MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF "SASA! TOGETHER APPROACH" IN ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN PAIDHA SUB COUNTY, ZOMBO DISTRICT

BY

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is my original work and has not been presented before in any other University for any academic award.

Signature..... **Date** 13/11/2026

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APPROVAL

This dissertation has been written under my supervision as the designated university supervisor.

Signature..... **Date** 13th/11/2026.....

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to my Mum, Late Dad Rev. Sam Akenda whose love, prayer, and sacrifices made me who I am today. This work is in your memory (Rest in Peace) for all the support until the finish line.

To my son (Baruch) and siblings, may you grow to be great gender allies to ensure a violence free society.

To all the women and girls of Paidha sub county and beyond who continue to demonstrate resilience in the face of gender inequality. It is my hope that this study contributes to the ongoing efforts in building a safer and more just communities where every woman has voice, choice and power.

To all the policy makers, Non-Governmental Organizations, researchers, let's prioritize women's issues in gender mainstreaming.

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a major human rights, public health, and development challenge globally and in Uganda despite the implementation of numerous interventions aimed at its prevention. The SASA! Together Approach is a community mobilization methodology designed to address the unequal power relations that drive violence against women through social norm transformation.

The purpose of this research was to assess the effectiveness of "SASA! Together approach" in addressing violence against women and girls in Otheko Parish, Paidha Sub-county, Zombo district, Uganda. Specifically, the study sought to identify the interventions implemented under the SASA! Together Approach, examine the achievements registered in preventing violence against women and girls, and assess the challenges affecting its implementation

The study adopted qualitative research design informed by the interpretivist paradigm. Data was collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and review of relevant documents. Thirty participants comprising community activists, role model families, community leaders, cultural and religious leaders, staff from implementing organizations, and community members participated in the study. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings indicate that the "SASA! Together Approach" has contributed to addressing violence against women and girls through community dialogue and reflection, community activism and mobilization, engagement of local leaders, media and communication materials, referral mechanisms, and the use of sports, music, dance, and drama. The study further established that the approach has contributed to positive changes in community attitudes towards violence, strengthened leadership and community ownership, increased reporting of violence cases, improved communication within households, enhanced women's participation in decision-making/ leadership, promoted positive masculinities, and strengthened support for survivors of violence. Despite these achievements, the study identified several implementation challenges, including persistent patriarchal norms, resistance to changing traditional gender roles, inadequate financial support.

The study concludes that the SASA! Together Approach is an effective community-based strategy for preventing violence against women and girls in Paidha Sub County by promoting gender-equitable norms, strengthening community participation, and encouraging collective responsibility for violence prevention.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

This chapter comprises of the background of the study; statement of the problem, objective of the study, research questions, scope, justification, significance of the study, conceptual approach as well as definition of the key terms. It provides a conceptual foundation upon which "SASA! Together approach" is understood as a strategic intervention for addressing violence against women and girls.

1.1 Background of the study.

Globally, Gender Based Violence (GBV) has been discussed as a social, health and human rights issue that affect women and girls (Nakray, 2013). Heise (2002) further emphasizes that Gender-based violence includes a host of harmful behaviors that are directed at women and girls because of their sex, including domestic violence, violence against women, wife abuse, sexual assault among others. Violence against Women (VAW), which is the central focus of this study refers to any act of GBV that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (Kalaca, 2010).

Violence is the use of force that has been prohibited by law (Welsh, 2002). However, whilst 'violence' might conventionally connote physical attack, the notion of physical violence represents a surprisingly broad spectrum of incidents (Waddington, 2004). Recent global estimates suggest that 30% of women will experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner during their lifetime with far reaching consequences for their physical, mental and emotional health. At least one in five women have been physically or sexually abused by a man at some point in their lives (Venis, 2002).

Despite the adoption of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the UN General Assembly in 1979, violence against women and girls remains a pervasive problem worldwide. Globally 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous

12 months and 1 in 3 women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently by an intimate partner (UN Women, 2021).

The Uganda police force annual crime report 2024 showed a notable decrease in the overall crime rate with reported cases dropping by 4.1% from 228,074 in 2023 to 218,715 in 2024. While there is overall decline in crime rate, the data underscores the need for continued efforts in community sensitization, legal reform and support system to protect the vulnerable people (Force, 2024).

Globally there have been a lot of intervention and frameworks developed to address these social concerns. These include the adoption of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the UN General Assembly in 1979 ratified in 189 UN member countries. The Convention establishes rights and protection for women against all forms of discrimination including violence against women. Equally, there are global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals especially Goal Five which aims for gender equality and empowerment of women. While regional frameworks include the African Union's Maputo Protocol especially Article 2 on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women that address practices based on ideas of women's inferiority or stereotyped gender roles, gender inequality and harmful gender norms which are the root causes of GBV (MartineCollumbien, 2016).

Locally, several interventions aimed at preventing violence include; National Plan of Action for Sexual and gender-based violence 2019-2024. This emphasizes strengthening health systems, enhancing political commitments and fostering multi-sectoral collaboration to address VAWG. The National Action Plan III on Women, Peace and security (2021-2025) align with international frameworks like CEDAW and SDGs focus on violence prevention, conflict resolution and strengthening governance structure. Further, there are community-based approaches such as SASA! Together developed by Raising Voices to change social norms and prevent violence against women (Taft Angela and Rhonda Small ,2014).

"SASA! Together" is an evidence-based community mobilization methodology developed by Raising voices in Uganda to prevent and respond to VAWG. The term "SASA" is a Kiswahili word meaning "Now", emphasizing the urgency of addressing VAW. It is an acronym representing the four phases of community change; Start Awareness, Support and Action according to Abramsky Devries K Kiss L et al (2024).

This approach was designed to address the root causes of VAWG by transforming unequal power relations between men and women at individual, family, community and institutional levels. The intervention recognizes that VAWG is not caused by a single factor, but interconnected social, cultural, economic and institutional inequalities. As a result, SASA! Together work across different levels of society including individuals, couples, families, local leaders, religious institutions and other service providers (Michau Lori & Sophie Namy, 2021).

SASA! Approach is a globally recognized and since its inception in 2008, SASA has been adopted in over 30 countries by more than 75 organizations worldwide. The approach is grounded in feminist theory and emphasizes the gender-power analysis, recognizing men's power over women as a root cause of VAWG. It employs a phased methodology; Start, Awareness, Support and Action to guide community through stages of change fostering critical reflection and collective Michau & Namy (2021)

Uganda serves as a birthplace and primary implementation of SASA! The approach was designed by Raising Voices (voices, 2008) and implemented by Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP) focusing on community mobilization to prevent VAWG. A randomized controlled trial conducted between 2007 and 2012 demonstrated significant community level impacts including 52% reduction in women's risk of experiencing physical violence from male partners (SASA!, 2015).

In Uganda, the SASA! Approaches have been implemented by various organizations that include; Raising voices, International Rescue Committee, Plan international, CEDOVIP in Kampala. In Northern Uganda/West Nile, the approach was implemented by Care International, Community Empowerment for Rural Development while in Zombo district it was implemented by Plan International, Mentoring and Empowerment Program for Young Women in the sub counties of Paidha, Nyapea, Abanga and Paidha Town council. Specifically for the case of Paidha Sub County, the approach is being implemented in Otheko parish, Oyoro, Jupaneka, Anyola, Jupangali lower.

The approach adaptability globally has allowed it to be effective in diverse settings addressing the unique challenges and cultural dynamics present in different African countries (M. Ellsberg H. J.-M., 2008). It's effects includes; reduction in the community attitude towards tolerating gender violence, improved community concern towards victimized women, easy to adapt in periphery and

core countries, enhanced empowerment and agency of women to express their opinion and negotiating within relationship particularly regarding sexual health and family matters, enhanced community support for survivors among others (Nambusi Kyegombe, 2014).

However, a lot of concern arose that questioned SASA's effectiveness in addressing violence against women and girls since its impact is minimal beyond urban communities where it has been implemented. The context under which the approach was developed differs. In Kenya, it was designed targeting the humanitarian and refugees characterized by displacement and protection concern while in Uganda the implementation remains rooted in community mobilization and transformation for gendered power relations within stable social system. These contexts differ from the environment in which the SASA! Together approach is being implemented in Paidha Sub County. SASA is a Swahili word that the local people do not understand which brought into language issue yet limited documentation has been done about study.

1.2 Statement of the problem.

Violence against Women is historical, pervasive and widespread, with great delimitating effects on women and girls. The national prevalence of Violence against married women by partner: physical violence: 22.3%, sexual (16.6%), physical and sexual (9.3%); all lower than violence against teenagers aged 15-19 years; Physical (23.5%), sexual (16.8%), and physical and sexual violence at 9.4% respectively (Force, 2024). Violence against women and girls is prevalent in almost all countries, widely acknowledged as a major public health and human rights concern (Nakayiza, 2024) justice for victims (Bettinger-López, 2019). GBV is a critical problem in Uganda. The National Survey on Violence in Uganda reported that 95% of Ugandan women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence which indicate there are high incidence.

There have been many interventions to address VAWG such as SASA! Together approach, yet VAWG persists, especially in rural communities. Additionally, the context under which the "SASA! Together approach" was developed does not apply directly to the community of Paidha sub county. For instance, "SASA" is a Swahili word that the local people do not understand which brought into language issue. It was developed in Kenya and imported to Uganda within another context. The approach was mainly being implemented at the refugee settlement for example in Tanzania by IRC and Ethiopia at the food distribution site whereby its context does not apply

directly to the people of Paidha Sub County. In communities where it has been implemented, SASA approach has significantly proven to increase community support for survivors of violence, improvement in relationship dynamics showing positive shifts in gender norms beyond Uganda. The approach is community-driven, focus on power, inclusive of men and consider cultural adaptability and is tailored to fit local contexts. Yet, there is notable limited documentation about this prevention approach. Paidha is deeply rooted in cultural structure that makes it difficult to effectively implement interventions on VAW. Assessing how SASA intervention has addressed VAW in the context of this cultural discrimination is both urgent and of necessity. The purpose of this study therefore is to assess the effectiveness of SASA approach in shifting social norms around violence against women in Paidha community.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of the study is to assess the effectiveness of "SASA! Together approach" in preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Paidha Sub County.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To identify interventions under "SASA! Together Approach" in addressing Violence against Women and Girls in Paidha Sub- county.
2. To examine the achievements SASA interventions have registered in addressing VAWG in Paidha Sub-county.
3. To assess the challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG) in Paidha Sub-County.

1.4 Research Questions.

1. What are the interventions under SASA! Together Approach?
2. What are the various interventions used in SASA! Together approach to address VAWG in Paidha Sub County?
3. What milestones have been registered by different SASA interventions in addressing VAWG?

4. What are the challenges faced by SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG)?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study focused on the intervention of SASA! in addressing violence against women and girls, the achievement and challenges faced by the approach including its effectiveness in addressing violence against women and girls in Paidha sub county Zombo district. The study findings will be beneficial to researcher, policy planners and decision-makers in different government institutions of the country and other NGOs and CSOs involved in addressing violence against women and girls.

The study supports the government and NGOs to come out with better policies aimed at addressing violence. The survivor will be able to read from their experiences that will empower other women and girls to make informed decisions to deal with the situation. This will also provide the situation of violence in Zombo district publicly which other academia can refer to.

1.6 Justification of the Study

Violence against women and girls in Zombo district which has also caused the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the area for instance the recent statistics shows that Zombo stand at 31%, which is even higher than the national statistic figure of 27%. Limited research exists on violence against women and girls and the effectiveness of the SASA! Together approaches are used to addressing violence particularly in Paidha Sub County. This study will therefore contribute valuable insights to this under-studied area, informing future interventions and advocacy efforts to improve the lives of survivors in Zombo district and beyond.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Radical Feminist theory as suggested by theorists Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Andrea Dworkin (1970). Radical feminism looks at how VAW is rooted in patriarchal culture and urge that VAW is a tool used by men to maintain patriarchal power. This feminist theory emerged in the 1960's and the 1970's as a tradition, which foregrounds men's oppression of women in all spheres of society including an emphasis on the personal as political.

Radical feminism sees physical and sexual violence as central to men's oppression of women and stresses the need for developing knowledge out of women's experiences. The intervention must target structural relations (laws, institutions, cultural norms) as well as survivor needs to reshape how societies address VAW (Ridgeway Cecilia L. 2004).

