



COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

**Ending violence against women through
community action**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 2017

The *Nabilan* Program: Working with the community to end violence against women and children

The Asia Foundation is implementing the *Nabilan Program* in Timor-Leste under a Grant Agreement with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The *Nabilan* Program goal is to **reduce the proportion of women who have experienced violence, and to improve the well-being of women and children affected by violence**. The program focuses on the three key areas of prevention, support, and justice. In 2015, the *Nabilan* Program began a pilot initiative called **Community-based Approaches (CBA)**, aimed at social change on violence against women and children, implemented in Letefoho Village, Manufahi Municipality. This innovative approach integrates prevention and services as it aims to reduce the incidence of violence by working with people in the community to change their behavior and increase women's access to help from both formal and informal sources.

This document outlines why the program identified the need for an innovative approach, how the approach works, and what has been achieved, including what has been learnt through implementation about violence against women and children and program practice. **This document contains information about *Nabilan* publications, which provide further information on CBA.**

Timor-Leste has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), has a state institution dedicated to gender equity (currently the Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-Economic Promotion of Women, SEM), passed a Law Against Domestic Violence (LADV) in 2010,¹ has previously had public campaigns to reduce violence, and has a 30 percent quota for women in Parliament.

Despite this, **rates of violence against women and children remain high**. Two-thirds of ever-partnered women (aged 15-49 years) have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence, or both, by a husband or boyfriend in their lifetime. Fifty-five percent of ever-partnered women have experienced emotional abuse from a male partner, and 43 percent have experienced economic abuse.² Fourteen percent of women aged 15 to 49 have been raped by someone other than an intimate partner in their lifetimes, and 10 percent in the past 12 months.³ Sixty-six percent of women who have experienced intimate partner violence never seek help.⁴ If they do, it is often from people close to them - friends and family. Shame, fear of bringing a bad name to the family, and fear of being blamed for violence, are the main reasons women do not seek help.⁵ Eighty

¹ Law No.7/2010 of 7 July 2010, Law Against Domestic Violence (LADV) passed by National Parliament available via: <http://mj.gov.tl/jornal/lawsTL/RDTL-Law/index-e.htm>

² The Asia Foundation. 2016. Understanding Violence against Women and Children in Timor-Leste: Findings from the *Nabilan* Baseline Study - Summary Report. The Asia Foundation: Dili, p 49. Available at: <http://asiafoundation.org/tag/nabilan/>

³ Baseline Study, p63

⁴ Baseline Study, p110

⁵ Baseline Study, p110

percent of women, and 79 percent of men in Dili and 70 percent of men in Manufahi, believe that a husband is justified in hitting his wife under some circumstances.⁶

There are many civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as state organizations and networks of community members, doing vitally important work to support women who have experienced violence and to reduce violence against women. This has not translated into a broader social movement on women's rights or social change on violence against women. In this challenging context, *Nabilan* began looking for a new way of programming to **change social norms** around violence against women. The program was already supporting institutional change (with government agencies and CSOs), but this alone will have limited impact when the reporting rates of women who experience violence are minimal. Change needs to occur at the institutional level and within the community. One program in particular, **SASA!** – which has been implemented in ten countries – provided a model for consideration, largely due to its success in reducing violence against women and its use of evidence to inform activities.⁷ Drawing on this model and evidence from Timor-Leste, the *Nabilan* Program developed the CBA, which seeks to identify and support men and women in the community to become active change agents in their own communities. When community attitudes change to become less supportive of violence, this enables people to talk about their experiences of violence without feeling ashamed and judged.

What is the *Nabilan* CBA?

The CBA work identifies and supports **community members to become change agents** in order to end violence against women and children. The approach is aimed at working with community members to recognize the important role the community plays in responding to violence and in preventing violence. Rather than an approach where outsiders bring information into a community, with CBA, the community is supported to identify the problem and solutions, through self-reflection and behavior change. CBA is also a long-term commitment to a single site.⁸ CBA depends on community participation, ensures integration into existing efforts and programs wherever possible, builds via repetition, and works towards saturation. A whole range of activities are focused on one community and the key-stakeholders around it so as to maximize the possibilities for social change.

CBA is innovative in the context of Timor-Leste for a range of reasons. Firstly, this approach facilitates space for the local community to identify problems and issues, rather than only using socialization methods where external parties deliver information. Secondly, engagement is ongoing and uses different activities. Community discussions, group activities, training, workshops, and meetings are held, along with other engagements such as information sharing and connecting community members. The learnings from each of these activities are incorporated into the *Nabilan* Program and back to the community. In this way, the community, along with the program, continues to define, and reflect, in a cycle of exploration. Thirdly, a community-based approach means that

⁶ Baseline Study, p83

⁷ Raising Voices, LSHTM and CEDOVIP. 2015. Is Violence Against Women Preventable? Findings from the SASA! Study summarized for general audiences. Kampala, Uganda: Raising Voices. Available at: <http://raisingvoices.org/resources/>

⁸ See: *Community Based Approaches for Ending Violence against Women and Children: Nabilan Program Toolkit*, The Asia Foundation, Dili, Forthcoming 2017, 5.

the information gathered through activities does not stand alone or separately from the practices of the program as research. Information that is gathered, as different activities occur, is shared with the program and partners more broadly and back with the community as the basis for reflection for subsequent activities.

