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Community Mobilization: Preventing Partner Violence by Changing Social Norms

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Introduction

In the last decade, the prevention of violence against women (VAW) has become a global priority (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Among the three types of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary¹, primary prevention is the least common yet may hold the most potential for impacting rates of partner violence (Heise, 2011). The growing recognition of the far-reaching negative consequences of violence against women (Ellsberg, et al., 2008; World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010) is spurring the development of diverse frameworks, models and strategies in primary prevention. These primary prevention efforts have been categorized into three types: awareness raising, small group work, and edutainment (Heise, 2011). However, extensive activity on the ground has, at times, resulted in generalized and diluted understandings of some of the approaches being utilized—limiting opportunities for collaborative learning and the development of promising practices. This is particularly the case for the type of primary prevention known as community mobilization.

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

¹ **Primary** prevention approaches are those that aim to prevent violence before it happens. **Secondary** approaches address the immediate responses to violence, such as the treatment for STIs for a rape survivor. **Tertiary** prevention approaches are those that involve the long-term care, such as rehabilitation and reintegration or reduce long-term disability caused by violence (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002).

A growing body of research exists explaining the factors, which contribute to violence against women. These factors are commonly organized through an ecological model’s four levels: individual, relationship, community, and society (Heise, 1998; World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). Globally, violence against women prevention efforts most commonly address individual and relationship causes or contributing factors through awareness raising and small-group work and many have been proven effective (Jewkes, et al., 2008; Kim, et al., 2007; Pulerwitz, et al., 2010; Verma, et al., 2008). However, increasingly, efforts aimed at societal-level factors, such as social norms which uphold gender inequality, are emerging using mass media edutainment and also demonstrating success (CMS Communication, 2011; Solorzano, et al., 2008; Usdin, Scheepers, Goldstein, & Japhet, 2005). Some of these approaches have a community-level component that is at times labeled as community mobilization. However, this paper explores community mobilization as a distinct and comprehensive approach in primary prevention. Community mobilization is a complex and strategic intertwining of awareness raising, small-group work, edutainment and more, which works to enable community members as leaders in changing entrenched social norms.

Community mobilization is...	Community Mobilization is not...
systematic and long-term programming	ad hoc, one-off activities in short-term projects
fostering alternative social norms	transferring information and facts
complex and multi-faceted	a singular strategy
a struggle for social justice	a technical quick-fix
about fostering activism	about implementing activities or training
involving a critical mass of individuals, groups and institutions	possible with few individuals or groups
stimulating critical thinking	transmitting simple messages
holistic and inclusive	limited to specific individuals or groups
benefits-based	punitive
focused on core drivers	focused on manifestations of violence
iterative and organic	linear and predictable
Community-led	organization or expert focused

Community mobilization is a unique, long-term approach aiming to break new ground in primary prevention. As the field of primary prevention continues to develop, clarity in the language and conception of community mobilization can be a catalyst for evolving program design, implementation and monitoring—while increasing the tangible outcomes emerging within communities.

This paper outlines the distinguishing qualities of community mobilization—particularly in the primary prevention of partner violence. Specifically, it examines the indispensable functions of *process*, *structure* and *content* when designing and implementing authentic community mobilization, and how each function draws upon public health and social justice frameworks. This paper goes on to discuss the monitoring and evaluation of community mobilization efforts, as well as key elements for success and typical challenges. Finally, the paper offers recommendations for further developing this important area of primary prevention.

Community Mobilization Overview

Community mobilization to prevent partner violence is a highly systematic approach that involves all levels of a community over an extended period of time. It requires engaging, inspiring and supporting a diverse range of community members, groups and institutions. Community mobilization elicits critical thinking, develops skills and inspires action to replace negative norms perpetuating violence against women with positive norms supporting safety, non-violence and the dignity of women and men.