Millett. Kate (1970) argued that violence against women should be understood within patriarchal power relations. In her analysis, society is organised in ways that give men greater authority and power over women and to address this, there must be transformation of patriarchal structures and gender relations including challenging gender stereotypes, unequal power and institutions that legitimize male dominance. Shulamith Firestone (1970) links women's oppression to the sex-class system and the social organization of reproduction and advocated for radical transformation of the social structures that reproduce women's oppression. Her broader vision was a society in which sex would no longer determine people's social status, power or economic opportunities.

In response to address VAWG, the radical feminist provides a critique of legal and state institutions of law, police and court as being inherently patriarchal failing to protect women argue that these institutions produce patriarchal power when they minimize domestic violence, reinforce gender stereotypes, blame survivors of failing to hold perpetrators accountable. This perspective demonstrates that effective prevention of violence against women requires not only legal reform but also transformation of the unequal power relations embedded within institutions and communities. The theory calls for support to women centred institutions and space that empower women like women's shelter. For instance, the rise of the women's shelter movement in the 1970s and 1980s was strongly influenced by radical feminist organising (Susan, 1975), challenging and reforming rape laws, creating feminist legal advocacy groups.

1.8 Scope

1.9.1 Time Scope

This research study focused on a Two-year period, from 2025 to 2026, to assess the effectiveness of SASA! Approach in addressing violence against women and girls in Paidha sub county, Zombo district.

1.9.2 Content Scope

The study seeks to examine the lived experiences of women survivors of violence in Zombo and the effectiveness of SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women and girls. The study also identifies the different coping mechanisms and resilience strategies of the women survivors, along with their mental health care needs and preference for the care. This will be done in line with the study objectives and research questions.

1.9.3 Geographical Scope

The study focuses exclusively on the violence against women and girls and the effectiveness of SASA approach in addressing the violence in Paidha sub county Zombo district.

This region was selected due to the documented surge in cases of violence against women evidence from Zombo district probation and welfare office, child and family protection unit from police indicate a high burden of violence in the district for instance between April and August 2021, Zombo recorded 428 cases of rape , 28 domestic-violence cases Wandera (2021) considering the location of the area border with Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.10 Definition Of Key Terms And Concepts

Power

In the context of this study, power is not simply about authority or control, it is analysed in multiple dimensions including gender-power relational analysis. These includes power over, power within, power with and power to. The SASA! Approach recognises power imbalances, reflecting on women's power within, building power with others and taking action to change the norms.

Social change

This refers to the transformation of community norms, behaviours, relationships and structures that sustain violence against women and gender inequality. It is not limited to individual behavioural change but includes shifts at interpersonal, community and institution Michau & Namy (2021).

The Local Activism strategy: is led by *community activists*, a diverse group of women and men who live and work in the community and represent different walks of life, ethnicities, religions, abilities and more Tjaden P. (2005).

Community leadership strategy- is led by *community leaders*, women and men who hold either formal or informal leadership positions in the community: for example, elders, marriage counselors, cultural and religious leaders, local government officials, local councils among others. This strategy engages the community circle of influence. Local leaders use their roles and platforms (large or small) to reach women and men in the community, as well as other leaders.
Violence against woman and girls (VAWG): include physical abuse, forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion, depriving reactionary violence by women illustrates that women often respond to violence with violence, and this had been the case for many survivors in this study.

Sex refers to biological difference of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessarily a direct product of an individual's biological sex" (Willis, 2015)

Patriarchy is a social construct which endorses the superiority of men over women (Weber, 2002) defined it as a system of government in which men rule over society as the head of the household and dominate not only women but also men who are younger in their years.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents reviewed relevant global and national literature on the intervention used in SASA! Together approach to address VAWG, the achievement of SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG), the challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG) in Paidha Sub-County and the identified literature gap that this study will fill.

2.2 The intervention used in SASA! Together approach to address VAWG.

SASA! is a community mobilization approach for preventing violence against women and girls, designed for catalyzing community-led change of norms and behaviors that perpetuate gender inequality, violence and increased vulnerability for women Starmann Elizabeth (2018) the approach further entails diffusion of new ideas to community through mass media channels like TV, radio and poster displayed in the shop, trading center, market and mid media through videos, role play, drama, sport in public places during community gathering.

This is also done to introduce the concept of power encouraging a gendered analysis of power imbalances through strategies that include local activism, media and advocacy, communication materials and training (Ellsberg M., 2008). This is implemented in phases to ensure that community members are repeatedly exposed to SASA! Ideas in diverse ways.

The SASA! Intervention has proven to be a pillar implemented in phases that includes; Start, Awareness, Support and Action aimed at reducing social acceptance of violence and improve response to women experiencing violence (Tamale Slyvia, 2008).

Violence against women and girls is a global challenge according to (Charlotte Bunch, 1990) and a lot of intervention had be done by different actors that include the International legal frame work, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Adopted by UN in 1979, The Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011), UN Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women (1993), UNiTE to End violence against women campaign launch in 2008 to raise awareness and encourage action including SASA! Together intervention

has proven to be a pillar in violence prevention as stated by Zimmerman Don H; Candace West (1987).

Training around gender and other interventions include working with men through couple's work, and a small number work with men as well as women as the main beneficiaries according to Taft Angela and Rhonda Small (2014). A very small number, including a community mobilization component, to work on 'gender' at the community level.

Community based interventions involving more women to take lead can shift discriminatory social norms to reduce the risk of violence; it also involves sexual differences (Simone de Beauvoir, 2023). Education and empowerment of women are fundamental. Health workers should be trained to identify, support survivors and strategies to address violence. These should be integrated into services for child health, maternal, sexual, and reproductive health, mental health (García-Moreno, 2015).

2.3 The achievement of SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG).

There is fair evidence that community mobilization campaigns have the potential to change risk factors for VAWG, particularly violence condoning attitudes and beliefs. However, a linear relationship between attitudes and behavior has not yet been established. The approach recognizes that sustainable prevention requires changes not only at the individual level but also wider community for example, the evaluation of the "One Man Can Campaign" increased recognition of women's rights and community response to survivor of violence (Abramsky, 2012)

The "SASA! Together" activist and community leaders are selected by community themselves to support in the activism work. This promotes sense of ownership and sustainability. Additionally, SASA! Together, allow participants to reflect upon violence and its consequences for their relationships among themselves and the solution to the problem are easily achieve (Kyegombe, 2015) .

The activism work of SASA! Together uses a lot of posters that relate to a situation in a given community for example a poster of physical violence (showing picture of a man beating his wife) and the children are crying; when questions are generated around what is taking place in the poster

even the violent couples can realize the negative impact of violence at home. The easy adaptation of SASA! Together to fit given community context made possible to implement for instance (Stern, 2018) Rwanda is using the approach to prevent intimate partner violence.

Women's and girl's social empowerment have long formed a cornerstone of the violence prevention movement, first based on the understanding that VAWG is fundamentally about gender inequality and women's subordination and this called upon men to be involved in supporting gender equality according to Mwiine Ashaba Amon (2019).

Kyegombe & Heise, 2019 emphasizes that there is strong qualitative evidence that women's disempowerment and dependence on men both make them vulnerable to experiencing violence, and less able to challenge or leave situations of violence.

2.4 The challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG) in Paidha Sub-County.

"SASA! Together approach" has been widely spread for its effectiveness in addressing violence against women and girls but also faced with several challenges that include; Community resistance and deep-rooted cultural norms, gender stereotype, and traditions that can lead to resistance to change from community members as (Lorber Judith, 1994) have highlighted that challenging gender power dynamics can initially provoke backlash particularly among men or elders. Additionally, SASA! is implemented in phases; i.e. Start, Awareness, Support and Action which is long term approach, time -intensive requiring sustained engagement as noted (Taft Angela and Rhonda Small, 2014) emphasized that the slow pace may conflict with short funding cycles especially for organizations relying on donor funding hence affecting consistency and sustainability.

Capacity building and training of community activists as facilitators need ongoing support where previous researchers indicated that inconsistencies in the facilitator skills and motivation could dilute message delivery or reduce its effectiveness (Starmann Elizabeth & Kyegombe Nmabusi, 2017). While activists may also face burnout, emotional fatigue, and social pressure especially the female activists being given little opportunity by their husband to do activism work; this calls for strong support system for them Small (2014).

Adapting SASA! to different cultural, religious or political settings requires careful customization since the approach was developed in different contexts, refugee setting which might not relate easily with the people of Paidha sub county (2017) further stress the importance of context specific adaptation which if not done well may result in irrelevance or resistance. The values in the community that give more privileges to men over women noting the "good things of life'' that men have traditionally enjoyed (Gheaus Anca, 2012).

2.5 The identified literature gap that this study will fill.

Wyrod Robert (2008) emphasizes that sexual abuse and rape by intimate partner is not considered a crime in most countries, and women in many societies do not consider forced sex as rape if they are married to, or cohabiting with, the perpetrator. The assumption is that once a woman enters a contract of marriage, the husband has the right to unlimited sexual access to his wife. Research in many countries like South Africa, Australia, and Uganda reveal that approximately 10 to 15 per cent of women report being forced to have sex with their intimate partner. This is also because sexual activity happens in private and women consider it as private matter that should not be shared to the public (Charlotte Bunch, 1990).

The available data on violence against women and girls are quantitative yet other forms of violence like emotional abuse and psychological violence are not captured and not attended to since it needs holistic approach to cater for the mental health of the survivor (Tjaden P., 2005). Additionally, there is limited research conducted on "SASA! Together" implementation in Zombo district. In addition, this approach has been mainly implemented in the refugee hosting community like in Ethiopia at food distribution site, Tanzania at the refugee camp implemented by Inter Religious Council and among women living with HIV in Kampala and its context might not resonate well with community of Paidha Sub County who are not station in the camp.

This study was limited by language barrier. The approach is being implemented in Alur speaking community yet "SASA'' is a Swahili word which means "Now" that community struggles to understand and the available materials for implementing the SASA! Together activities are in English and Swahili yet most of the local community could not understand that need to be translated into local language that may lead to differences in meaning and interpretation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focused on the methodological process that guided this study. This includes research design, research approaches, description of the geographical area and where population of the study exists, description of the population from which the sample was selected, sampling strategies, data collection methods, data quality control, data analysis and ethical consideration.

3.2 Research Design

This study was grounded in the interpretivist/constructive paradigm on the effectiveness of "SASA! Approach" in addressing violence which assumes that; Reality is socially constructed through people's cultural beliefs, attitudes and lived experiences as result of "SASA! Approach". This also helps in capturing the social change and power issues among the target group.

In my study, I used qualitative research design since it enabled me to gather subjective reality and multiple truth/lived experiences. It also helps in bringing out the voice of marginalized groups, challenges stereotypes, norms, role and promote inclusion as indicated by Mohajah. H. (2018).

3.3 Research approach.

Qualitative research approach helped to explore phenomena and gain understanding of underlying opinion on the effectiveness of "SASA! Approach" in addressing violence against women. The qualitative approach made it possible to understand the power dynamic and social issues causing violence against women that SASA! "Together approach" is addressing.

3.4 Description of the geographical area where the study exists.

The study was conducted in Paidha Sub-County, Zombo district, West Nile sub-region in Northern Uganda which is approximately 70 kilometers South of Arua city. It borders Arua district to the North, Nebbi district to the East and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with high influx of population and asylum seekers. This area was selected purposively because of the high rate of violence against women (UN Women, 2025; Uganda Bureau of statistics (UBOS), 2024) and deep-

rooted cultural norms, high rate of illiteracy. The population of Zombo district is 312,621 (M146,719 and F165,902) (Uganda Bureau of Statistics ,2025).

Paidha Sub-county explicitly is in the Southeastern part of Zombo district; consists of 04 Parishes namely Amei, Cana, Kaya and Otheko. It has a population of 21,470 (10,195 males and 11,275 females). It is bordered by Nebbi District on the Eastern side, Paidha Town Council and Democratic Republic of Congo on the Southern Part and Nyapea Sub-county on the Western side.

Otheko parish was chosen because this is where SASA! Approach has been implemented. Additionally, Otheko had the highest rate of VAWG as stated by Wandera (2021) , and this motivated the implementation of SASA. Out of the 09 Villages in the parish, the study focused on 04 villages of Oyoro, Anyola, Jupangali lower and Jupaneka.