Facilitating the activities are 14 Community Mobilizers who were identified with the involvement of local leaders. **The Nabilan Program's CBA is founded on an analysis of gender and power, because these are at the root of violence against women.** To make change in their community, the Mobilizers need to look at their own beliefs and lives. One of the biggest risks of an approach like this is individuals reinforcing problematic beliefs, rather than supporting change. Using materials from SASA!, over a course of four months, *Nabilan* conducted trainings for Mobilizers around the topics of gender and power, violence against women and children, and how change happens. *Nabilan* will continue providing these trainings on a quarterly basis. The role of Mobilizers is to do simple activities in their everyday lives in their own community to demonstrate new ways of thinking about gender and power. Informal conversations, responding to real situations and issues, can be very important. In this way, the approach is not based on being an expert, and does not require special skills. The Mobilizers are supported by a staff member from Letefoho Village who conducts monthly monitoring visits to each of the sub-villages and hosts a monthly meeting to bring all the Mobilizers together to share experiences and learnings.

What has the program learnt?

The program has enabled a **safe space for discussions with men and women** through which gaps in information about violence against women and children and program implementation are starting to be filled. Key themes are emerging from discussions around what constitutes intimate partner violence and the cycle of violence, providing vital information for program implementation. Violence against women is seen largely by male participants in program activities as physical violence. Emotional abuse is not seen as constituting violence, in contrast to its inclusion in the national legal definition of domestic violence. Similarly – and supporting findings from the *Nabilan* Baseline Study – sexual violence by an intimate partner is not seen by some community members as constituting domestic violence. How participants speak about violence against women is highly gendered. Male participants identified the women who spoke out about violence from a partner as creating a problem, rather than the male behavior as being problematic. There is also a reluctance from some men and women participants to admit that violence is occurring within their particular community or family.

CBA activities are also starting to glean information about **women's coping strategies and the factors motivating change in men**, with a key finding being that women's help-seeking behaviors are linked to strategies for behavior change in men. Women are engaging in help-seeking behaviors to create a pathway for male behavior change, while staying in a relationship. Disclosure of domestic violence outside the immediate family unit appears as a key dynamic for women in creating an avenue for male behavior change. Men, on the other hand, try to maintain control by keeping any discussion or action with regards to violence within the household. Discussions with women are also confirming a pattern whereby women at risk of violence remove themselves from their husband's company for a period in which they feel violence is likely.

Despite an unwillingness of both men and women participants to recognize violence within their own communities, the program has succeeded in engaging community members on violence against women and children and to reflect on attitudes and behaviors. While the key entry point for this work has been individual men and women, engagement with other actors, such as government and other members of the Gender-based Violence (GBV) Referral Network, is validating research and enabling the program to assist local stakeholders provide support to women and children experiencing violence.

The deliberate manner of selection of Community Mobilizers has proven effective, with the Mobilizers feeling supported by local authorities and appearing to have gained the trust of the community. Not paying the Mobilizers - while it led to a few Mobilizers dropping out - has resulted in a highly committed and increasingly articulate group of Mobilizers who recognize that the fact that they are not paid is a unique and positive feature of the program.

Feedback from Community Mobilizers highlights the need for the program to have a **strong local identity**, rather than being a reflection of an international model. What is also apparent is that the way the program talks about research needs to be framed as documentation of learnings, rather than as 'research.'

Implementation of the CBA brings a number of ethical and safety considerations for the CBA team. These considerations require careful consideration and organizational support to ensure that program activities do no harm to members of the community. Community Mobilizers have been provided with training and materials to enable them to refer cases to service providers should the need arise, and this is regularly monitored by CBA staff. In other ways, the program also seeks to minimize risks and also support team members in a challenging implementation environment. This will be an ongoing need for the program and must be adequately supported.

The CBA approach provides **opportunities for scalability and is a sustainable model**. The key individuals for the program - the Community Mobilizers - are in the community, with skills and knowledge to support social norms change. They are implementing the program without requiring payment, doing so because they have a desire for change in their community. The *Nabilan* Program is now considering how the work could be scaled up.