Integrating Paradigms of Prevention

Community mobilization is a primary prevention approach: primary because it aims to stop violence before it starts; and, prevention because it is a *systematic* process that promotes healthy environments and behaviors and reduces the likelihood or frequency of an incident, condition or injury (Cohen & Chehimi, 2010). Secondary prevention is also present within quality community mobilization programming, although to a lesser extent, when the issues of power and violence are made more public in a community and women experiencing violence reach out for support. Thus, an ethical community mobilization program needs to have mechanisms of support and referrals in place to assist women who have been and are experiencing violence. In addition, in a quality community mobilization approach, tertiary prevention may emerge. For example, as a result of working with a hospital, the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis to survivors of rape may become institutionalized. Yet fundamentally, community mobilization is a primary prevention approach that aims to shift social norms that condone and perpetuate partner violence.

Integrating Public Health and Social Justice

Quality community mobilization fuses elements of public health and social justice. The field of public health provides key technical guidance and components which are essential to the success of the community mobilization. Public health's focus on a well-defined process of behavior change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) and use of the ecological model offer the frameworks for systematically organizing the potentially unwieldy undertaking of community mobilization. Similarly, a social justice paradigm provides an essential framework for engaging in community mobilization for the prevention of partner violence. Fundamentally, partner violence is about injustice, a striving for equality, rights and the dignity of women and men. It is an extremely personal issue which connects to the core of who we are and what we believe. Working to prevent violence against women without a social justice frame quickly devolves into an impersonal, technical quick fix or packaging information into simple messages. Efforts devoid of a social justice lens become short-term projects rather than sustained movements, enacted by individuals who are personally invested in bringing about a change in her/his community. Therefore, community mobilization approaches that are technically strong from a public health perspective, yet lack a social justice framework, will fall short. The integration of public health and social justice may not come naturally to either disciplines, yet for partner violence prevention it is a potent and indispensable mix ensuring the effective process, structure and content of this complex approach.

The Role of *Process, Structure, and Content* in Community Mobilization

Partner violence is a complex phenomenon arising from deep-seated norms. It is perpetuated over generations with multiple influences at play (WHO/LSHTM, 2010). Thus, when striving to prevent partner violence, using a linear, single-strategy approach is unlikely to yield lasting results. Rather, an approach that mirrors the qualities of the phenomenon becomes essential. A community mobilization approach recognizes complexity, multiple pressures and how experiences at all levels in the social ecology of a community are influencing attitudes and behaviors underpinning the problem. A community mobilization approach recognizes that social norms do not change easily or quickly, and that change is preceded by holistic, comprehensive and sustained efforts.

However, complexity does not imply chaos. From its outset and over its long-term engagement, quality community mobilization—like communities themselves—embodies qualities that give meaning and order to its complexity. They are as follows:

Process

Community mobilization follows an intentional process based on a theoretical understanding of how change happens.

Structure

Community mobilization uses a multi-faceted structure, in which diverse strategies are employed simultaneously to engage a critical mass from the community.

Content

Community mobilization uses consistently communicated ideas that form the underlying analysis and discourse connecting all activities.

Process

Community mobilization follows an intentional process based on a theoretical understanding of how change happens.

Public health practitioners emphasize that prevention is a *systematic* process, and commonly speak to this idea using the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) which describes the five steps that individuals—and therefore populations—typically go through while making change.² In community mobilization efforts this model provides a robust framework needed to give meaning, order and deliberate steps to what otherwise would be an unwieldy undertaking.

When addressing the prevention of partner violence, community mobilization reaches beyond individual-level outcomes and strives to achieve change in the social norms of the general population. Without deliberately identifying how change occurs programs may miss out on critical thinking, promote action before understanding, or become locked in cycles of chronic

² The five stages of the Transtheoretical Model (commonly referred to as the Stages of Change model) are pre-contemplation, contemplation, and preparation for action and maintenance.

awareness raising. Working in a world of ever-evolving theoretical frameworks, it is less relevant which theory of change guides a community mobilization initiative. However, it is essential that the theory used addresses, or is adapted to address, a social-level context. The distinctively long-term, holistic and sustained nature of community mobilization requires such a meaningful roadmap to track its extended and sometimes unpredictable trajectory. Although the process of change is iterative and varies by community, this process can be facilitated through a theoretically-driven approach that relies on thoughtful planning and monitoring of community change.

