting…critical reflection within yourself about how you are really being, how is your relationship…and then go out to speak to others.”
Staff Member, CARE Burundi
“SASA! has also helped me realize how much the community needs me and how we need each other.” - Community Activist, Kampala
**Concluding Thoughts**

*SASA!* is fundamentally changing how many organizations approach the prevention of violence against women and HIV. As more and more groups begin to adapt and implement *SASA!* in many countries, we are continuing to learn what works best in different contexts. Working to change the social norms perpetuating violence against women and HIV is not easy or quick. However, by focusing on the power we have within and together, *SASA!* is helping organizations be more effective, strategic and safe in their work to prevent violence against women.

If you are interested in learning more about *SASA*, contact us at info@raisingvoices.org

*SASA* does not only address [the] power imbalance among community members but it helps staff think about power in their lives; both at the work place and in their homes. The sessions are very deep and touch one profoundly.”

Staff Member, CARE, Burundi
Endnotes


ii Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. (2007). Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006 Calverton, Maryland, USA.


