Challenging harmful social norms and GBV through SASA! Faith

SUMMARY

Women have a right to lead a dignified life, to have a voice and actively participate in decision making and to live a life free from violence and its associated risks. Rooted in harmful social norms, gender based violence acts to subjugate women at all levels, undermine opportunities for women and deny women their basic human rights. SASA! Faith is an evidence-based GBV prevention and social norms transformation methodology that mobilises faith communities to prevent violence against women through promoting faith-based values of justice, peace and dignity. Between 2017 and 2022, Trócaire and partners in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya implemented SASA! Faith as part of a package of interventions to enhance women’s and girls’ empowerment, autonomy and safety. Our programme research and annual results evidence that through SASA! Faith women have enhanced their social status, reduced their vulnerability to violence and increased their decision making opportunities. When combined with women’s economic empowerment activities, the methodology has contributed to increased income and household dietary diversity for women.

BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe ranks low on the Gender Inequality Index standing at 110/149 countries. Despite constitutional provisions regarding equal representation of women and men in all decision-making bodies, women’s participation in leadership and politics remains low at 35% in parliament, 13% in local government and 27% % in Cabinet (SADC Gender and Development Monitor 2022). Zimbabwe has high prevalence of child marriages and sexual violence against adolescent girls and young women. One in three women in Zimbabwe aged between 15 and 49 years have experienced physical violence, whilst one in four women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 (2015 Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey). Violence against women and girls and harmful practices have contributed to higher rates of HIV/AIDS cases amongst women and girls.

Targeting the three districts of Zimbabwe with the highest prevalence of gender based violence, the Irish Aid funded programme supported 28,263 women and 15,922 men with a combination of GBV prevention and response and women’s economic empowerment supports. Molly Makiwa (40) and her husband Tungamirai Chitiga (44) live in Vhiyai Village of ward 12 in Bikita District, Zimbabwe. They are one of the couples supported by the Irish Aid funded programme delivered by Trócaire partner Caritas Masvingo.

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1 Caritas Masvingo; Diocese of Mutare Community Care Programe (DOMCCP); Emthonjeni Women’s Forum.
2 Women’s Legal Resource centre (WOLREC); Society For Women and Aids in Malawi (SWAM); Coalition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS.
3 Gulu Arch Diocese Soroti Catholic Diocese; Women’s Development Alliance (SOCADIWODA);Teso Dioceses Planning and Development Office (TEDDO); Muslim Center for Justice.
4 Women’s Empowerment Link (WEL); Love and Hope Centre (LHC); Centre for Enhancing Democracy and Good Governance (CEDGG); Legal Resources Foundation (LRF).
THE CHALLENGE

Molly lived in abject poverty unable to meet the basic needs of herself and her seven children, without adequate shelter and often forced to beg for food to supplement the limited income generated from Tungamirayi’s economic activities. Molly faced emotional violence, verbal abuse and controlling behaviour from her husband. She was not allowed to leave the home, to socialise with other women, to engage in economic activities or to attend church and her relatives were refused visits. A prisoner in her home, Molly’s self-esteem was severely eroded and she began experiencing suicidal ideation. The eventual intervention of Molly’s mother-in-law resulted in Tungamirayi’s agreement that Molly could attend church.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

Molly’s local church, the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, was among the faith communities targeted by the Irish Aid programme to engage with the SASA! Faith methodology. Trained male and female Community Activists (CAs) conducted discussions about gender-based violence and facilitated reflections on power (SASA! Faith Sessions)- what power is, who has it (and why/why not), how it is used, how it is abused and how power dynamics within a household or a community can change for the better. Through these sessions, Molly learned about ‘power within’ (e.g. self-confidence and self-worth) which enables other forms of power including ‘power to’ (e.g. to take action to transform one’s world) and ‘power with’ (e.g. mutual support, solidarity and collaboration).

Couple’s sessions conducted by the CAs also supported Molly’s husband, initially reluctant to participate, to reflect on his behaviour and attitudes and understand them as forms of violence. Tungamirayi gradually loosened his control over Molly and accepted her right to participate in economic activities.

Complementary Internal Savings and Lending Group (ISAL) and income generating activities delivered by Caritas Masvingo and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, supported women like Molly to develop a small business, increase their income as well as discuss common social problems facing women and exchange solutions to address these. With the loan borrowed from the ISAL group, Molly purchased Kapenta, a small fish, from Harare and began selling them locally. The business has been doing well, providing Molly with eighty percent profit against costs. Molly also developed a vegetable garden, sun drying the excess vegetables produced based on value addition advice she received during the ISAL meetings. This helped to increase both her household dietary diversity and business profits.

SASA! Faith CAs also conducted sessions on family budgeting and joint decision making during the ISAL group meetings, with the participation of some of the partners of the women group members. This helped Tungamirayi to support Molly’s business ideas and assist her with work in her nutrition garden. The phased approach using combined strategies within the Irish Aid funded programme has supported Tungamirayi to transform his behaviour and enabled Molly to enhance her self-confidence, empowerment, autonomy, well-being and safety. These community based activities were supplemented by media and advocacy activities. This was particularly important during the Covid 19 pandemic when social media was used a medium for delivering messages of change as well as connecting women with GBV responses services.
Good practice

- Sustained engagement is critical to the transformation process. SASA! Faith provides long-term engagement with faith leaders and community members to reinforce ideas about justice, peace and dignity. To be successful, social norms transformation requires repeated exposure to transformative values, norms and ideas and intentional engagement with different types of community members (e.g. men and women; adults and youth) and influential actors (e.g. faith leaders).