Just as public health has inspired community mobilization's use of a theoretical process of change, social justice work has demonstrated that a process of change only comes to life by way of people—regular women, men and youth living and working in a community. While it is the role of an organization to guide a logical process, it is community members who will animate it. This process requires an investment in time, relationship building and meaningful participation. Within the typology of participation (Pimbert & Pretty, 1994), community mobilization programs may start out with functional or interactive participation but will need to evolve into self-mobilization—community members initiating and defining their own participation in the process.

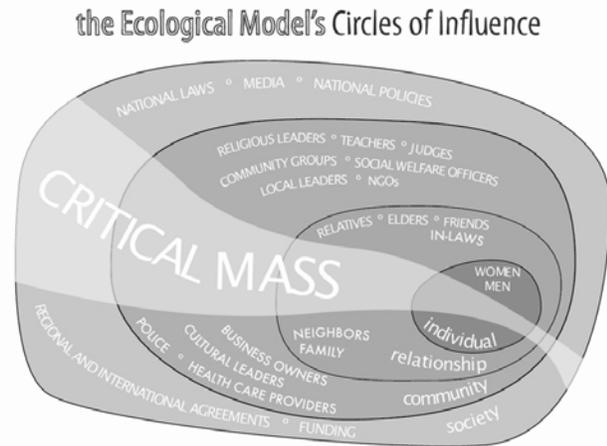
Social norm change can only come about if community members spearhead efforts, inspiring one another through courage, negotiation, listening and action. It requires clarity and long-term visioning from organizations, coupled with sustained commitment from those community members who take up the work as their personal mission. Community mobilization for preventing partner violence, in particular, requires a reorientation of how organizations view, treat and partner with communities. Authentic collaboration with communities can be a struggle for organizations that are used to being in the role of expert. In a quality community mobilization approach, communities are no longer the implementers, but are engaged as people first, leading the process with their own strengths, struggles, and ideas.

Structure

Community mobilization uses a multi-faceted structure, in which diverse strategies are employed simultaneously to engage a critical mass from the community.

Communities can be large and diffuse, both geographically and demographically—posing the challenge of how to structure the involvement and engagement of an entire community. In public health, when needing to consider all parts of a community, practitioners frequently draw on the Ecological Model (Heise, 1998), which outlines a community's "spheres of influence"—from individual community members and leaders, to the institutions they rely on (health, governance, security, education), to the bodies that influence policy or social climate (media, law makers, donors, etc.). An ecological perspective demonstrates how the different levels of a society (individual, relationship, community, society) interact with and influence one another over time with individuals changing their environment and the environment changing individuals. Belief in this synergy and interdependence distinguishes community mobilization from other singular approaches.

When designing community mobilization efforts, these spheres of influence provide a theoretically-grounded structure that ensures every layer in the social ecology of a community is reached. A simple mapping exercise based on this model helps to identify key individuals, groups and institutions that will be important to involve. By reaching within and stretching throughout these layers, community mobilization engages sufficient numbers of people to make a significant influence typically referred to as *critical mass*.



Reaching all layers of a community requires that male and female community members are equally involved. Community activists engage people within their everyday lives, which means that men typically reach out to men, and women to women, yet many activities also happen with mixed groups. However the work evolves, a community mobilization approach requires that organizations involve women and men equally, consistently and with similar ideas, so VAW programming does not perpetuate the inequalities it is working to dismantle. Men, and male engagement, are critical to a quality social norm change approach, and it is essential that the language and understanding that surround community mobilization reflect the inclusive nature of this work.

While public health has provided a structure for reaching all levels of a community, social justice has demonstrated that multiple strategies are required to populate such a structure. Numerous individuals, groups and institutions cannot be reached in the same way. One strategy is insufficient in capturing the imagination and interest of diverse constituents. Instead, a variety of strategies must be used consistently and over time. The use of distinct strategies allows organizations to organize the myriad of activities needed to engage community members with sufficient intensity. Often one organization cannot implement all strategies, and in turn collaborates with other organizations and institutions—delineating roles based on expertise.