3.5 Description of the population of which samples were selected.

Zombo District comprises 15 Lower Local Governments (11 Sub-counties and 04 Town Councils), Paidha Sub-county inclusive. Zombo is a highland district with a human population of 312,621 people accommodated on an estimated land area of 939.7km^2 (UBOS, 2024; Zombo DDPIII, 2021). Zombo district has a total population of 312,621 people with 146,719 males and 165,902 females (2024). Zombo is predominantly inhabited by the Alur, Kebu and Lendu communities. These groups share cultural practices and language contributing to district's rich cultural tapestry for example Alur are known for their traditional dances like "Agwara". Agriculture is the main socio-economic activity with over 69% of households engaged in subsistence farming crops like cassava, beans, maize, millet, banana among others. Majority of the population identifies as Christian and Islam takes smaller proportion while 18years is considered as legal age for marriage but there is existing polygamous marriage due to family dynamics in some communities with high literacy rate of approximately 79% for females and 73% for males Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2025).

The study targeted women survivor of violence, men, community leaders, activist, local government leaders, organization that has implemented SASA Approach among others in Paidha sub county, Zombo district.

3.6 Sampling strategies.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study based on the specific characteristics, knowledge or experience on "SASA! Approach". In terms of selection criteria, all women and selected men of legal age (24 - 68years old), residing in Paidha sub county, Otheko Parish in the villages of Oyoro, Jupangali lower, Jupaneka and Anyola. They were engaged in "SASA! Together approach" in addressing gender-based violence. The targeted sample was 30 participants. This provided understanding of the intervention of SASA! in addressing violence, the achievement of the SASA! Approach.

3.7 Sample size.

The study primarily focused on men and women who have ever interacted with the SASA approach to address VAWG. I planned to interview them since they are knowledgeable about the approach that enriched my research. The first category was focus group discussions with community leaders (LCs, leaders in saving group, councilors among others) with 08 (F04, M04) respondents who participated actively in conducting community meetings targeting leaders from village level up to sub counties like councilors, parish chiefs, village health team, community development officers among others to understand the biggest achievements of SASA! Together approach whether cases of violence have reduced or if people are reporting cases due to awareness.

Category two included focus group discussions with 08 (F04, M4) Local activists (both men and women). These are people who were selected by community members and trained on SASA! Together approach to build skills and encourage community members to join power with others to prevent violence against women. Their activities include; power poster, community conversation, community info sheet, bingo game, community poster, drama sketch among others which has pictures and messages in them with guiding questions to engage the discussion on prevention of violence against women.

The third category also involved focus group discussion with 03women and 03men community members who are married (in their households) and were engaged in SASA activism through community meetings. This category was so important in the research because they are knowledgeable about changes in how couples resolve conflicts or improved relationships since

SASA began and actions community members taken to prevent violence since SASA started. The fourth category was key Informant interview with role model families. I interviewed 02 couples (F2, M2) to share how SASA! Together approach has contributed to their long-term end of violence against women and to know how they used to knowledge to create change in their families and community. These interviews took place as planned and the respondents were open to sharing information required. The fifth category was key informant interviews with Cultural and Religious Leaders as a key structure in the community since their involvement helps in shaping morals and values. This also offered me an opportunity to understand deeper how cultural and religious leaders supported SASA activities to address violence against women. I targeted two of them to represent the views of the rest because of the strong position they hold in the community.

The last category I interviewed were key informant interviews with 02 participants working with non-governmental organization that has ever implemented SASA! Together approach in their programming. For example, Community Empowerment for Rural Development CEFORD) and Mentoring and Empowerment Program for Young Women (MEMPROW) of all which are found in Zombo District. These organizations were so helpful in gathering information on the effectiveness of SASA! Together approach in preventing violence against women, to also learn more about some of the interventions used by CSOs implementing SASA! Together Approach. In summary, the total number of participants interviewed for both key informant interviews and focus group discussion was 30 (F15, M15). These includes; local activist and community leaders who were actively engaged in the activism work, the role model family who changed from their violent ways as result of SASA, women and men community member (in their households), CSOs implementing SASA Approach, cultural and religious leaders as shown in the table below;

Categories of Respondents	**M**	**F**	**Total numbers**	**Methods**
Community leaders (LCs, leaders in saving group, councilors among others)	4	4	8	FGD
Local Activists	4	4	8	FGD
Women and Men community members (in their households)	3	3	6	FGD
Role model families	2	2	4	KII

Cultural and Religious Leaders	1	1	2	KII
CBOs/CSOs implementing SASA! Approach	1	1	2	KII
Total			**30**	

The selected categories were identified because; they actively engaged in SASA methodology, they also include families that changed as result of SASA! Approach and the community members, local activists and community leaders

3.8 Data collection methods.

This study used qualitative methods of data collection. It focused on three categories of participants that include:

I. Key Informants Interview (KII)
II. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

3.8.1Key informant Interviews.

To further enrich my research, I conducted key informant interviews with up to 08 participants who included representatives from 04 Role model families (Couples who changed from their violent ways as result of SASA, 02 Cultural and Religious Leaders and 02 Non-Governmental Organization implementing SASA! Together Approach. The choice of the four male and four female was to get a deeper understanding and benefit from gendered differences of the different categories of people who were involved in the SASA! Together approach.

Out of the 08 key informant interviews conducted, 06 were married; they all attained lower primary level of education, 02 were single and they have bachelor's degree working with Non-Governmental Organization.

My interaction with role model families was so interesting because they already know me as Gender Activist in the community, upon my arrival at their homes following the phone call conversation to have a meeting with them, I was warmly welcomed and they were eager to talk to me, upon my arrival I found one of the family members listening to music that clearly indicate they are happy family. Surprisingly the women were so free to share their transformation journey

from a violence home to a violence free home, which they used to hardly talk about, this clearly shows the positive impact of SASA! Methodology.

The participants from Non-Governmental Organization and cultural/religious leaders were welcoming. The participants from Community Empowerment and Rural Development (CEFORD) preferred phone call interview over in person due to her unavailability because she was in the field and arranging for in-person meeting was difficult. However, during the telephone interview, I went short of airtime, and she immediately called back and that made it easier for both of us to share freely. She also noted that engaging cultural leaders is very important, but some chiefs are taking long to embrace the changes, arguing that some of the SASA! Practices are against the culture, giving more power to women over men.

3.8.2 Focus Group Discussions

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research method and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discusses a given topic in depth, facilitated by a professional or external moderator. This targets number of participants ranging from (8-12) people regardless of their gender. The method intends to solicit participants' attitudes and perceptions, knowledge and experiences and shared practices in the of interaction with different people. The technique is based upon the assumption that the group processes activated during an FGD help to identify and clarify shared knowledge among groups and communities, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain with a series of individual interviews according to Alam (2025)

I held three focus group discussions with community leaders (LCs, leaders in saving group, councilors among others), Local Activists and Women and Men community members (in their households) all were mixed group. The first category was community leaders (LCs, leaders in saving group, councilors among others) in Jupangali lower village, Otheko parish, Paidha sub county under a banyans tree plantation with 08 (F4, M4) participants. I selected this equal number with the help of community leader in charge SASA! Together activities give me a clear understanding of the effectiveness of SASA approach.

The second category was 08 Local Activists (F4, M4) in Jupaneka village. I selected this category because they were actively involved in the implementation of SASA! Together activities. While the last category was Women and Men community members (in their households) who had been

attending SASA community meetings and other related activities. I interviewed 06 (F03, M03) participants. They are all married since SASA! Together, approach target couples to balance power to promote a violence free society.

The focus group discussion created space for men and women to share their experiences and journey that they walked from normalizing violence to a peaceful life. Although the activist encountered challenges during community meetings ranging from expectation of transport facilitation from the participants to attend the meeting.

The focus group discussion also brought traumatizing experiences for me especially when I talked about how it looks like to balance power among the couples, most women shared that they have limited opportunity to exercise their power and make decision within households while most men I that interviewed are in polygamous marriage with limited level of education and have many children.

Out of 22 (F11, M11) participants that I interviewed in focus group discussion, 21 were married and out of the 10 married men, 05 had more than one wife with many children ranging from 5-12 per person and their education level ranges as follows; 18 stopped at primary, 03 attained secondary (Senior four) and 01 person had a diploma. This alone depicts the contributing factor to violence in the community due to lack of knowledge. This kind of setting pushes them away from opportunities and high-income work. Households stay in subsistence farming or small businesses, which increases economic stress, poverty and cultural barriers to participation.

3.8.3 Secondary data collection.

To have more insights into the research, I also collected secondary data from Non-Governmental Organization reports relevant to the study. For example, the SASA! Together manual developed by Michau Lori & Sophie Namy (2021) , evolution of SASA that gives more information on how and why SASA! Together started. I also used baseline survey and mid-line assessment report conducted by Mentoring and Empowerment Program for Young Women (2023) to have a detailed comparison with the rate of violence that existed before SASA and the situation after SASA! Together intervention or whether people are reporting cases of violence due to awareness. This also helps to evaluate attitudes, norms, knowledge and behaviors around VAWG as argued by Davidson (2019)

3.9 Data quality control.

This was examined to monetize a good standard of work points out that it is important to pay attention to the objectives of the study and the instruments used. This was done with the use of two properties, which are validity and reliability. Validity was used to check on the correctness of the objectives and their soundness. This was done through pretesting of questions for interviews to ascertain their relevancy and relationship to the topic and objectives stipulated. Credibility and dependability were considered to ensure that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences and that the research process was systematic, transparent and consistent. This was applied in the daily debriefing and the analysis of questions on the interview guide.

3.10 Data management and analysis.

The data management system is the set of procedures and people through which information is processed. Data analysis involved decisions on what to preserve and how it was preserved. This entails collection, manipulation, and retrieval of information. Data information from notes, documents, interviews, FGDs, and audio recordings was transcribed and managed securely.

Data collected was analysed thematically emphasise a "feel" for the data i.e. the common patterns, concepts, meaning that emerges from the data. The process of examining data to understand them is integrated throughout the analysis. Always question data and examine them with a critical view Thomas Alan (1996)

Thematic analysis was appropriate because it enabled me to identify, organize, interpret and explain the recurring pattern and meaning within participant's experience, perception and views regarding the effectiveness of SASA! Together Approach in addressing violence against women and girls in Paidha sub county, Zombo district.

3.10.1 Audio Recording of Interviews.

Audio recordings were conducted with participants' consent, transcribed into written text. The transcription process involved converting participants; verbal responses into written accounts while maintaining their original meaning, expression and intended messages. I also relied on field

notes taken during the discussion that documented participants' responses, key observations, non-verbal expressions where relevant, recurring issues and important contextual information.

The prepared transcripts and notes that were organized into a common dataset for systematic analysis. This helps to link the information gathered to the objective, for example how community activism and mobilization contributed to violence prevention as an intervention in the first objective.

3.10.2 Verbatim Transcription of recorded interviews.

In addition to the field notes, I transcribed all the audio recordings while highlighting the themes by identifying the commonalities, differences and concepts. I transcribed 08 key informant interviews and 03 focus group discussions. The transcription went on smoothly although it is very hectic and time consuming, which involves playing the recording several times to get the exact wording clearly, but I prioritised it to enable me to get the detailed information as I draw themes during the process. After transcription, I analysed the interview transcript thematically looking at common themes emerging, discrepancies based on the objectives of the study. The detailed transcripts offered me an opportunity as a researcher to have a rich, detailed raw data to use in my data analysis.

3.11 Ethical consideration

The research was carried out in accordance with the guidelines given by the Makerere University Directorate of Graduate Research Training (DRGT). Adherence to protection, consent, cultural sensitivity was got from the research participants before any interview or recording. Confidentiality was assured to all the research participants.

Additionally, my actions in the field were guided by scholarly writings on Feminist Research Ethics. Feminists endeavour to conduct research through a gender lens while challenging patriarchal structures in society and in so doing, they argue that it is unethical not to apply gender perspectives in all research regardless of discipline Kingston (2020).

I personally conducted the mobilization of the participants using phone calls especially for the key informant interviews while other participants were mobilised by the community leader. I used

motorcycle, which was accessible and affordable to enable me, reach to all my respondents. I met the participants for key informant interviews at their homes; some offered me a chair to sit on while others gave me mats. While for focus group discussions, most of our conversations took place under a tree and coffee plantation with conducive shade that created a safe environment. They were so open to give me all the information that I needed without hesitation. I kept time and attentively listened to their narratives, concerns and experiences. I provided transport for those that participated in the focus group discussions since they came from far villages.

Concerning difficult questions that came through and expectations from the participants, as a researcher, I introduced myself and oriented them on the purpose of the study, so all of us were on the same lane that made it easy for me to conduct the interview successfully. The information generated with participants is protected to ensure confidentially is enhanced.

Negotiating Ethics, Reflecting on the position of the researcher.