- Collaboration with and strengthening capacities of local stakeholders. The programme supports participating communities to forge effective relations with government departments, including Ministries of Women’s Affairs, local clinics and the police. Communities are better placed to support survivors of GBV beyond the lifetime of a programme due to the established relations with local GBV prevention and response stakeholders.

- Community of Practice supports programme quality, learning and adaptation. Trócaire and partners developed the SASA! Faith Community of Practice (CoP) which provides a crucial space for collective reflection, learning, peer support, and the sharing of knowledge and resources. The CoP has enabled Trócaire and partners to gather learning in an on-going manner and improve practice. It also helps ensure consistent application of the methodology across all implementing countries.

- Engaging men as allies and supporters of the change process. Community Activists use different spaces within faith communities to mobilise men to reflect on harmful behaviours and supporting them to become allies during the change process. The approach was found to reduce the risk of backlash against women who pursued change within their communities, whilst upholding the centrality of women’s experience and voice in the process.

- Economic empowerment is key to supporting women’s empowerment journeys, enhancing their safety and reducing their vulnerability to gender based violence. The Irish Aid programme included complementary activities aimed at supporting women to develop business ideas and business management skills. Enhancing women’s economic power and autonomy has in turn increased their social status at both household and community levels, reduced their vulnerability to violence and increased their decision making opportunities.
‘We are now seen as the power couple and are now assisting other young couples with business ideas and basic counselling for those who are in the same situation as we were, giving our life testimony as an example’.

Molly Makiwa (40), Vhiyai Village of ward 12 in Bikita District, Zimbabwe.

**KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS FOR REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY**

1. SASA! Faith was implemented across four countries with different contexts and impact was realised. The connection that SASA! Faith makes between religion and the need to end violence against women, is what makes SASA! Faith bring change in individuals and communities, making it adaptable.

2. Community mobilisation and movement building are critical in changing social and cultural norms. For sustainable change to take place, there is a need to address every layer of the ecological model, i.e. the individual, family, society and institutions.

3. Collaborative structures and relationships are another way to ensure sustainability. Right from the start, some partners were connecting CAs and community leaders (religious and traditional) to relevant council and Government departments that provide various GBV prevention and response services. The referral pathway was strengthened and will remain in use even beyond the funding period.

4. Capacity building and implementation through local CAs on a voluntary basis – in addition to being a good programmatic strategy – also provided value for money. The CAs implemented through existing structures and groups meaning that costs associated with community engagements and mobilisation were very low. This has also worked as a sustainability measure as the CAs will still be in the community long after the funding cycle has ended.

5. SASA! Faith mobilises religious leaders through religious leader’s forums, round tables and one-on-one meetings at agreed intervals. Through these engagements, the programme managed to secure the buy-in of the Religions leaders. Religious leaders are targeted because of how impactful and authoritative these leaders are. As gatekeepers and influencers, they are crucial to community members’ acceptance of SASA! Faith. They also already have a platform, their congregations and pulpit, as well as influence that comes with their social standing, which SASA! Faith capitalises on.
LESSONS LEARNT

- SASA! Faith requires commitment from those who wish to implement the methodology. This includes investing the adequate human resources and funding for the duration of the cycle which is a minimum of 3 years. Technical support and accompaniment is critical to maintain the quality of implementation and adherence to the methodology.

- Disaster preparedness should be factored in when planning to roll out SASA! Faith. During the Covid 19 pandemic, Community Activists moved from on-site implementation to a hybrid model, whereby some sessions were conducted online, via WhatsApp groups, through radio stations and other methods. A flexible approach to the SASA! Faith materials is required. For example, ‘Power Posters’ which are used to explore power were adapted to suit the hybrid dialogues taking place via WhatsApp. Hard copies of the posters were digitalised so they could be shared on WhatsApp, using convenient formats that do not incur high data costs when downloading.

- ISAL Groups can also be used as a safe space for women. The ISAL groups are used by women to discuss priority social issues such as gender based violence and HIV. They also provide a useful entry point for engaging with the community and opening space for wider discussion and reflection on gender based violence.

- Couple’s sessions on SASA! Faith and economic empowerment sessions are key to supporting and encouraging couples to rebalance power. They can also lead to a reduction in the potential backlash facing women during the change process and in gender based violence generally.

- The use of a multi-sectoral approach enables the survivors to receive holistic services. Through collaboration between multisectoral partners, a referral pathway can be established and maintained to ensure that women and girls can access the care and support they require in line with best international practice. Collaboration with national and local government, and capacity strengthening where required, also strengthens women’s and girls’ access to services.

MORE INFORMATION/REFERENCES


- Trócaire & Raising Voices, “Learning From SASA! Faith Implementation In Six Countries”, 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Irish Aid for their generous support to Trócaire’s overseas programmes, an example of which this case study refers to. The ideas, comments and recommendations contained herein are entirely the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent or reflect the policy of Irish Aid.