Ideas in Action: Strategies for Community Mobilization

Community mobilization uses multiple strategies to reach diverse individuals, groups and institutions across the ecological model. Activities are categorized within various strategies. Common strategies used in community mobilization include:

- **Local Activism:** grassroots initiatives that engage family, friends and neighbors. Activities include drama, quick chats, door-to-door discussions, community conversations, public events, etc.

- **Media:** influencing public perceptions through traditional, popular and new media. Activities include soap operas, films, newspaper articles and comics, radio programs, television, etc.
 - **Advocacy:** influencing local, national or international leaders. Activities include one-on-one meetings, petitions, policy analysis, lobbying, etc.
 - **Communication materials:** using art, graphics and images to illustrate ideas. Activities include posters, comics, games, murals, flyers, picture cards, etc.
 - **Training:** interactive group sessions to explore issues in depth. Activities include workshops, seminars, teach-ins, mentoring, etc.
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While structure and relevant strategies provide a framework for engaging communities, social justice movements and social change cannot happen from program activities alone. Social change is not a program that can be implemented, it is a process of inspiring and facilitating activism. Activism is what a person does when she or he feels compelled to speak out or act based on her/his values and belief systems. Activism cannot be mandated by an NGO or any external motivation; it does not come about through provision of information. Although gaining knowledge is important in inspiring activism, it is only the first step in a longer process of changing attitudes, strengthening skills and fostering action. Activism emerges when individuals internalize the value of justice which undergirds violence prevention efforts. The internal motivation required for quality community mobilization makes it an intensely personal process by which community members themselves take up this struggle as their own and make a more just community part of their personal mission. Activism can happen in program activities, but more frequently it occurs during informal day-to-day interactions and relationships where community members do not simply teach about a topic but live with new values that inspire, challenge and influence others. Inspiring activism is required to change norms people have held for generations—outliving any project cycle.

Content

Community mobilization uses consistently communicated ideas that form the underlying analysis and discourse connecting all activities.

Public health approaches are built on empirical evidence of risk factors (or drivers). The Ecological Model (Heise, 1998) illustrates the multitude of individual, relationship, community and societal risk factors contributing to violence. A quality community mobilization approach reviews the evidence, identifies the risk factors, and then becomes intimately conversant with the context-specific factors in their community to craft meaningful, locally appropriate and relevant content. While various risk factors must be considered and included, a fundamental driver of violence against women -- found in communities throughout the world -- is patriarchy and its manifestation in the social norms and institutions that uphold unequal gender roles, male authority, women's lack of power and autonomy (World Health Organization, 2002).

Social norms are the beliefs, values and behaviors that are considered 'normal' or 'right' in a community. They act as the unwritten rules that guide how people ought to live. In order to achieve a reduction in violence against women, negative social norms that perpetuate and

condone violence must be replaced by positive social norms that support non-violence, dignity and the rights of women. There are two types of norms: injunctive norms which describe how people ought to behave, and descriptive norms which describe what people actually do and believe. Addressing injunctive norms is more effective in achieving social norm change (Heise, 2011; Paluck, Ball, Poynton, & Sieloff, May 2010). For example, rather than using a descriptive norm such as ‘men use violence against women’, it would be more effective to use an injunctive norm such as ‘non-violent relationships are happier and healthier.’ Often in programming there is a focus on the problem, yet in order for change to happen people must have hope and aspire to something different -- not just commiserate on the negative.

While public health practice has reinforced the need to develop evidence-based content about locally relevant risk factors, particularly those embedded in social norms, social justice movements have demonstrated that norms are unlikely to change with basic information. Most people know violence happens and that it is harmful. The real effort is needed in helping people connect with the core drivers of power, patriarchy and injustice in a personal and impactful way. Language and framing become critical. Jargon and ‘development speak’ means very little to women, men and youth living in communities. The challenge for organizations is to transform the jargon into ideas, examples and concepts relevant, accessible, and provocative to community members – all while emphasizing the positive aspects of new norms and the belief that change is possible and beneficial.

