

Rethinking Power

Is it possible to prevent violence against women and girls and leave no one behind in difficult times?

by **Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyè yo** and the **Global Women's Institute**, July 2022

This paper is a short summary of the results of a research study conducted about the effect of a community mobilization program to prevent violence against women and girls in La Vallée, Haiti called the *Rethinking Power* program of **Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo**. *Rethinking Power* implemented programming in La Vallée by from 2017-2021, a period that also included challenges such as COVID-19 and a political, economic and social crisis in Haiti. Despite the difficult context, the program attempted to “leave no one behind” and to ensure that its violence prevention efforts worked for all women and girls, including adolescent girls and women and girls with disabilities. The **Global Women's Institute** with its partners **Institut de Formation et de Service** (IFOS, 2017-2019) and **Pentagone** (2020-2021) led the design and implementation of a quasi-experimental study to understand the effect of *Rethinking Power*.

What is violence against women and girls and why should we prevent it?

Violence against women and girls includes any threat or act (physical, emotional, sexual, or economic) directed at a woman or girl that causes harm and is meant to keep her under the control of others. These acts can occur inside the home (in private) or outside of the home (in public).¹ In Haiti and around the world, 1 in 3 girls have already experienced violence by age 18. When people learn to balance their power in their relationships and communities stand up against violence, there are many benefits, such as increased self-confidence, decreased suicide and health problems, stronger couples and families, improved academic performance in children, and happier, healthier communities.



What is disability? Is violence against women and girls with disabilities a problem?

Disability is the interaction between people with a health condition (e.g., Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, visual impairment, etc.) and barriers in their environment (e.g., negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and buildings, and limited social supports).² There are many types of conditions, including some we cannot see; the program categorized these conditions into three main types: physical, sensory and mental (intellectual and psychosocial). In Haiti, almost 1 in 3 of people (30%) in La Vallée reported having some form of disability (difficulties in hearing, vision, mobility, remembering, self-care and communication). Women and girls with disabilities face discrimination on two levels: because of their gender and because of their disability. This is a result of the higher social standing of men and boys in general and negative societal perceptions of disability. Women and girls with disabilities are much more likely to experience violence than other community members, in Haiti and around the world.

The Program: Violence Prevention That Seeks To Leave No One Behind

Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo has been working on child rights, education and livelihoods in Haiti since 1993. In 2010, it began adapting and using the evidence-based **Raising Voices SASA!** methodology in different communities in Haiti to prevent violence against women. *Power to Girls*, a complementary methodology inspired by and adapted partly from *SASA!*, that seeks to prevent violence against adolescent girls by mobilizing girls and their communities to prevent it, was added in 2013. *Power to Girls* includes a community mobilization process like *SASA!*'s, combining it with girl-centered programming including girls' groups and a school process of change. Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo began using both methodologies in La Vallée in 2017. In 2019, with the support of the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF)**, Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo partnered with two disability rights organizations, **Pazapa Center** and **Teyat Toupatou**, to create and include *Safe and Capable*, a resource pack designed to go alongside *SASA!* and *Power to Girls* to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities.

SASA!, *Power to Girls*, and *Safe and Capable* work together to mobilize communities in a process of change that helps community members take action to prevent violence in their everyday lives. 575 community members—including Community Leaders, Community Activists, School Personnel, and Girls' Group Mentors—from La Vallée were key to creating change, participating in training and mentoring with staff and then conducting activities within the everyday activities of their lives with others in the community.

Rethinking Power was designed to ensure everyone knows that they have power and have the choice to use it well, so that no one in the community is left behind as we work toward happy, safe, dignified lives for community members of all genders, ages and abilities. Leaving no one behind is not easy in any time, but these years were difficult ones in Haiti and the challenge deepened, even as it became more important than ever.

The Research

The Global Women's Institute, with partners IFOS and Pentagone, compared participating communities in La Vallée (Musac and Ternier) to communities in Marigot (Corail Soult and Savanne Dubois) that did not participate in Rethinking Power, to see what difference the program made. While La Vallée and Marigot are different communities, they were similar enough to compare in terms of how they work socially and levels of violence.³ Researchers asked people questions at three different time periods: at baseline in 2017, at midline in 2019 (which was also the baseline for the work on violence against women and girls with disabilities) and at endline in 2021. The methods used were surveys and individual interviews with women and girls age 15 and over and focus groups with people 10 and over in La Vallée and Marigot. Specific questions and research methods were included to see how the program impacted girls and young women aged 10-23⁴, as well as women and girls with disabilities.



Julaine Noelus and Soinette Désir,
Safe and Capable piloting



The Communities in 2017-2021 and Effect on Programming

La Vallée and Marigot are both beautiful communities in the Southeast Department of Haiti. The communities have many strengths such as the presence of strong community groups, including women's groups and organizations, some secondary schools, a strong sense of community responsibility, and other assets.