I came into the research process as a student of Gender Studies, Makerere University but also as a gender activist who had been working for non-governmental organization on preventing Violence against women and girls in the community. This is because growing up as young girl I saw how women were violated and when I started my first job in 2017 with Life Concern-Uganda, an NGO based in Zombo district, my role was to work in the Human Rights and Gender department to resolve conflicts through mediation/dialogues that exposed me to the reality that women are facing on daily basis. At some point the cases reported were heavy for me to handle I would refer yet others were comfortable to speak to me.

Severally, most of the cases reported were related to Gender based Violence, I also witnessed how women suffer to attain justice while others battled with trauma as result of violence. The government and other civil society organisations have come out with various approach to prevent Violence against women and ensure a violence free society,

yet the result is not yielding a lot, that is why there is need to assess the effectiveness of SASA! Together approach in preventing Violence against women in Paidha sub county, Zombo district.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets and analyzes the qualitative data collected from the field, what other researchers have done, and my arguments related to the existing literature. The presentation of data serves to highlight the responses of the participants about their situation with references to the effectiveness of SASA! Together approach in preventing VAWG. The analysis of this data presented in this chapter highlights how the data collected responded to the research objectives and questions. The research objectives set out to identify interventions under SASA! Together Approach in addressing Violence against Women; examine the Achievements of SASA in addressing VAWGs and the challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach in addressing VAWG.

The findings are organized into three major themes as delivered from the objective of the study. These themes relate to the various SASA interventions in addressing VAWG; the achievements of SASAin addressing VAWG and the challenges and the challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach. It is through thematic areas that I reflect on the model's effectiveness in addressing VAWG.

4.1 Social Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

The study target 30 participants, 15 female and 15 males. This was carried out in the villages of Jupangali lower, Jupaneka, Anyola and Oyoro in Otheko parish, Paidha Sub County, Zombo district. This was done specifically among the communities where SASA! Together approach was implemented. The age of the participants that I interviewed ranges from 24-68years; youth were 10(F6, M4) and adult were 20 (F9, M11).

About their level of education, out of the 30 respondents, 04 female had no formal education; (02 female community members and 02 Role model family), 20(F8, M12) attained primary level, 03(F1, M2) reached secondary (01 female reached Senior Two and 02 male completed senior Four), 01male had a diploma and 02 females had degrees.

Regarding marital status, out of the 30 participants that I engaged with, 27 were married and 03 were single. The categories of their religion were as follows; 18 were Catholic, 10 were Protestant and 02 were Muslim.

This diversity enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives across households, institutional and leadership level in terms of the position they held in the community, the economic activities, how power is being balanced at household level and how this structure support in the prevention of violence against women. From this, I realized that the leadership position ranging from Local councils at village level, 90% of the participants are peasant farmers but mainly women play a great role in farming. While men still have more power as head of household and they find it hard to balance power urging that, it will make them feel less of a man. From this, I noticed that power imbalance is the root cause of violence in the community.

How SASA! Together Approach in addressing VAWG was perceived.

The SASA! Together Approach in addressing VAWG was perceived by the community positively because it promoted open discussions on power, gender equality, healthy relationships, and prevention of violence against women. The community members described the approach as transformative, participatory, and practical in changing attitudes and behaviors at households and community levels emphasizing that the transformation in gender norms is clearly seen as men are increasingly recognizing women as equal partners in decision-making rather than subordinates and women express greater confidence in speaking during community meetings, reporting violence and joint leadership positions as shared by participants that were interviewed during mixed FGD with community members noting that;

> *"Before SASA! we believed beating a wife was normal and a "real'' man should discipline his wife especially if she has done something wrong or refused to take water for bathing in the bathroom, but now we understand that respect and communication build stronger families"* ***(FGD 6th January 2026)***

Additionally, another male participant added that.

> *"I have witnessed that women are now able to report violence that happens to them because they know the community and local leaders will support them while others are*

now competing for leadership positions with men for instance, the current Local council one in Anyola village is a woman; something that has never happened in our community before" ***(FGD 6th January 2026)***

Moreso, community of Otheko Parish is grateful for SASA! Approach because of its participatory nature where everyone participates in community dialogue, and the idea of community radio where voices of community members are recorded during dialogue and played on the radio was widely accepted. Many people listened together, reflected on the messages reported that it has strengthened dialogue on relationships, accountability, and non-violence ways of resolving conflicts while community activists, local leaders and cultural leaders work together to respond to violence as shared by community members during the mixed FGD interview that;

"Everyone in our village is involved in discussing violence against women, not only leaders and the community activists live with us and understand our challenges making it easier to trust them" ***(FGD, 6th January 2026)***

The evidence clearly indicates that SASA! Together interventions were generally welcomed and accepted by communities since they were participatory, culturally sensitive, and community driven. Instead of imposing external solutions, SASA! encouraged communities to reflect on their own experiences and identify positive ways using their power positively according to Michau Lori & Sophie Namy (2021).

4.2 Various SASA interventions in addressing VAWG.

There are various SASA! Together intervention used in addressing VAWG as seen below,

4.2.1 Community dialogue and Reflection activities as intervention of SASA! Together approach in addressing VAWGs

Community dialogue refers to participatory discussion among community members, couples, leaders, activists and institutions aimed at questioning harmful norms and encouraging collective responsibility in preventing violence while Reflective activities involve personal and group reflection exercises, storytelling and guided conversations that encourage individuals to analyze how power operates in relationships and communities. As shared by the participants that I

interviewed; Morris a male local activist, resident in Jupangali lower married with 03 wives and had 9 children had this to say.

> "*SASA! has taught us to sit and discuss issues peacefully instead of fighting with my wives yet previously I used to beat my wives when we have misunderstandings and I used to believe I am a final decision maker but we attended community dialogue on the importance of having a "happy family", I realized that we can always use non-violence means to resolve conflict and women can give ideas that promote the growth in the family"* ***(FGD , Jupangali lower on 6th January 2026)***

Another participant, a community member in Oyoro village shared that "*this community dialogue is like a medicine that treats violence, because the intervention encouraged continuous reflection and community accountability, I am no longer the same, my family is very peaceful yet previously we use to invite our in-laws and elders frequently to come and resolve our issues, I have become "wayu", meaning a mentor in the community* (**FGD , *7th January 2026).***

The research further showed that reflective discussions enabled men to reconsider notions of male dominance and encouraged women to gain confidence in expressing their views while the community activists reported that regular dialogues create trust and openness making violence less acceptable within communities, a female local activist had to say this:

> *"When we had just started conducting the community dialogue, most women would feel shy to open up on issues of sexual violence and it is worst when men are present but now, they are able to share freely and able have lengthy conversation together with men"* ***(Focus group discussion, local activists on 6thJanuary 2026)***

According to Starmann Elizabeth & Kyegombe Nmabusi (2017), SASA! Together approach interventions are designed to stimulate critical thinking and gradual behavior change rather than imposing direct instructions. This approach recognizes that sustainable change emerges when communities themselves reflect on their experiences and identify solutions to violence collectively. Based on the sharing from the participants that I interviewed, I noticed that community dialogue has created opportunities for collective learning as shared local activist during FGD.

"SASA! has made learning easy by bringing together men, women, girls, boys and community leaders to openly discuss the causes, consequences and solutions to social problem such as violence against women and girls from within rather than relying on external experts because we know our problem better" ***(FGD 7th January 2026)***

Another participant added that "*Before the community` dialogue, we used to believe domestic violence was a private matter and when the case is bigger, we could involve our in-laws but now we know the whole community has a role in preventing it. Such discussion has given both men and women confidence to speak about issues that they had kept silent about for years." (****FDG 7th January 2026)***

The intervention's participatory nature also strengthened community ownership and sustainability of the change through the repeated discussions. Individuals began questioning beliefs that normalized male control and violence. Instead of externally imposed solutions, communities became active agents in identifying harmful practices and promoting healthier relationships. This aligns with Freire's theory of critical consciousness which emphasizes reflection and dialogue as tools for social transformation (Freire, 2020).

Similarly, (Goldmann, 2019) emphasizes that sustainable prevention of VAWG requires long-term norm change processes involving continuous community engagement and critical reflection. SASA! operationalizes this by integrating informal discussions, activism, and public reflection into daily community life.

The intervention also aligns with (Kyegombe & Heise, 2014), which identifies multiple levels influencing violence, including individual, rotational, community and societal factors. Community dialogue addresses these levels simultaneously by engaging couples, leaders, peers and institutions. In view of the above demonstrates that these interventions improve couple communication, reduce acceptance of violence, strengthen community accountability, and support long-term social norm change. This further enhanced collective action against violence.

SASA uses structured community dialogues where participants discuss gender roles, power imbalances, and consequences of violence. These take place in groups over time and often include reflection from the question and shared learning. This has contributed to preventing violence

through challenging norms that justify violence by questioning accepted ideas about male authority and female submission; community dialogue disrupts cultural norms that support violence as stated by Abramsky (2024).

4.2.2 Community Activism and Mobilization.

Community activism within SASA! involves the training engagement of community activists, local leaders, religious leaders, cultural leaders, role model families and change agents/community members who facilitate discussions, awareness campaigns, home visits and advocacy activities. Community mobilization entails collective engagement of communities in identifying, challenging and preventing violence through participatory processes and shared responsibilities. Community activism and mobilization are core interventions within SASA! because they engage ordinary community members as active agents of change in transforming attitudes, behaviors and social norms that perpetuate violence Abramsky Tanya et al. (2016).

During KII interviews, the participants reported that the local activists regularly visit homes, mediated conflicts, organized discussions and modeled positive behaviors. In one of the interviews with Priska (not a real name), 27year old married with two children, she said that:

> *"Before SASA! violence was seen as a private issues as you all know what happens in our community here, but now the community intervenes and supports survivors, for example last week when Obedling (not real name) was fighting at the bar at Cong-Elisa trading center, the community had to intervene in order to calm the situation"* ***(KII on 7th January 2026)***

4.2.3 Violence is no longer an individual issue.

In SASA! violence against women is understood as a community and societal problem rather than individual issue because approach shifts responsibility from survivor alone to the entire community. Encouraging everyone to prevent and respond to violence for instance traditionally, VAW were often considered "family matter" that should remain private, survivors were frequently blamed, discouraged from reporting abuse or expected to tolerate violence to preserve family unity.

However, SASA have made violence to become a community issue by creating collective responsibilities by encouraging community members to recognize that they have a role in preventing violence, breaking the culture of silence through dramas, community discussions and positive use of power especially "power with" and "power within" encouraging mutual respect. This was shared during KII by a respondent noting that.

> *"Previously violence used to be an individual issue but now everyone talks openly about violence, and I have witnessed this severally where neighbors intervening when violence occurs, men openly speaking against violence especially polygamous men in our community here and couples resolving conflict through communication instead of violence" (**KII on 7th January 2026)*.

These changes demonstrate that violence has become a shared community concern rather than an issue hidden within individual households with practical examples when a neighbor hears violence no longer ignores it but checks on the survivor and connects them to support services. This reduces acceptance and normalization of violence and encourages early intervention before the violence escalates hence increases survivor support and access to services.

Additionally, Alex, a resident of Jupaneka village reaffirmed by emphasizing that.

> *"Local activist has helped men to understand that power should not mean beating women yet previously, wife beating was common over small issue like when a woman refuses to take bathing water in the bathroom that men treasure so much, she would be beaten but now most men do not beat their wives and others support in carrying their own water to the bathroom while elders continue to discourage mistreatment of women" **(Focus group discussion on 7th January 2026)***

The above participants' stories narrate how SASA! Together Approach trains and support community activists (men, women, youth) as change agents to lead activities by mobilizing neighbors, facilitating dialogues and encouraging non-violent behaviors that community can emulate. It also demonstrates that community mobilization strengthened informal support networks and increased collective accountability. Furthermore, the involvement of respected leaders and peers enhanced trust and legitimacy of the intervention since community members are

more likely to engage with messages delivered by individuals they knew and respect within their own social structures.

Kyegombe & Heise (2014) found out that community activism within SASA increased bystander intervention and strengthened community responsibility towards preventing violence. The study further emphasized that activists became role models who demonstrated equitable behaviors and encouraged others to adopt similar practices. Similarly, Michau L (2007) argues that violence prevention interventions are most successful when it involves communities over time through activism and collective action.

In the viewed above, it clearly indicates that community activism and mobilization are central to interventions within SASA! for addressing VAWG. By engaging the activists, leaders, institutions, and other community members increases the effectiveness in challenging harmful social norms and promoting long-term prevention of VAWG through participatory and community led processes.