Creating provocative yet appropriate content has long been the art of social justice movements. It requires knowing from the outset the key norms deemed essential for facilitating change, and then maintaining that clarity and focus when making complex concepts of how norms manifest accessible to a larger audience. The chart below illustrates critical norms needed to shift in primary prevention of partner violence (Adapted from Parks, Cohen and Kravitz-Wirtz (January 2007)).

	Existing Negative Norms	Alternative Beneficial Norms
Gender Roles	Women are expected to be weak and submissive and men are expected to be tough and in control.	Women and men are able to express themselves fully. The whole range of human emotions and roles are available for all people, regardless of sex
Power	Men can use their power over women.	Women and men both have power. Neither sex has power over the other. Power is shared in relationships, families and the community.
Silence	Individuals and the community are usually silent about men’s use of power over women.	Silence about men’s use of power and violence is broken. Violence in a relationship between a woman and man is no longer seen as private.
Violence	Abuse and aggression is tolerated and the victim is blamed.	Violence is unacceptable and those who choose violence are held accountable.

Community mobilization to prevent partner violence is a revolutionary process designed to shift not only individuals' experiences but to create a more just community for all. This social justice foundation plays a critical role in maintaining a focus on the core drivers through provocative content strong enough to propel personal reflection, critical dialogue and action.

Ideas in Action: SASA!

SASA! is a community mobilization approach designed by Raising Voices to prevent violence against women and HIV. SASA! means ‘now’ in Kiswahili and is also an acronym for the four phases of community mobilization: Start, Awareness, Support, and Action. These four phases follow the Transtheoretical Model’s (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) stages of change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, and action. Organizations typically initiate engagement in communities beginning with identifying community activists who are women and men of all ages who spearhead efforts in the community. They engage single and mixed sex groups in informal, everyday activism to question harmful norms, discuss the benefits of non-violence and balanced power and support positive change.

Process	Structure	Content
<i>Phases of SASA!</i>	<i>Strategies reaching diverse individuals, groups, institutions</i>	<i>The framework of power adapted for SASA!</i>
Start	Local Activism women, men, youth at community level as individuals and in existing groups	fostering the power within staff and activists to address violence against women and HIV/AIDS
Awareness	Media and Advocacy local government leaders, journalists, traditional marriage counselors, ministry officials, cultural and religious leaders	raising awareness about men’s use of power over women and how the community’s silence about this power imbalance perpetuates violence against women
Support	Communication Materials women, men, youth, leaders, groups, health care providers, police, local courts	supporting women experiencing violence, men committed to change, and activists speaking out on these issues by joining their power with others
Action	Training community activists, couples, leaders of organized groups, local cultural and government leaders, police, health care providers, religious leaders	enabling women and men to use their power to take action to prevent violence against women and HIV/AIDS, and make these actions part of everyday life and institutions’ policies and practices

Monitoring and Evaluation

Community-wide changes—particularly in social norms—are inherently difficult to measure, and those measurements that do exist can be challenging to attribute to specific areas of programming. A persistent critique of VAW prevention work, and particularly community

mobilization efforts, is the lack of accountability and measurable outcomes. The reasons for this include the following: a) primary prevention for violence against women is a new and emerging field—there is still substantial learning required in both programming and monitoring; b) there are very few methods or tools for tracking change of this kind; c) activist organizations often find monitoring and evaluation (M&E) difficult and lack ‘technical skills’ for operations research; d) social norm change work is inherently broad and diffuse; and, e) there is disproportionate focus on the ultimate aim of reductions in violence rather than on the milestones along the pathway of prevention.