Recommendations

Implementation of CBA requires an ongoing process of learning and reflection. The findings highlighted in this report provide guidance for continuing to engage with the community in the current site on violence against women and children and for developing the work further in that site. The recommendations are also relevant in considering scaling up the work to other locations. The recommendations identified here should be read in conjunction with the CBA Toolkit.⁹

Violence against women and children

- Continue to document and draw on learnings from the key program questions - how the community understands violence, what motivates men to change, and what are women's coping strategies.
- Explore with the Community Mobilizers how to engage with community members in relation to emotional and sexual violence, given the lack of recognition of both forms of violence as domestic violence. This should include understanding the frequency and impact of both forms of violence.
- Ensure that future programming takes into account the fact that many people are unwilling to speak about violence in any way that may reflect badly on themselves or their community, even while others may speak openly about violence as a community problem.
- Continue to use case studies or scenarios as a way to open up discussions about violence, without asking people to talk about violence directly in their own lives or community.

Implementation approaches

- Ensure that CBA staff are those who are willing to facilitate a space for other people to find their own thoughts and voices, and that they are flexible and able to adapt to the community in which the program is being implemented.
- Ensure that there is adequate support to staff based in the field and that there are at least two staff based in the municipality in which the program is being implemented.
- Recognizing that bringing field staff and those based in headquarters together provides valuable opportunities for support, debriefing, and learning, ensure that visits to both headquarters and the field are adequately supported (including being programmed in work plans and budgets).
- Continue the approach of voluntary Community Mobilizers, with reimbursement of only small agreed costs, such as phone credit, or transportation money when attending mandatory program trainings or meetings.
- Ensure that Community Mobilizers are selected following a very deliberate search engaging local authorities and stakeholders and also through observation of their

⁹ In articulating these recommendations, the program is also cognizant of - and faithful to - the recommendations of the SASA! Program Brief on Fidelity.

engagement in the program issues to ensure their interest and enhance their legitimacy in the community.

- Ensure that Community Mobilizers are active participants in key program agreements.
- Ensure that the program continues to adapt and develop its community mobilization methodology for the local context. It is important that the program is both informed by international experience (such as the SASA! approach), and also contributes to international experience by sharing learnings.
- To ensure that learnings are connected to programming, ensure that any CBA research is framed as building evidence pathways, learning, and reflections on programming.
- Ensure that program resources are allocated not just to analyzing learnings from new program documentation but also to existing CBA program documentation, to allow the program to compare changes in key areas over time.
- Develop alternative ways of documenting learnings that take into account challenges faced by Community Mobilizers and program staff in written documentation.
- Continue to engage with local authorities and stakeholders to support implementation.
- Ensure there are detailed and up to date plans and allocated resources to support team members (including Community Mobilizers) who may be affected by vicarious trauma.
- Ensure that there are detailed and up to date plans, allocated resources, and protocols to support any team member directly affected by violence, including as a result of their facilitation/engagement in CBA activities.
- Ensure that there are detailed and up to date plans, allocated resources, and protocols to address the risk of violence to participating community members through their engagement in CBA activities.
- Building on successes and program learnings, identify how the program could be scaled up to other locations and what level of resourcing is likely to be required to do so.

Where to find further information

The *Nabilan* Program has developed a [report](#), [discussion papers](#), and [toolkit](#) to document program learnings and support continual improvement of work in the future. All of the documents are available from The Asia Foundation in English and Tetum.

The *Nabilan* report [A Reflection on Practice, Ethics and Research](#) documents what has been learnt to date through the CBA programming about both key research questions on violence against women and program practice. It reflects on *Nabilan's* processes, covering what has been learnt so far as well as the practical reasons why particular decisions have been made.

To support ongoing implementation and scaling up of the CBA work, the *Nabilan* Program has also produced a [Community-based Approaches Toolkit](#) which is a step-by-step guide to the development of the work. It is aimed at documenting and reflecting on how the program implemented the work. It is also aimed at assisting others who are working on social change at the community level. As the CBA work continues to evolve, the Tool Kit is expected to go through

changes and adaptations over time. The Tool Kit is broken into various elements, which are key to the overall approach: building relations and consent within the community, building teams, asset mapping, selecting community mobilizers, implementing community workshops and partner activities, as well as research. Each of these topics is covered with check lists and other guiding documents that can assist with implementing programs in a similar way in other sites.

Nabilan has also produced the *Nabilan Discussion Series*, which is targeted at the Manufahi community, partners, and funders. Each discussion paper is distributed to the community and discussed there before being distributed more broadly. The aim of the series is to provide updates of activities, and to reflect on ethics, methods, and lessons learned. The program has produced three discussion papers to date: Discussion Series No 1 '*Nabilan* Community Engagement in Manufahi, Timor-Leste'; Discussion Series No 2 '*Nabilan* Community Engagement in Manufahi - Community Mobilizers'; and Discussion Series No 3 '*Nabilan* Community Engagement in Manufahi - Prevention Messaging.'