4.2.4 Use of media and communication materials.

Media and communication materials within SASA! Together Approach includes posters, flyers, discussion cards, storytelling tools, radio messages and printed materials among others. These materials are designed to stimulate critical reflection and conversation around gender equality, power and non-violence and are accessible in local language. This has made community activism very easy because they relate to the pictures in the posters shared by *a local activist in Jupaneka village.*

> *"The poster and storytelling have made community members to start talking about violence openly. People relate easily about pictures shown in the posters with guiding questions in local language, lucky enough these posters are available in public places like trading centers, health facilities, and church and on shops where anybody who come across can see them"* ***(FGD on 6th January 2026)***
>
> Another participant during interview with role model family explained*, "The message on power and respect helped couples understand each other better; as I am talking now, we were able to follow the message with my wife and we went up to Paidha radio station to*

create awareness on how SASA! activism have restored peace at our home and currently we have respect for each other and we resolve our issues using non-violence means, many people learnt from us including our neighbors" ***(key informant interview with role model family (male), 12th January 2026)***

As shared by my research participants above, I can ably state that communication materials also served as catalysts to create visibility and repeated exposure to consistent messages across different communication channels increased message retention and normalized conversations about violence prevention.

The use of local language is culturally relevant and participatory communication enhances accessibility, encourages active participation since people are more comfortable asking questions, sharing experience in their mother tongue, improves understanding of key concepts such as power, gender equality, consent, violence among others and community ownership of the intervention. However, unequal media access and literacy barriers can limit the reach and impact of communication interventions. Therefore, cultural sensitivity in messaging and community participation remains critical for effectiveness.

The existing literature strongly supports the use of media and communication intervention in addressing VAWG. According to Michau Lori & Sophie Namy (2021) , communication materials are essential in community mobilization programs because they create opportunities for public engagement and social norms transformation. This creates wide awareness with multiple exposure to channels and increases understanding of VAWG and its consequences. It further reinforces dialogue topics that encourage community consensus in having a violence free society (World Health Organization, 2010)

4.2.5 Sport, Art, music, dance and drama.

Sport, Art, music dance and drama are creative approaches used widely within SASA! Together approach because they attract broad community participation, simplify complex gender issues and create emotional engaging spaces for learning and reflection. Sport, Art, music, dance and drama are used in communities to communicate messages about gender equality, power, and respect.

Community activists further reported that sports activities and public entertainment events create opportunities for men and youth who might otherwise avoid formal meetings on GBV. The studies also found that participatory performances and artistic activities encouraged emotional connection, empathy and collective reflection through role-plays, audiences observed the consequences of violence and explored alternative ways of resolving conflicts peacefully.

When asked for the view on the effectiveness of sport and drama as an intervention in preventing violence, Loice, a community leader in Jupangali lower responded that.

> *"You see, in our community here most men and youth do not like to attend community meetings, they always say that it is a waste of time while others say that they cannot attend meeting which they will not be given money, but when we organized football match or drama, they are the first to reach at the playground. I remember the recent football match organized by One village transformed church of Uganda project during women's day, they turned up in big numbers and we as community leaders we use such opportunity to pass the message on preventing violence against women inform of role plays/drama and this has worked for well"* ***(FGD , community leader from Jupangali lower on 6th January 2026)***

The above quote was reaffirmed by a youth participants during the FGD with community members noting that;

> *"You know for us as youth, SASA have made it easy to engage us with the use of sport, drama, art including posters, music, storytelling and drawing that enable us to express emotions, belief and experiences that may be difficult to express openly for example the recent football match organized by SASA! Includes half time discussion where community activists facilitate conversation about respect, shared decision making and preventing violence against women and girls"* ***(FGD on 6th January 2026)***

As shared, use of sports brings together women, men and young people who may not otherwise participate in discussions about violence, but they use the opportunity to discuss on topics such as healthy relationship, consent, non-violent conflict resolution. This improves youth attitude towards gender equality and reduces acceptance of violence.

Within the SASA! Model, art sport and drama are transformative tools that create inclusive spaces for collective reflection among the youth. This enables them to question harmful gender norms, explore issues of power, learn from one another and develop practical solutions. By combining creativity and participation, the approached foster community ownership and sustained reductions in violence against women and girls.

Another participant that I interviewed was so positive about the various activities that they were engaged in including music and drama, which have built on his confidence to share freely. Mudashir, a male respondent aged 24, single in Jupaneka village narrates.

> "*being a young activist, I used to find it hard in most time to conduct meetings with old people but later when I joined the drama group, gained the confidence to facilitate meeting with any category of people, I am now happy that ideas are considered and we respect each other*" ***(FGD interview on 6th January 2026***

SASA models provide platforms for youth and encourages them to actively participate in planning, implementation and evaluating community activities. Their voices help shape interventions that reflect their realities and priorities since they are trained as community activists, champion for gender equality that build their leadership, facilitation, communication and advocacy skills. By bringing youth, parents, religious leaders, cultural leaders and local authorities builds intergenerational dialogue that bridges the gap and improves youth participation in promoting gender transformation agenda.

As narrated, this provides platform for story telling which the local narratives resonate more deeply than abstract message. The participatory arts are powerful tools for social norms change because they involves reflection, challenge stereotype and strengthen group identity and violence prevention; " more so during celebration like International Women's Day where drama and sport are used to pass message on violence prevention this further amplify the voices in enduring violence free community and widen the reach (World Health Organization, 2010).

Similarly, (Kyegombe & Heise, 2014) argue that drama and artistic activities within SASA enabled communities to discuss sensitive issues indirectly and safely reducing resistance while encouraging reflection and learning. The SASA! Together intervention has been impactful in

addressing VAW because it did not only focus on survivors, but it involves the entire community in creating social change.

In conclusion, I noticed that SASA! Together intervention contribute to addressing VAWG and a violence free communities through gradual transformation of attitude, behaviors, and social norms change, improving couples communication where participants reported learning peaceful , conflict resolution, mutual respect and joint decision making and reduced conflict at household, promoting positive masculinity where men were encouraged to view power positively through protection and shared responsibility than control and violence and lastly creating safe space for dialogue through regular meetings, conversation about violence prevention and these changes contributed to stronger social cohesion, reduced violence and safer communities.

4.3 Achievements of SASA! Together Approach in addressing VAWGs.

In many rural communities, an intervention fails when they focus only on single structure without addressing the broader social environment. However, “SASA! Together approach” instead created opportunities for continuous dialogue, peer learning and social accountability, enabling communities themselves to challenge violence supportive systems.

This also demonstrated the importance of engaging men as partners in prevention efforts rather than portraying men solely as perpetrators, it encourages positive masculinity and responsible use of power. This inclusive approach reduces resistance and fosters collaborative change within households and communities.

Furthermore, the use of culturally relevant approaches such as storytelling, drama, and music and community activism contributed significantly to the achievements of SASA in Paidha sub county. These methods respect local traditions while encouraging critical reflection and transformation of harmful cultural norms. Kohsaka (2021) noted that culturally grounded interventions are more likely to achieve sustainable impact because they promote local ownership and participation.

4.3.1 Improved community social norm change through peer modeling-

One of the most significant achievements of the SASA! Approach is its ability to transform harmful community social norms that perpetuate violence against women (VAW). Social norms

refer to the shared beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that communities consider acceptable or normal. In rural communities, norms surrounding gender roles, male authority, discipline within marriage, and women's submissiveness historically contributed to the acceptance and perpetuation of intimate partner violence (IPV). SASA! successfully challenged these deeply rooted norms by promoting critical reflection, dialogue, and collective action around power and gender equality.

Leonard, a married young man who is a farmer and local activist in Jupaneka village who experienced a change in social norms by sharing responsibilities with the wife said this during an interview **(KII interview on 6th January 2026)**

> "*One of the biggest lessons I learned is the value of working together as a couple ever since I became SASA! Activist. I have realized that sharing responsibilities like cooking, bathing children, splitting firewood, washing utensils makes a family stronger and brings more love and understanding into the home. My own family has become more united and resilient because of this. I have earned respect from people in my community. Sometimes I take care of the children while my wife attends meetings and find no shame in cooking food. They now see me as someone they can turn to for guidance and help, especially when facing problems in their homes.*
>
> *I have learned how to balance power in my household, and it has made life so much smoother. We no longer have serious conflicts at home, and I am determined to keep violence out of my family for good. I am a changed man now. I value peace, respect and partnership and I am committed to building a happy, violence-free home."*

Traditionally, in many patriarchal societies, women are expected to perform unpaid care work such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, among others. These responsibilities often consume several hours each day limiting women's opportunities to education, income generation as shared above; "*my husband now helps with cooking, and he takes care of the children when I attend meetings*" demonstrate evidence of changing gender norms and contributed towards reducing women's unpaid care burden by fostering shared responsibilities and promoting equitable household partnership.

Most men who changed as result of SASA! Together activism have become a staunch support system to their women, hence reducing the burden of unpaid care work for women in families which accelerates value for work, mutual understanding and respect.

Similarly, (Michau L, 2007) in a study conducted in Northern Uganda found out that increasing numbers of men participated in unpaid care work because communities increasingly viewed shared responsibilities as a sign of family progress by emphasizing the economic and social benefits of cooperation demonstrating that gradual changes in social norms can transform long-standing gender roles and balanced household responsibilities. Alluding to the above highlights, Onencan 58 years old role model family said this;

> *"SASA has brought a lot of change in our family, there is love, and joint planning and my wife is considered into decision making which used to be my role as a husband. Previously, most of the violence used to happen as a result of alcohol, I use to spend most time drinking but now I no longer drink and spend that time with my family; we are happy together; I have also become a role model in the community, and people refer to me because I have changed from my old ways".* ***(Key informant interview with Role model family on 5/12/2025)***

SASA! approach demonstrates that behavioral change in men is possible when communities collectively challenge harmful norms and promote equitable relationships. The approach mobilizes the entire community to reflect on how power is used in relationships that enhances more positive attitudes and behaviors. Community discussions encourage men to reflect on how alcohol impairs judgement, fuels aggression, increases household's conflicts that negatively affects their families, participants learn healthier ways to manage conflict, communicate with partners and cope with challenges.

Upon my arrival at the home of Onencan, I found them happy listening to radio, and I was able to interview his wife, Kawambe 49years to inquire more about how the positive change looks like for her as a wife and she said that.

> *"Indeed my husband is a changed man now from his violent ways as result of SASA intervention, violence at our home is history now, my husband has become supportive in*

doing house chores work like washing utensils, sweeping the compound among others for instance *when I am not around, I find when my husband has prepared tea for me which is unusual with men these days yet previously he would always beat me when drunk and several times I have been sleeping in the kitchen with children so that I am not beaten, we could not share bedroom even though we were married , but now he does not drink and got saved. We are happily living together*" **(KII with role model family in Oyoro village on 5th December 2025)**

From the above sharing, it clearly shows that the harmful social norms that are embedded in culture is not static and it is able to change positively to ensure women and men exercise their responsibilities effectively. As a result, SASA! Together approach targets these norms by getting whole community to discuss, question and create new norms like "violence is not acceptable" and "it's healthy for couple to make joint decisions in their family."

Men's involvement in domestic chores challenges the norm that housework is women's work only and norms are not fixed. SASA! uses community dialogue to create "critical consciousness" where people question norms and collectively agree on new ones. The couple's story serves as visible example that encourages others to change.

Michau (2007) describe SASA! Together approach as community mobilization model that engages men and women to shift norms around power, violence, and gender roles. It emphasizes the importance of visible role model families in sustaining change whereas (Jewkes & Lang, 2015) argue that men in questioning harmful masculinities and promoting equitable household roles is critical for reducing violence against women.

4.3.2 Strengthened leadership because of SASA! Activism.

Strong leadership in a community in this context means building the capacity of local leaders, cultural, religious, councilors, and community activists to actively prevent violence against women. This can help in managing cases of violence, building knowledge and confidence, and use of existing authority to create supportive structures. David a male local activist had to share this during the interview.

"Before SASA program came in, the community members used to disobey the Local leadership saying they do not know their work but when MEMPROW, a Non-Governmental Organization trained them on Gender and qualities of a good leader, they gained knowledge and started respecting and working with them closely" ***(FGD on 6th January 2026).***

SASA's Strengthened leadership has led to communities closely collaborating with leaders, local and cultural. Strengthened collective action to avert violence. This participatory leadership has increased trust between leaders and the community they served, making violence prevention a shared responsibility rather than an individual concern. Okila Geofrey, a community leader in Oyoro village, could not agree more as he explained.