The recent push for evidence-based programming (Gender & Development Network, March 2012) has resulted in cluster randomized trials being used to measure community mobilization approaches, and there is uncertainty if using this method is suitable (Engelhardt, Robinson, & Kangas, March 2012). In addition to being resource-intensive and highly technical, these trials may not necessarily capture the complexity of community-based change. There is a pressing need for alternative tools that non-research organizations can meaningfully use in their day-to-day programming to monitor the quality of process and assess the impact of efforts. Community mobilization M&E tools need to be simple yet solid, user-friendly, recognizing the typical capacity of activist organizations to collect, use, and analyze data. In addition, these new tools need to decrease an organization’s reliance on narratives to evaluate their efforts and create the capacity to *quantify* the quality of programming, individual experiences and community change. Herein lies an opportunity for activist organizations and research institutes to collaborate for further growth in this area.

Despite the recent experimentation with cluster-randomized trials, typical monitoring of community mobilization approaches includes simply tracking the number of activities conducted and people reached. These numbers are important, yet the field must move beyond this if there is recognition of the necessity of ethical programming that consistently tracks positive and negative implications of programming, and if donors, governments and policy makers are going to invest in community mobilization work. Although challenging, effective monitoring is especially important for long-term approaches. In addition to increasing accountability and measurable outcomes, it allows for ‘real-time’ adjustments in program design, decreases staff burnout, and motivates staff and community activists. That said, while strengthening the evidence of outcomes from community mobilization is paramount, slow and steady progress needs to be an understood consequence of the quality of the work. Social norm change takes considerable time, so while achieving impact outcomes is important, it cannot be expected to happen within short time frames.

Evaluating the impact of community mobilization efforts also has its challenges, but is important in helping understand if, how much, and how social change happened. When initiating a community mobilization approach, planning the evaluation in advance of programming can be helpful. The evaluation planning process can provide a useful forum for discussing what social norm changes a program aims to achieve and how those changes may happen (structure, process, and content). An effective evaluation of a community mobilization approach may utilize multiple approaches, including qualitative methods, to assess the multiple strategies working with different parts of the community. Achieving real change in social norms and behaviors takes considerable time; it cannot be expected to happen within short time frames. Thus,

evaluation efforts are most effective when taking the long-term nature of community mobilization into consideration and using results for learning how to strengthen processes rather than assuming failure when significant changes do not happen over a short time period.

Ideas in Action: The Outcome Tracking Tool

The Outcome Tracking Tool aims to monitor community level change in knowledge, attitude, skills and behavior. It is one of several tools being developed and tested by Raising Voices in an effort to raise the quality of programming and accountability of community mobilization.

Methodology

It allows staff to observe systematically sampled activities and rank knowledge, attitude, skills, and behavior indicators along a scale of 1-5. On a monthly basis, these numerical results are entered into a simple Access database screen and analyzed giving an indication of how/if the community is shifting in critical areas.

Outcomes

These data provide insight into *how* an organization is doing rather than just *what* they are doing. It allows staff and activists to make informed programming decisions including where more emphasis is needed, if the ideas are being received in the way intended, what issues require more time or different tactics, and when to move on to another phase. Although not a perfect measure, it is a start. There are challenges in bias of staff as well as community members who participate in the activities. It also only captures planned activities not more informal activism, and it requires senior level staff familiar with partner violence programming who are able to think abstractly and process information quickly. The results learned from this tool are corroborated with that of other process and impact measures (e.g., Activity Report Forms, Rapid Assessment Surveys, etc).

Elements of Success

Clear process, structure and content, plus an ongoing monitoring system, are the building blocks of community mobilization. The following factors become the elements that sustain a quality community mobilization approach:

- **Grounding in the community.** When using a community mobilization approach, those organizations and groups located in and connected to the community they are working with are more likely to be effective. This grounding allows for closer support and monitoring of activities, increased responsiveness when issues and challenges arise, and more opportunities for deepening trust and connection through relationship building. Proximity and intimate involvement demonstrate to communities that an organization is truly standing with them in solidarity.

