



YOUTH ALIVE ZIMBABWE

From reflection to action

Practice-based learning on women's economic empowerment, shared power and changing gender norms through SASA! Faith



1. INTRODUCTION

Turning reflection on power into action

SASA! Faith creates spaces where women and men reflect on power, gender roles, relationships and violence against women. This learning brief explores how these conversations are translating into changes in household relationships and women's economic participation.

The brief draws on three practice-based stories from SASA! Faith implementation in Zimbabwe. The stories of Immaculate Mafondokoto, Forget Nyatsanza and Judith Nyamugafata, and Francisca Mudzeke and Edward Mambemba show different pathways through which reflection and dialogue can influence everyday decisions and economic practices.

The stories point to three connected areas of change:

- Women gaining confidence to pursue economic opportunities.
- Men reconsidering control over household resources and taking on more supportive roles.
- Couples and peers creating new forms of shared decision-making and economic collaboration.

The experiences also highlight the role of Community Activists as participants, facilitators and role models. Their own experiences provide practical examples of how changes in beliefs and relationships can influence household economic practices.

The central learning is that conversations about power become more meaningful when participants have opportunities to translate new ideas into practical action. In these stories, reflection was followed by savings, livelihood activities, joint decision-making and greater recognition of women's economic agency.

2.1 STORIES OF CHANGE

From confidence to capital: Immaculate's journey



Immaculate Mafondokoto, 47, is a member of the United Methodist Church and joined the Community Activist group in 2023 after SASA! Faith was introduced in her church. She was motivated by an interest in learning about issues affecting women, particularly the prevention of gender-based violence. Through the Start Phase, she began reflecting on the concept of power within and her own capacity to take action.

Together with two other female Community Activists from her ward, she formed a small savings group. During monthly CA meetings, each member contributed USD 10. Members then took turns borrowing from the pooled savings to support their individual income-generating activities.

Immaculate combined her share of the savings with her personal funds and purchased 25 layers and chicken feed. This marked the beginning of her poultry project, which now provides a regular source of household income through daily egg sales. She reports that meeting household expenses, including school-related needs for her children, has become easier.

For Immaculate, the change extends beyond income. SASA! Faith gave her an opportunity to recognise her own capacity and experience the value of women working together towards a shared goal.

Her experience demonstrates how confidence, peer support and access to small amounts of capital can create an entry point for women's economic action.

2.2 STORIES OF CHANGE

From control to collaboration: Forget and Judith



Forget Nyatsanza, 36, joined SASA! Faith as a Community Activist in 2023. He grew up in a patriarchal environment where masculinity was closely associated with being the provider and controlling household income. Before participating, Forget preferred to make household purchases himself, including decisions relating to income earned by his wife, **Judith Nyamugafata**, who sold horticultural produce.

Training and practice meetings prompted Forget to reflect on gender roles, power and household decision-making. Judith also participated in a session for spouses of Community Activists and later attended SASA! Faith sessions at their church. These shared learning experiences created opportunities for conversations about power balance, women's economic participation and joint financial decisions.

Forget also received small transport reimbursements through his participation in CA activities. Instead of spending the money, he saved it. With encouragement from fellow activists and his wife, he began to view small savings as a potential source of capital.

Together, Forget and Judith established two livelihood activities, poultry farming and goat rearing. They now own four goats and jointly plan how to use their combined income. Forget supports Judith with the goat project while also taking short-term work with a local company in Honde Valley.

His experience reflects a shift in how he understands his role within the household. Rather than associating masculinity with control over resources, he describes responsibility, support and collaboration as part of his role.

The story highlights the value of engaging men as partners in gender transformation while creating opportunities for couples to apply new ideas within their own households.

2.3 STORIES OF CHANGE

Side by side: Francisca and Edward



Francisca Mudzeke, 44, is a member of the Chiedza Apostolic Church. Before participating in SASA! Faith, she spent most of her time caring for her family, managing household responsibilities and working in the family garden. Her husband, **Edward Mambemba**, held traditional views about household finances and livestock ownership. Major financial decisions were associated with men, while Francisca had been socialised to view household care as her primary responsibility.