"Oyoro village is one of the dangerous communities in Paidha Sub County with high rate of violence, murder and burning houses whenever conflict happens but with the strong leadership that exist now as result of SASA! The community was able to come out with by-law on prevention of violence against women that has helped to restore calmness in the community, these days whenever violence happens, we sit down as community and resolve them amicably without causing more harms" ***(FGD, 7th January 2026).***

Onegiu, a cultural leader, 68years old applauded the great achievement that SASA intervention has created and they are willing to support the community activism saying that.

"We as cultural leaders have created a favorable working environment for the activist to do their work, and they continue to reach to us for support when violence happens. We also share ideas on violence that happens in the community and how it can be managed jointly" ***(KII 13th February 2026)***

As shared, in SASA! Together approach, leadership is not just about authority but using the position to make violence prevention as a responsibility for everyone not just the activist and leaders. With this, the changes are sustained for safer development of community. Therefore, leadership needs to be strengthened through continuous mentorship, community dialogue, leaders acquire knowledge, skills, and confidence to challenge harmful gender norms, mediate family conflicts, and mobilize communities towards non-violent relationships.

This aligns with SASA! Action phase where its goal is for community itself to win and sustain leadership at all levels. Taylor (2016) described the model as community ownership and leadership at multiple levels that highlights change must be owned by the community not just implemented by outsiders.

4.3.3 Reduction of cases of violence due to awareness.

The reduction in cases of violence happens due to awareness since it changes knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors at both individual and community level, people can recognize violence they used to normalize. As shared by Ongeyuwun, a resident of Jupangali lower had this to say.

> *"Due to the awareness, community find it easier to report cases to the activist before reaching the LCs and there is reduction in the numbers of cases being reported at Community Development Officer most of the cases are handled by the activists except the severe ones that are reported to police.* ***(Ongeyuwun, community leader, on 6th January 2026)***

Kajik, a woman councilor, emphasized during the interview that.

> *"It is true that the cases of violence have reduced because this was seen during the recent Christmas celebration on 25th December 2025 at Otheko parish where we did not register case of violence yet previously we could handle around 13 cases related to domestic violence which is unusual because every season we have been experiencing violence in the community, girls were being raped but this is no longer happening as result of SASA activism. "* ***(FGD on 7th January 2026)***

The above narrative reaffirms that violence has reduced in their community and they directly attribute it to SASA activism. The voice contrasts past and present experiences highlighting a meaningful change during a high-risk period (Christmas season). The reduction in both domestic violence and rape of young girls shows that the change is not limited to one type of violence but is broader and more systemic. This shows that change is visible and the impact is not only statistical but lived and observed.

The fact that the SASA! model uses of comprehensive approach in prevention of violence is very important because involving youth, men, women, elders meant all categories can do their part to ensure a justice free community. The availability of activists within the community also played a significant role since they can be easily accessed and the service is free.

The awareness raising through SASA reduced violence by changing how communities recognize, respond to and report violence. As people stop normalizing violence, they are more likely to report early to the activist as Flood (2011) argues that awareness raising with men and communities is a necessary first step to challenge norms that normalize violence.

4.3.5 Improved confidence among community members to speak out about VAW.

"Speaking out" and "women's participation" are the greatest achievement in SASA! Together approach of the support phase and action phase. This is because it trains community activists to create safe spaces for discussion and to challenge norms that silence women and survivors of violence.

> *"From the time I got married my husband been the final decision maker, his word is final and this shuttered my confidence; even while speaking, I could not look straight in the eyes but after we were engaged in community dialogue organized by SASA activists, I learnt that as a woman, I can also make decision and that built on my confidence to speak out"* ***(FGD interview with community member on 6th/52025)***

From the information gathered, it clearly shows that improved confidence happens because norm shifts when violence is publicly named as unacceptable, survivors feel less shame and stigma and peer support is important since women hear other speak out about violence, it reduces its re-occurrence and isolation. This aligns with social norms theory that states that behavior changes when people perceive that others in their group disapprove of violence and support equality (Michau et al, 2008).

4.3.6 Improved relationship between parents and their children.

SASA! Together approach framed violence as a power issue affecting the whole household as activists often discuss how violence models behavior for children and how non-violent parenting

improves family relationship as shared by Kajik a 58years local activist and a woman councilor for people living with disability in Paidha sub county narrates.

> *"my children used to be indiscipline and they do not listen to me but when we started bringing them closer to us, they changed; now other people refer to them being the good example in the community, From my own experience, I have noticed that children can become calmer, perform better in school and are less aggressive after parents reduce household conflict*" **(FGD 6th January 2026).**

By using SASA intervention to prevent violence against women, the model has strengthened family ties, social fabrics that weave intergenerational relationships between parents and children and beyond. It also shows that couples who practice positive parenting alongside non –violence can build stronger relationships with their families. The community becomes stronger when families are working together because anger, conflict and lack of conflict management skills increase the cycle of violence.

This achievement reflects social learning theory by Bandura (1977a) noting that children learn behavior by observing their parents. When parents stop using violence and increase positive communication, children copy the same. It also shows the "spillover effect" because changing one relationship can improve others in the household.

4.3.7 Embracing alternative mechanisms to violence-free communities.

Use of alternative to violence is important strategy in addressing VAW because SASA! Together approach does not just say "stop violence." It gives concrete, culturally acceptable alternatives. Walking away, going to fetch water, talking later, involving a trusted elder, and breathing as alternative to violence. SASA model equips community members with practical non-violent alternatives for managing anger, frustration and conflict rather than reacting with aggression or physical violence. It helps individuals to recognize their emotions, pause and choose behaviors that protect relationships. Walking away from heated situations before anger escalates into violence, individuals learn that temporarily leaving an argument is not a sign of weakness but an act of self-control.

While deep breathing and emotional self-control techniques help individuals manage anger, reduce psychological signs of stress making it easier to think clearly before responding. This encourages individuals to reflect on the consequences of their actions before acting and reduce impulsive behavior that often contributes to violence.

> As shared by a participant during the KII; "*Whenever I feel incredibly angry after argument with my partner, I first sit quietly, take a deep breath, and allow myself to calm down. After that we discuss the issue peacefully instead of fighting. This technique has helped me a lot from my old violent ways of life."*

However, seeking support from trusted leaders like religious/cultural leaders, respected role model families before conflict escalates into violence since they are viewed as mediators who can guide with peaceful solutions. Instead of encouraging silence or blaming survivors, these leaders facilitate respectful dialogue and reconciliation based on respect.

This was attested to during the FDG interview with community members in Oyoro village.

> *"Before SASA! People in our community used to ignore violence and sometimes when people are fighting, no one bothers to intervene, especially those families who fight frequently, they believed it was a family issue. Now neighbours and trusted leaders' step in to help before the situation becomes worse while others now instead of fighting, they invite an elder whom they both trust to discuss the problem with peaceful solutions"* ***(FDG 7th January 2026)***

These alternatives contribute to sustainable behavior change because they replace harmful habits with appropriate actions that community members can use in their daily life. Through repeated actions, individuals learn that disagreements can be resolved without violence and men who previously responded to stress through aggression increasingly demonstrate patience, emotional control, and respectful communication. Francis, a community member, and a businessman who sell drug shop at leng- congi trading center had this to say.

> *"I used not to tolerate violence and I am always quick at reacting when something went wrong, I could even beat my wife but when I attended a session that was organized by SASA activists on alternatives to violence where they emphasized that violence is a choice that*

we can always use non-violence means to resolve conflicts, I realized that my reactions against my wife were not proper, I had to change my ways and these days I no longer beat her , instead I walk away" ***(FGD 7th January, 2026)***

Similarly, Irene 28 years local activist, married and have 4 children, added that,

"In most cases when I have a conflict with my husband, I don't respond to him because I believe keeping quiet helps in reducing the violence or sometimes I just pick my jerrycan and rush to fetch water to avoid it from escalating because I believe that by the time I return home the anger would have reduced. However, to be more honest it is hard to deal with men who drink a lot of alcohol like for the case of husband, he becomes violent whenever he is drunk" ***(FGD 6th January 2026)***

From my own perspective as a researcher, many interventions aimed at addressing VAW in the community fail because they focus on prohibition without offering alternative behaviors, SASA alternatives are practical, no cost and fit within local norms, walking away, involving elders reduces psychological barrier to change. When men publicly adopt non-violent alternatives, they model new norms for other men. Over time, this contributes to the community perception that violence is not acceptable.

This shows movement from awareness to behavior change by providing alternatives to address common barriers. I know I should not hit, but what else can I do when I am angry? this also reframes masculinity; walking away is presented as strength not weakness fitting with gender transformative approaches as stated by Jewkes R & Lang J (2015b).

4.3.8 Peer to peer mentorship strengthen the community outreach and teamwork in SASA.

SASA! Together approach relies on trained community activists to facilitate norms change around gender and addresses violence against women. However, due to various levels of education and skills among some activists, the stronger activists are paired with newer ones to mentor each other. This promotes collective learning and strengthens the activists to deliver their activities effectively. Jimmy, a farmer and new SASA! Together activists in Anyola village had this to say.

"I joined SASA! activism when my colleagues had already implemented for one year, but I am glad that for their mentorship; sometimes we could organize joint activities so that I can learn from others on how to administer activities. I also had challenges in report writing due to limited level of education but later I picked up and was able to conduct my activities effectively. As a result, I have created a lot of impact among people who are now aware of their rights and how negative use of power can influence violence in the community" ***(FGD 7th January 2026)***

From the narration above, pairing stronger activist with newer ones is a form of peer-to-peer learning. It compensates for differences in education and literacy ensuring all activists can communicate SASA! messages effectively. This also builds confidence and reduces burnout among activists. When they work jointly, their activities appear more coordinated, and it allows them to cover larger/diverse audiences hence addressing VAWG.

As Bandura (1977b) stated, the concept of observational learning and self-efficacy supports the idea that the newer activists gained confidence with experienced peers and improved on the ability to work as team, strengthen new work and maintain impact.

4.3.9 Increased participation of women in public spaces.

One of the achievements of SASA! Together approach is increased participation of women in public spaces and leadership. Beyond addressing violence, the approach has created a condition where women can exercise voice, agency, and leadership in the community. Women can move from private/domestic roles into public decision-making spaces as shared by Loice, a community activist and woman councilor elect, Paidha Sub County.

"With the mentorship that I got through SASA! activism work, I got the courage to contest for leadership position at lower level which was not the case before; previous I was Vice Chairperson LC1 but later I contested for a position of woman councilor in Paidha Sub County and I was elected. However, my journey into politics was not smooth because some male local councils were opposing my leadership skill, but I did not give up, I encourage other women to continue working hard to get what they need amidst discrimination against women that exist in the community" ***(FDG 7th January 2026)***

Alluding to women shifting into leadership position, Obedmoth; a community member added that;

> *"For the first time we have seen a woman contesting for LCI position in Anyola village, yet the position was dominated only by men, this shows women are now taking part in leadership position"* ***(FDG 7th January 2026)***

Loice expressed that capability of women to accept leadership positions at family and community level have made people to become gender sensitive, whenever there is meeting being organized, they ensure gender equality in the attendance; this has helped in participation of women in public spaces.

This indicates that SASA! Together approach have not only reduced VAW but also affirm women's leadership, promote shared responsibilities at households and advanced equal participation. This enhances the whole community shift around women's rights to participation according to Mufanebadza (2025) emphasizing how investing in faith-centered approaches to shift social norms creates lasting change for women and girls.

The testimony of a woman moving from Vice Chairperson LC1 to contesting for councilor illustrates the pathway from community-level engagement to formal political participation. This aligns with the concept of "power within" and "power with" in SASA! where women gain self-confidence and collective support to claim public roles. According to Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices. The women contesting for public offices demonstrate expanded agency enabled by norm change.

This echoes organizational and community mobilization according to L. Michau (2007) Emphasized that collective action is more effective than individual effort. Team work also reduces burnout and builds local ownership which is critical for sustaining norm change after the program ends.

4.3.10 Increased reporting of violence cases due to awareness.

As SASA! Together approaches aim to change social norms that normalize violence by engaging community members; awareness-raising activities are important because it creates more space for community, activists, leaders to critically reflect on power and gender relations, increased

knowledge on violence. This helps in shifting norms and violence become visible and reportable rather than hidden and acceptable. I have learnt from community activist in Anyola village that.