- **Primary organizational focus.** Organizations using a community mobilization approach are most successful when it is their primary mandate. A community mobilization approach requires dedicated time and staff and a commitment to building skills in multiple strategies (e.g., advocacy, training, local activism, media, communications, institutional engagement, etc.). If the various aspects of the organization are all working in selected communities in a coordinated manner, it will increase effectiveness by multiplying outreach and reinforcement of the ideas through various strategies.
- **Authentic power sharing.** Organizations are used to being in the role of expert, and many communities are habitually the receivers of information, services or programs. However, community mobilization thrives best when organizations dismantle traditional conceptions of expertise, knowledge and hierarchical patterns of relating. This requires deliberate work on power and privilege and a willingness to authentically share power.
- **Sustainable and relevant funding.** Short-term project funding is incompatible with quality community mobilization efforts. Changing social norms takes time; it is not always predictable or linear. Organizations need funding that allows them to sustain programs over time and without interruption. Whereas short-term program funding, often paired with unrealistic expectations, can thwart meaningful efforts.

Challenges

Most organizations genuinely strive to make a positive difference. However, a community mobilization approach requires more than good intentions. It requires a preemptive recognition of the complexity of the process and the due diligence to prepare staff professionally and personally for the work. Herein lie the challenges most commonly faced by organizations working on community mobilization:

- **Rigorous program design.** Often, organizations best suited to do this work in the community lack the skills to develop a theoretically-grounded, long-term community mobilization program. The skill sets required to design and monitor sustained programming is quite different than those needed for traditional community-based efforts. Yet, organizations working in the community are often expected to do both.
- **Dissociation from social justice.** Often the leadership and staff of many organizations have not connected with the social justice aspect of this work. The planning, implementation and monitoring of community mobilization efforts requires an astute social analysis of violence, justice and power—including working through one’s own assumptions, biases and uses/misuses of power. Such a connection to the issues becomes the gateway to for one’s own activism as well as facilitates effective community mobilization. However, it calls for a level of self-awareness and personal investment that is becoming uncommon in some development organizations.
- **Resistance to fostering critical thinking.** Community mobilization is a process of raising consciousness about gender, power and rights. It involves an acknowledgement that the discussion about these sensitive issues will not be predictable or smooth. This

understanding marks a distinct shift from the typical one-way ‘messaging’ seen in development work, and thus has been a challenge for many organizations. Without taking the time at the outset to reframe their role, put trust in community members, and recognize the need to loosen their reins on the process, organizations often fall prey to simply implementing a larger version of traditional programming.

- **Lack of readiness to manage the layers of prevention.** Organizations can struggle to manage the multiple demands for support that emerge during community mobilization—they may even border on unethical conduct by raising sensitive issues without the appropriate follow-through. A commitment for sustained engagement with the community as well as a robust referral system is necessary, even if the referrals are informal and non-institutional. Organizations conducting community mobilization must consider both the referrals needed to support community members, as well as the skill-strengthening required to ensure the responsiveness of service providers. This investment in planning and training may feel daunting at first, yet if it is missed, the organization can become mired in service delivery.

Recommendations

There are many critical areas of learning, attention and growth needed in evolving community mobilization for the prevention of partner violence. The following recommendations are absolutes required to move the work of mobilizing communities forward:

Organizations mobilizing communities: Establish mandatory processes that engage all staff in exploring concepts of power, values and social justice and how they manifest in their own identities, relationships and work life.

Research institutes: Create mutually beneficial and respectful partnerships with activist organizations to experiment with new research ideas, document learning and generate new ways to monitor and measure impact.

Governments: Recognize the importance of violence prevention and allocate sufficient budgets for the education, justice, gender, health and local government ministries to enable quality prevention and response.

Funders: Invest in longer-term community mobilization efforts with sustained and sufficient funding.

The development community: Invest resources, time and energy in innovating ideas and activism that evolve the concepts of community mobilization. Community mobilization holds the promise of fundamentally shifting societal power dynamics, generating a wide range of benefits for women, men, their children and their families. Changes in norms can create a ripple effect for a multitude of development outcomes.

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