

# Gender-based violence communication strategies:<sup>1</sup>

## Creating communications materials for gender-based violence programmes

Increasing the availability and uptake of strengthened gender-based violence (GBV) response services requires evidence-based community outreach to foster trust and mitigate and prevent further violence.

GBV programmes that include community awareness of GBV and harmful practices rely on effective communication strategies that should:

- Communicate new ideas and inspire discussion and critical thinking about these new ideas;
- Create informed and resilient communities that actively work towards preventing violence and supporting survivors;
- Empower women and girls and marginalized groups by providing information about their rights and available services and resources;
- Bring focus on the imbalance of power and gender inequality to a group discussion;
- Bring issues such as intimate partner violence, which is often considered a private issue, into the public domain in a creative and friendly manner;
- Inspire personal reflection about our own use of power and how we could use it to create positive change.

<sup>1</sup> The information in this sheet is adapted from the [SASA! Activist Kit](#) Start Phase, Communications Materials, Strategy Overview (accessed 3 October 2023) as well as SASA! Communications and Training materials.

## Types of communications

### Types of communications that relate to GBV programming

- Community engagement
- Community outreach
- Community awareness
- Community education
- Community events
- Community sessions

### Other types that relate to GBV prevention-based communication

- Community mobilization;
- Community activism;
- Social and behavioural change communication;
- Information and education materials;
- Digital communication through social media, apps, online forums and other visibility.

## Gender-based violence communication materials

Communication materials that support GBV communication strategies could include a range of products such as posters, billboards, social media posts, information sheets, brochures, articles and videos. Communication materials should be informed by data and evidence about GBV and the harmful social and gender norms that allow and condone it. They should be designed to get people thinking and talking about rights, power and GBV. Communication materials can be created as a stand-alone method to convey a message to a community or be used to support discussions or other GBV prevention activities including radio programmes, podcasts, broadcasts, theatre, exhibitions and roadshows.

### Effective GBV communications materials do the following:

- They provoke thinking by asking questions. Do not tell people what to think.
- They portray positive behaviours for community members to consider.
- They offer suggestions and ideas for alternative ways of living.
- They are designed for active rather than passive use – always accompanied by a list of questions for stimulating discussion and debate about their contents.
- They are part of an overall communications programme linked to efforts to end GBV.

The issues of power imbalances and violence against women are difficult. Communication materials should not portray violence, emphasize the negative or assign blame. Instead, they should attempt to portray the positive – helping community members imagine new and better relationships and families.

## Checklist for effective community engagement materials and messaging

### Content

#### Do your community engagement materials and messaging...

- Make people think about an issue?
- Avoid telling people what to think?
- Encourage people to think differently?
- Avoid labelling them based on gender, ethnicity or another identifying characteristic?
- Maintain the dignity of the individuals?
- Encourage viewers to think for themselves?
- Show women as empowered agents and avoid showing women, including those with marginalized identities, as powerless victims?
- Reinforce the concept of human and women's rights?
- Encourage personal reflection?
- Use individuals and situations that viewers can identify with?



### Language

#### Do your community engagement materials and messaging...

- Avoid blaming or accusations?
- Use the local language of the community/target audience?
- Use language that is simple and straightforward?
- Use an impactful phrase or question?
- Make statements that make people think about the issue?



## Testing gender-based violence messages and materials



Pre-test messages and communication products, including stories, on a small audience to understand their impact. When gathering a people to gauge their reactions and opinions, consider asking the following questions about the message or material:

**What did you hear?**

**What does it make you think about?**

**How does it make you feel?**

**What does it make you want to do?**

Check out [this resource](#) for more information on pre-testing GBV messages and materials.

## Gender-based violence storytelling

GBV and violence against women is relevant to everyone. Throughout GBV programmes, there will be requests to interview survivors to tell their story about violence. These requests may come from colleagues, journalists, government counterparts, donors and other writers. Survivor stories are seen as a compelling way to bring attention to the issue of GBV, advocate on political platforms, increase visibility for the organization and mobilize resources for the work. Extra care should be taken when publicizing GBV and engaging with survivors to generate stories. Some survivors may want to share their story on a public platform in response to the violence they experienced as part of their healing process or the way they choose to integrate the experience. Other survivors become known activists or take on other roles in their community where telling their story about GBV is a part of their identity.

Engaging with survivors to tell their story for media, advocacy and communications should be carefully considered. Be sure to take the following precautions:

- ➔ Hold a preliminary meeting with communications professionals *before* they speak to any survivors, even if they have training and experience in ethical storytelling with survivors.
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- ➔ At this preliminary meeting, provide relevant cultural context, request that the communications professional (even if they are a high-profile media figure or colleague) start the interview with an explanation of who they are and how the interview will be used, and request they give survivors an opportunity to share why they are telling their

story and what they want people to know. Ask that the communications professional respect the words that the survivor uses to describe their own experience, even if it is not the formal terminology used by your organization.

- Collect and retain the contact information of the communications professional (even if they are a colleague) to ensure corrections and retractions can be requested if needed.
- Informed, voluntary consent with a consent form is required from survivors to obtain and publicize their story.
- The safety of the survivor and maintaining confidentiality needs to be ensured before writing or producing their story.
- Do not seek out survivors or their loved ones to collect stories about GBV. Create opportunities for people to share their stories voluntarily, prioritizing the person's healing process.
- Encourage stories that contain not only examples of GBV but also the broader issues, the action your organization is taking and the impact of your work.
- Consider the following formula when telling a story: issue, action, impact.
- Do not give in-depth details about the violent incident for public consumption, particularly without mental health safeguards in place.
- Focus on experience of service provision as part of the story. This could include a negative experience before details about the positive experiences are shared.
- Feature empowering aspects of case management services provided, like connections to education, livelihoods or comprehensive sexuality education.
- Takeaways from the story should be survivor autonomy, empowerment and support.
- Consider art and other expressions of healing, strength and empowerment.

**Refer to the Guidance note for communications on gender-based violence, available on the UNFPA website, for more information on communicating about GBV for programme visibility, advocacy and awareness.**