> *"The cases of violence have reduced among the couples especially those that I have interacted with closely during my free time, most people report to the activist since their service is free of charge and they are easily accessible although the case related to sexual violence are not shared openly for example, consent before sex but we have been organizing meetings that target women separately to allow them share freely"* ***(FGD interview with Samson, 42years old community activist in Anyola village on 6th January 2026)***

Similarly in another interview, Joyce, a resident of Otheko parish, first wife with seven children, a farmer and women leader in church and Bosco, a local activist in Jupangali upper talks about improved community reporting system where cases of violence are not being sat on,

> *"People are appreciating the knowledge which becomes a revelation to most of them with clear referral pathway. The community know how and where to report cases and they find it easy to reach to the activists with strong support system, even the violent couples have become change agents as result of their transformation and men have started reporting cases of violence yet previously they did not know that they are also victims" (****FGD 6th January 2026)***

The above participants' stories show that SASA! Awareness activities made violence visible and unacceptable because people change behavior when they perceive that others in their community disapproves of the behavior and support the new norms. The quote "knowledge which became an eye opener" shows that information about gender and power relations disrupted the taken-for-granted acceptance of violence.

However, the information on sexual violence, especially around consent, is still not openly shared. This indicates that while norms around physical violence are shifting faster, sexual autonomy and consent change more slowly. It is consistent with global evidence that sexual violence remains underreported due to fear, shame and issues of sexuality tend to remain private.

From the information gathered demonstrates that SASA! Together awareness raised contributed to reducing violence and increased reporting to trusted local activists and leaders. Key drivers improved knowledge on gender and power, accessibility of activist and visibility former perpetrator of violence as role models. This has implications for sustaining prevention efforts by continuing to invest in community –based activist and peer modeling.

4.3.11 Positive masculinities and male ally ship.

Positive masculinity and a male ally ship resulting from SASA! Together implementation by engaging men and boys as allies is central to this process. The information that I gathered during the interview shows how clan leaders, husbands and former perpetrators of violence shifted from supporting or perpetuating violence to actively preventing it, resolving conflicts, and taking caregiving roles. This reflects a shift from hegemonic masculinity towards more equitable, non-violent forms of manhood as Onegiu, one of the key informant interviews with cultural leaders narrates.

> *"As cultural leaders we have become supportive in ensuring a violence free community, I have witnessed this several times where community members are able to speak out against the violence while some men are able to ask for forgiveness from their partners yet it used to be hard, most men used to feel superior; " how do I ask forgiveness from a mere woman that I have married with cows? But now the story has changed.' (**KII 13th February 2026)***

This indicates cultural leaders are using their authority to publicly condemn violence, signaling a change in community norms. Men are also being engaged in conflict resolution and dialogue. This shows that they are moving beyond bystander roles to mediate and promote non-violent solutions such as Moris, community member, narrates.

> *"Recently my in-law had domestic violence with her husband, I reached out to her and we had dialogue, I also shared with them how they can become supportive to each other; they forgave each other and living happy as I talk**" (FGD 7th January 2026)***

Another community member added that.

> *"I used to be violent and unsupportive parent to my children but now I do provide for their needs and I have come to believe that VAW is not only a "woman issue"; community members are able to dialogue jointly with support of violence response team when violence*

happens using non- violent means while others continue to share their experience, transformation journey from violent ways to change others" ***(FGD on 7th January 2026)***

The excerpt provides clear evidence that SASA! Together approach has contributed to the emergence of positive masculinity and male ally ship in the community. Men can denounce violence openly as a dedicated support system since they hold much power in the community and ensure that women safe with creation of community response structures. The increased responsibility by men came out strongly where they are now able to provide for the basic need for their children like buying clothes, medication, feeding among others although there is a demonstration of male allyship in achieving violent free communities, it comes with a cost to pay on the part of ideal men due to social cultural expectations and resistance.

This relates to Connel R (1987) *theory about Gender and Power* that explains how hegemonic masculinity sustains gender inequality. The observed changes reflect a challenge to this hegemony through alternatives equitable masculinities while Jewkes R & Lang J (2015b) argues that engaging men and boys in questioning rigid gender norms is essential for addressing VAW. The quote from men is the real example for this approach. Drawing learning from this, Edley (2017) argues that masculinity is not fixed biological trait but a social construction that is learned, performed, and shaped by cultural expectations.

4.3.12 Cultural and religious leaders support violence prevention.

In SASA! Together approach, cultural and religious leaders hold significant moral authority and shape what is considered acceptable behavior. Historically some religious and cultural teachings have been misused to justify male dominance but SASA! addresses this by collaborating with leaders to interpret teachings, promote gender equality and create enabling environment for the activist to create change as Gilbert Oromirwoth, a church catechist at Oyoro church of Uganda narrates;

"At church level; a lot of achievements have been registered as result of SASA especially among Christians who were not working together as couples but now they support each other, they are able to send their children to school, others constructed permanent houses, bought land and goats; something they never thought would be possible but having a

peaceful home as result of SASA activism has made great impact. For example, Wanok and his wife are making bricks and constructing together yet they used to be violent while authoritative man who has become supportive by sharing responsibility with his wife. Moreover, during my preaching, I do include SASA activism with words of God that make it easy for the community to relate with. Severally I have given opportunity for the SASA activists to share information on preventing violence in the communities during other gathering like burials and functions" ***(KII 25th February 2026).***

By integrating SASA! messages into sermons, leaders bridge the gap between secular gender concepts and faith. This addresses a common barrier, the perception that gender equality conflicts with religion. It reframes non-violence and shared decision making as morally and spiritually desirable for example joint work, increased male caregiving show movement from rigid, authoritarian to shared responsibilities hence shifting power dynamics at households' level.

The cultural leaders have created a supportive environment for activists to conduct community activism in addressing VAW as shared by Onegiu, a male cultural leader 68 years and a resident at Jupaneka village narrates,

"We as cultural leaders have created a favorable environment for the activists to do their work, and they continue to reach to us for support when violence happens. We also give ideas on violence issues happening in the community for the activists to talk about" ***(KII 13th February 2026)***

The cultural institution is a great structure in ensuring sustainability of the change because they are influential and community believes in them. This reduces backlash and increases uptake as cited by OECD (2019) emphasizing that engaging traditional and religious leaders is critical for changing discriminatory social institutions and sustaining gender equality. While Flood (2011) argues that SASA! achievements depend on engaging diverse power holders including cultural and religious leaders to shift community norms that perpetuate violence against women and strengthen family growth.

4.4 The Challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach in addressing VAWG.

Although SASA! Together approach has demonstrated positive achievements in changing attitudes, increasing community engagement, and addressing violence against women and girls, its implementation encounters challenges that affects the pace, sustainability, and the depth change. Addressing VAWG through social norms transformation is inherently complex because violence is rooted in deeply embedded cultural beliefs, gender inequality, economic structure, and institutional systems. Consequently, Paidha sub county as community implementing SASA! Together often face barriers that influence participation, acceptance, and long-term impact. The key challenges faced by SASA! Approaches are as follows.

4.4.1 Structural and institutional constraints in SASA! Together Approach.

Limited community reach with information on preventing violence due to few numbers of SASA activists. This shows a mismatch between activist numbers and population size leaving many people without access to information on violence prevention and support attested that.

> *"In my village there are only 05 activists while the entire Otheko parish only have twenty activists operating in the 04 villages of Oyoro, Junaneka, Jupangali lower and Anyola yet the village has high population. Low coverage leading to limited reach means most of the people who face violence are left out yet there is high demand from the community including people from the neighboring villages to benefit from the SASA! activism while couples who are trying to change tend to go back to their old ways of inflicting violence and this calls for continuous support." (**KII on 6th January 2026)***

This approach relies heavily on peer-to-peer support and community mobilization, with only 05 activists per village in a high population area; the "Dose" of the intervention is too low to reach everyone. This creates a coverage gap where many at-risk households never engage with SASA! messaging limiting the potential for community wide norm shift, which is a common challenge in scaling the intervention hence affecting its effectiveness in addressing VAWG.

The SASA! Together trials according to Abramsky Devries K Kiss L et al (2024), he noted that the impact of the intervention could be stronger where there are enough activists and functional links to services. Limited coverage becomes the barrier since most people are left out.

4.4.2 Weak institutional and functional referral system.

The institution and services delivered experience limitations, for instance weak referral pathways, inadequate legal support, limited psychosocial services, and insufficient response mechanisms. These hinder survivors' access to justice and support, especially in the case of Paidha sub county where the police, local leaders, and health workers lack adequate knowledge on gender sensitive responses. This weakens survivor protection efforts to attain justice since the activists also have limited knowledge on conflict resolution as attested by Johnbosco, a community leader at Jupangali lower village.

> *"Several times we the activists are faced with challenge of referring survivors of violence to the relevant authorities like police, health facilities and local leaders since some of the cases are beyond our limit, yet they do not want to go knowing that they will be asked to pay money for the services. We were also trained on prevention of violence only but not response which means we cannot provide adequate support for conflict resolution hence some cases of violence end up dying pre-maturely"* ***(KII 6th January 2026)***

Changing norms without linking survivors to responsive services creates frustration and risk. Weak referral pathway can reinforce silence yet for effective prevention to take place, it requires both norms change and a functional response system that the Organization (2010) calls the "Ecological model" of violence prevention that stresses that interventions must address individual, relationship, community and societal levels including strengthening justice response.

4.4.3 Limited resources and sustainability implications.

"SASA! Together" entails high cost of implementation, the approach is expected to run for 3years to be able to finish all the four phases of implementation that include: Start, Awareness, Support and Action phase. This becomes challenging to achieve and sustain the change when resources are limited as Gloria, one of the KII interviewee working with Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD), a Non-Governmental Organization implementing SASA! in Zombo district narrates.

> *"From my experience, SASA! implementation requires a lot of money for training the activists, continuous monitoring, supervision, media engagement, community dialogue,*

*and monitoring processes. However, we are faced with financial constraints, staff turnover, and dependence on donor, which is not sustainable with shrinking civic space, affects completion when the funding is not enough" (**KII, 20th February 2026).***

Gloria and Gladys who supervise the activities for the local activists by attending their meetings, filling their observation forms and community change tracker shared that they always encounter high monetary expectations from the community and activists although it's a voluntary work, the activists expect some motivation in cash/in kind and incase it's not given it leads to low output, others start skipping their meetings and fail to give reports at the end of the month while community expect transport refund and some people do not attend because they will not be paid.

4.4.4 Community resistance, patriarchy, and slow social norm change.

The rigidity of community to embrace change due to persistent patriarchal norms and gender power imbalance setting of the society. This makes it hard to transform society since they are stuck in their traditional ways of handling violence cases. The social norms continue to legitimize male authority and female subordination making violence appear acceptable or a private family issue as shared by Gloria, a 30-year-old female collaborating with Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD), a Non-Governmental Organization based in Zombo District.

*"Too much time taken by the cultural leaders to understand the concept of SASA thinking that some of its information is against cultural norms, personally I have faced this with chiefs of Alur kingdom, and this will take long for them to appreciate the SASA Interventions**" (KII on 20th February 2026).***

Additionally, men hold more power, and they feel women should not be at the same level with them thinking it will make them feel less of a man in the community as shared by Alex, a community member during focus group discussion.

*"You are my wife and I have married you with bride price, how can we be at the same level? I deserve to exercise all my power as the man of this house. Even long ago during the time of our grandfathers before this thing of women empowerment came in, women used to act on authority of their husbands" **(FGD 7th January 2026)***

While youth continue to be disengaged from the SASA! Together intervention they have negative mindset towards the program, they are not heavily involved, yet they are the main perpetrator of violence in the community, they also feel that the SASA! Intervention is stopping them to exercise their power as men; Oyirwoth, a community member from Jupangali upper during focus group discussion; shared this.

> *"SASA is a waste of time, what is wrong with disciplining my own wife? As a man, I oversee the family and when something wrong is happening at my home I have all the rights to talk" (**FGD**,* **a community member from Jupangali upper on 7th January 2026)**

The resistance emerges strongly when discussing question related to gender roles, male dominance, and cultural practices. Some men perceive empowerment initiatives for women as threats to their authority leading to backlash and reluctance to participate. The cultural norms around gender and family hierarchy restrict open discussion and help seeking as Priska, a female local activist aged 28 a resident of Anyola village, Otheko parish shared her experience during community meeting, noting that.

> *"I have noticed that during joint community meetings, women tend not to participate actively especially when they are attending together with men while elders do not feel comfortable to share the violence they are facing during meeting when their daughter in-law is also around due to cultural values. Whenever a question is asked for discussions, men usually dominate the discussion, and women shy away more so when handling topics related to sexual violence**" (Mixed FGD 6th January 2026).***

From the evidence above, it clearly shows the discomfort of women and elders in a mixed-gender setting even when the spaces exist, the cultural norms dictate who speaks and what to say. Although "SASA! Together approach" have tried to address this through single-sex group meeting on sensitive topics related to sex, the barriers still exist. This reflects the concept of "Patriarchal bargain" that women and elders may avoid challenging norms publicly to maintain social standing according to Kandiyoti (1988)

4.5 The effectiveness of SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women and girls in Paidha subcounty, Zombo district.