Francisca encountered SASA! Faith through her village health club, where sessions addressed violence against women and ways families and communities can prevent violence. One message stood out for her: women can own and manage productive assets and contribute to household income.

Edward participated in a male engagement session in their village. Through these discussions, he began questioning his previous belief that livestock ownership should be restricted to men. When Francisca expressed an interest in starting a goat-rearing project, Edward supported her. Francisca purchased three goats and began building her own productive asset base.

The couple now discuss how income from their activities could support household priorities, including school fees and building materials. They also molded bricks together, with plans to reinvest income from brick sales into the goat project.

Francisca describes feeling more empowered through the opportunity to own and manage livestock. Edward recognises that his earlier views about women's ownership of livestock limited women's economic participation.

Their experience illustrates how engagement with both women and men can create space for changes in household expectations, asset ownership and economic decision-making.

3. WHAT THE STORIES REVEAL

Five learnings

Learning 1: Women's agency grows through confidence, collective support and practical opportunities

Immaculate's experience shows how reflection on power can contribute to greater confidence and action. The savings group provided a practical mechanism through which women supported one another and accessed small amounts of capital.

Economic empowerment discussions become more meaningful when women have opportunities to apply new ideas through collective savings, peer support and livelihood activities.

Learning 2: Men's engagement can contribute to changes in household power relations

The experiences of Forget and Edward show the value of deliberate engagement with men on gender, power and economic participation. Both entered SASA! Faith with established expectations about masculinity, household authority and control over resources. Through participation and dialogue, they began questioning these expectations.

Their stories show two practical changes: greater recognition of women's economic roles and greater participation in joint household decision-making.

Learning 3: Couple-based engagement creates opportunities for change within households

The stories of Forget and Judith, and Francisca and Edward, demonstrate the value of creating opportunities for partners to learn and reflect together.

When both partners engage with ideas about power and economic participation, discussions can move from programme sessions into household decisions. Joint savings, livelihood activities, asset ownership and financial planning provide practical spaces for applying new understandings of equality.

Learning 4: Community Activists serve as role models for change

Community Activists occupy an important position within SASA! Faith implementation. Their own experiences provide examples of how reflection and action can influence relationships and economic practices.

Immaculate's savings group and poultry project demonstrate how CAs can apply learning within their own lives. Forget's changing approach to household decision-making shows how personal transformation can support wider community engagement. Supporting CAs as role models therefore involves recognising their lived experiences alongside their facilitation responsibilities.

Learning 5: Peer support strengthens women's economic action

The savings group formed by Immaculate and two other female CAs provided more than access to money. It created a space for mutual encouragement, trust and collective action.

Peer structures such as savings groups can provide a practical bridge between social norm work and economic action. They also create opportunities for women to share experiences, solve challenges and encourage one another to pursue economic goals.

4. FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION

What does this mean for SASA! Faith implementation?

The three stories suggest several practical implications for programme design and implementation.

Create spaces for women and men to reflect together

Discussions about power, gender roles and economic participation should provide space for women and men to reflect on how these issues influence household decisions. Couple engagement provides one route for connecting individual reflection with household-level change.

Link social norm work with practical economic opportunities

Participants need opportunities to apply new ideas. Savings groups, livelihood initiatives and productive asset ownership provide practical avenues for women and households to translate reflection into action.

The experience of Immaculate shows how a small savings mechanism supported by peer relationships contributed to a livelihood activity. The experiences of Francisca, Edward, Forget and Judith show how economic activities can also become spaces for negotiating power and decision-making.

Support men as partners in change

Men's engagement should address gender, power, economic participation and household decision-making. The stories show that men can reconsider established expectations when they have opportunities to reflect on how these expectations affect women, relationships and household wellbeing.

Engage Community Activists as role models

CAs should receive support to reflect on their own experiences and apply SASA! Faith principles in their households and communities. Their personal journeys provide examples that community members can relate to.

Strengthen peer structures for women

Women's savings groups and other peer structures can complement SASA! Faith sessions by providing practical support for economic action.

This Learning Brief was compiled by Ruvaraishe Tapera and Donna Nyadete