The two strategies (local activist and community leaders) used under this approach has created high impact through social norm change and belief where people are free to speak about violence openly and it's a collective effort to address violence. Its major strength is its ability to connect individual behavioral change with relationship transformation and community wide social norm change as argue by Radical feminist that violence against women and girls are not simply an individual behavioral problem but is connected to patriarchy, male dominance and unequal power relation between men and women.

However, there is need to institutionalize SASA! Together approach by engaging police, health, government, development partner among others. This will strengthen collaboration and referral system when violence happens and improves on the circle of influence.

In conclusion SASA! Together approach is more than a violence awareness programme, it is a transformative mobilization approach that has contributed to challenge the power relation.

Additionally, the study has shown that a lot of achievements has been registered as result of "SASA!" intervention which includes; improved community social norms change through peer modeling, strengthened leadership, reduction if cases of violence due to awareness, embracing alternative mechanisms to violence-free community; it has created a space for women to feel free, resonate and share their stories that cause more connection with others. Some couples were able to identify root causes of violence and resolved, some broken marriages were restored; "*As I am talking now; my marriage almost failed due to violence but I am happy to say that the situation is calmed*"; shared by a female community member.

However, the challenges still exist in achieving its effectiveness that include structural and institutional constraints, limited resources and sustainability implications, community resistance, patriarchy and slow social norm change.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.

5.1 Introduction.

This chapter presents the summary, recommendation and conclusion of the major findings obtained from the field that can inform policy makers along the planning processes with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of SASA! Together approach in preventing violence against women and girls in Paidha sub county, Zombo district. The chapter also presents area that can be focused on for further research.

The focus of this study was to assess the effectiveness of "SASA! Together Approach" in addressing violence against women and girls in Paidha sub county, Zombo district. To fulfil this objective, the research asked several questions to which participants responded. The study has shown various interventions under "SASA! Together Approach" in addressing Violence against Women and Girls and these includes community activism and mobilization, engaging local leaders (cultural and religious), use of media and communication materials, violence response team and referral linkages, sport Art, music, and drama

5.2 Summary of study findings

Community dialogue and Reflection activities as intervention of SASA! Together approach.

The study found that community dialogue and reflective activities are central to the success of the SASA! Together Approach. Regular community discussions, storytelling, and guided reflection enabled women and men to critically examine unequal power relations, improve communication within families, and collectively reject violence as an acceptable way of resolving conflict. These participatory processes strengthened trust, accountability, and community ownership of violence prevention initiatives.

The research further showed that reflective discussions enabled men to reconsider notions of male dominance and encouraged women to gain confidence in expressing their views while the community activists reported that regular dialogues create trust and openness making violence less acceptable within communities.

The intervention's participatory nature also strengthened community ownership and sustainability of the change through the repeated discussions, individuals began questioning beliefs that normalized male control and violence. Instead of externally imposed solutions, communities became active agents in identifying harmful practices and promoting healthier relationships.

Violence is no longer an individual issue.

The findings further revealed that the SASA! Together Approach has transformed perceptions of violence against women from being viewed as a private family matter to a community concern requiring collective responsibility. Community members, leaders, and activists increasingly recognize their shared responsibility in preventing violence, supporting survivors, and challenging harmful social norms. This collective action has reduced the culture of silence surrounding gender-based violence.

Furthermore, the involvement of respected leaders and peers enhanced trust and legitimacy of the intervention since community members are more likely to engage with messages delivered by individuals they knew and respect within their own social structures.

Use of media and communication materials.

The study also established that media and communication materials, including posters, discussion cards, radio messages, storytelling tools, and locally translated information, enhanced awareness and community participation. The use of local languages improved understanding of concepts such as gender equality, power, consent, and non-violence while making the intervention culturally appropriate and accessible. Nevertheless, literacy challenges and unequal access to media remain barriers that require continued attention.

Use of sport, Art, music, dance, and drama in activism.

The findings further indicate that sports, music, dance, drama, and other artistic activities provide effective platforms for engaging men, women, and young people who may not participate in formal discussions. These creative approaches promoted emotional learning, stimulated dialogue, encouraged empathy, and strengthened youth participation in promoting gender equality and peaceful relationships.

SASA models provide platforms for youth and encourages them to actively participate in planning, implementation and evaluating community activities. Their voices help shape interventions that reflect their realities and priorities since they are trained as community activists, champion for gender equality that build their leadership, facilitation, communication, and advocacy skills. By bringing youth, parents, religious leaders, cultural leaders, and local authorities build intergenerational dialogue that bridges the gap and improves youth participation in promoting gender transformation agenda.

Improved community social norm changes.

Furthermore, the findings show that the SASA! Together Approach contributed to positive social norm change through peer role modeling. Men increasingly shared unpaid care responsibilities such as cooking, childcare, and household work, reducing women's unpaid care burden and strengthening family relationships based on mutual respect and partnership.

Traditionally, many patriarchal societies, women are expected to perform unpaid care work such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, among others. These responsibilities often consume several hours each day limiting women's opportunities to education, income generation "*my husband now helps with cooking, and he takes care if the children when I attend meetings*" demonstrate evidence of changing gender norms and contributed towards reducing women's unpaid care burden by fostering shared responsibilities and promoting equitable household partnership.

Most men who changed as a result of SASA! Together activism have become a strong support system to their women, hence reducing the burden of unpaid care work for women in families which accelerates value for work, mutual understanding, and respect.

Embracing alternative mechanisms to violence-free communities.

The study further established that peer-to-peer mentorship among community activists strengthened teamwork, improved facilitation skills, and enhanced the quality and consistency of community outreach activities.

Walking away, going to fetch water, talking later, involving a trusted elder, and breathing as alternative to violence

Finally, the study found out that promoting practical alternatives to violence including walking away from conflict, deep breathing, talking after emotions have settled, involving trusted elders, and using respectful communication equipped individuals with practical skills for managing conflict peacefully. These alternatives contributed to long-term behavior change by replacing violent responses with constructive conflict resolution strategies.

5.3 Study Recommendations

Based on the study findings, data interpretation and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Organizations implementing the SASA! Together Approach should continue investing in regular community dialogue and reflective learning activities because they promote critical thinking, strengthen community ownership, and sustain long-term social norm change.
- Youth should be deliberately involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of violence prevention interventions by strengthening youth leadership, peer education, and community activism since they understand their problem better and involving women helps in building strong leadership skills for them to participate in decision making and presents issues that affect them. This also strengthen sustainability because when a woman is married in a community, they tend to stay longer while tending to shift in search for livelihood.
- Strengthened engagement with cultural and religious leaders to challenge the harmful social norms that perpetuate violence by involving men, women and youth.
- Government to institutionalize SASA! Together, Approach it into existing gender, community development, and local governance structures including health facilities.

5.4 Areas for further Research

- Based on the findings of this study there is need to enhance long-term sustainability of behavioral change through the SASA! Together Approach and explore its effectiveness in different geographical and cultural contexts within Uganda.
- Impact of SASA! on different age groups. While the study highlighted youth participation, further studies should compare how the “SASA! Approach” influence adolescents, youth,

and older community members differently particularly regarding attitudes toward gender equality, non-violence, and gender programing.

- How SASA! contributes to the development of positive masculinities and enhances alternative mechanisms to violence and mental health.
- Digital and social media adaptation of SASA! as technology use increases, future research should examine the potential of digital platforms, mobile phones and social media in expanding SASA! messages while minimizing misinformation and exclusion.

5.5 Conclusion

The study concludes that the "SASA! Together Approach" is an effective community mobilization model for preventing violence against women by addressing the underlying social norms, gender inequalities, and power imbalances that sustain violence. Rather than focusing only on individual behavior change, the approach successfully promotes collective responsibility by engaging community members, local leaders, cultural and religious institutions, youth, and families in preventing violence.

The findings demonstrate that sustained community dialogue, reflection, creative communication strategies, leadership strengthening, peer mentorship, and practical non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to lasting changes in attitudes and behaviors. The approach has strengthened relationships within families, increased shared household responsibilities, improved communication between couples, empowered women to participate in decision-making, and encouraged men to adopt more respectful and supportive behaviors.

Overall, the "SASA! Together Approach" has shown that sustainable prevention of violence against women is achievable when communities are empowered to question harmful gender norms, promote positive use of power, and collectively take ownership of creating safer, more equitable, and violence-free communities.

The study also established the challenges faced by SASA! Together Approach in addressing VAW in Otheko parish, Paidha sub county were revealing because insufficient coverage, weak institutional response system, cultural barriers and resistance, limited resources among others affect the impact of the interventions and addressing them needs increasing number of activists,

strengthened referral pathways, and gender sensitive training for the service providers to ensure women are safe.

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APPENDICES

Research Tools

Appendix 1: Key Informant Interview Guide

(cultural/religious leaders, Role model family, CSOs implementing SASA! Together Approach).

Date of Interview _____Gender _____Location_____

Age _____Marital status_____ Level of education_____

Introduction.

"Hello, my name is Kayom Sunday, I am a student from Makerere University conducting academic research on SASA! Together approach. If you do not mind, I would like to ask you a few questions about your thoughts on the effectiveness of SASA! Approach in addressing violence against women and girls in our community.

This should not take much of your time, and you can choose to stop the interview at any time or to skip any questions if you would like. Your responses are confidential, and your name will not be written down. We will use the information to improve on the intervention in addressing VAWG in this community and beyond".

Before we begin, I would like to ask for your permission to continue. Do I have your consent to proceed with the interview? (***Wait for the respondent's consent before proceeding.***). Thank you very much for your willingness to participate.

THEME 1: **Various SASA interventions in addressing VAWG.**

1- *To what extent does the SASA approach contribute to the long-term end of VAWG-(**Role model family, cultural & religious leaders)**.*
2- *What are some of the interventions used by CSOs implementing SASA! Together Approach? **(CSO)***

THEME 2: Achievements of SASA in addressing VAWGs.

3- *What do you think are the biggest achievements of SASA! Approach in your community? Have cases of violence reduced?* ***All***
4- *Are people reporting due to awareness? All*

Sub-theme: Community action and achievement-

5- *What actions have community members taken to prevent violence since SASA started?* ***All.***
6- *How have the cultural and religious leaders supported SASA activities? (****Cultural and Religious leaders****)*

THEME3: The challenges faced by SASA! Together approach in addressing VAWG.

7- *Where has the SASA Approach fallen short in terms of effectiveness? What do you think contributed to those challenges?* ***All***
8- *What recommendations would you propose to improve the SASA approach?* ***All***

Thank you once again

Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

(Local Activist, Community leaders, community members-women & men).

Date of Interview _____Gender _____Location_____

Age _____Marital status_____ Level of education_____

Introduction.

"Hello, my name is Kayom Sunday, I am a student from Makerere University conducting academic research on "SASA! Together approach". If you do not mind, I would like to ask you a few questions about your thoughts on the effectiveness of SASA! Approach in addressing violence against women and girls in our community.

This should not take much of your time, and you can choose to stop the interview at any time or to skip any questions if you would like. Your responses are confidential, and your name will not be written down. We will use the information to improve on the intervention in addressing VAWG in this community and beyond".

Before we begin, I would like to ask for your permission to continue. Do I have your consent to proceed with the interview? (***Wait for the respondent's consent before proceeding.***). Thank you very much for your willingness to participate.

THEME 1: Various SASA interventions in addressing VAWG. (for local activists and community leaders only)

1. What are the interventions under SASA! Together Approach?
2. What are the various interventions used in SASA! Together approach to address VAWG in Paidha Sub County?

THEME 2: Achievements of SASA in addressing VAWGs. - (for All)

3. What milestones have been registered by different SASA interventions in addressing VAWG?

Sub-theme: Changes in behavior and relationship. (women &men)

4. Have you seen changes in how couples resolve conflicts or improved relationships since SASA began?

Sub-theme: Community action and achievement- (for All)

5. What actions have community members taken to prevent violence since SASA started?

THEME 3: The challenges faced by the SASA! Together approach in addressing VAWG. (for All)

6. What are the challenges faced by SASA! Together approach in addressing violence against women (VAWG)?
7. What recommendations would you propose to improve the SASA approach?

Thank you