Both communities also showed a strong need for the program before it began in 2017. For example, almost half of women (49%) at baseline reported having experienced *some form* of violence from a male partner in their lifetime (including economic and emotional violence).⁵ Unfortunately, general living conditions worsened during program implementation, especially from 2019-2021, due to COVID and the political, economic, and social crisis in Haiti. Many overall life conditions worsened during that time, such as food insecurity in the household, economic insecurity in the household and the community, social unrest in the community, and women's mental and physical health challenges. These conditions are important to people's lives overall, and research worldwide shows that, when they worsen, that usually increases violence against women and girls.

While both sets of communities suffered, general conditions got somewhat worse in La Vallée than in Marigot due to some community gang violence that was specific to La Vallée during the period. This came out in the data. For example, in La Vallée in 2021, among women and girls over age 15, **6 in 10** said their community had been affected by insecurity and **half** said their households had been negatively impacted. **One third** reported a serious problem with food and two-thirds of these people said that problem had worsened in the past year. **6 in 10** had experienced severe psychological distress in the past 30 days.

These community changes also affected programming. For example, extended school closures meant the schoolwide process of *Power to Girls* could not be implemented as intended and school curriculum was not integrated until the final months of the program. This limited the participation of boys in *Power to Girls*, though all community members were still engaged in community mobilization activities. In addition, some areas of the community were completely inaccessible to program staff for months due to insecurity, and support to the community network was restricted to phone conversations. Gatherings were also limited for several months due to COVID-19, restricting or halting many daily program activities including girls' group gatherings, activist-led community mobilization, and training and support by staff.



"Insecurity has affected the lives of women and girls, as they were afraid to go out because of abductions, rapes, and any other violence they might experience."

– Girls' group member, La Vallée



Christina Berlus, former Girls' Group Mentor

Research Results: Effect of the Program

Due to the overall conditions worsening, as mentioned above, we might expect that violence against women and girls increased in La Vallée. Instead, it decreased! For example,

the level of past year physical and sexual partner violence against women was cut in half over course of the program in the intervention communities (from 23% to 12%).



Community Activists learn how to spark discussion with a poster



Girls' Group members playing chess

Overall, the research showed that *SASA!*, *Power to Girls*, and *Safe and Capable* has had a positive effect on the lives of women and girls in La Vallée. Positive changes were seen not only by the people who participated directly in the trainings or other activities, but also among the entire community population. Positive changes included changes to the ways people saw women, men and intimate relationships (attitudes), as well as prevalence of violence against women and girls.

In terms of leaving no one behind, community attitudes about people with disabilities and about adolescent girls are improving. Violence against women and girls with disabilities, as well as violence against girls, are also reducing, but these changes are moving more slowly than compared to the general community.

Attitudes

Gender equitable attitudes are more common now in La Vallée after the program has been implemented. There also have been changes in Marigot (the comparison site) – though they are generally less.

Equality

Compared to baseline, at endline women in La Vallée there was a 16% decrease in women agreeing that diapering, bathing, and feeding children is mainly the mother's responsibility; a 21% decrease in agreement that a women's role is taking care of her home and family; and a 10% decrease in agreement that men have the final say on decisions in the household. Compared to Marigot at endline, women in La Vallée were also less likely to endorse these gendered roles.

Girls' power

More community members in La Vallée now report attitudes that support equality between women and men, and support agency and safety among girls; they are also less likely to accept violence. For example, at baseline only about 60% of women thought that boys should spend as much time as girls doing household chores - which increased to 75% at endline. The percent of people who agree that girls should be allowed to socialize outside the home just as boys do rose from 15% to 28%, indicating an increased willingness to allow girls freedom to learn and explore. These same levels of change were not seen among the population of Marigot. In the qualitative research, girls age 10-19 also described the changes they saw in the community. For example:

"With the help of the training they usually give, now almost everyone understands that since you are beating a girl it is violence that you are doing to her. Now the community would see such a thing, the man would be judged wrong,"

– Girl's group member, La Vallée

Rights of people with disabilities

From the start of *Safe and Capable* in 2019 to its completion in 2021, much has improved about attitudes on the rights of people, and specifically women and girls with disabilities. There is almost universal agreement around some positive attitudes among people with disabilities. For example, 95% of respondents in La Vallée agree that women and girls with disabilities have the right to live without violence; while the percent of people who agree that people with disabilities feel emotional and physical pain as other people do rose from 58% to 79%. It should be noted that attitudes about women and girls with disabilities among community members in Marigot also improved during the time period. Pazapa Center, whose staff helped create and were trained in *Safe and Capable*, was making regular radio programming on disability rights in Marigot as well as some programming from a local disability rights organization. This may have contributed to changes in Marigot.

Acceptance of violence

Overall, people in La Vallée accepted violence less than in Marigot at endline. By the end of the program, less people believed that a woman should accept violence to keep her family together (from 19% to 12%). However, the program did not make a positive impact on the attitude that violence between a husband and a wife is a private matter in which others should not interfere, and there is more activism needed to change that attitude.

Prevalence of Violence

Levels of intimate partner violence have reduced in La Vallée after the program has been implemented. One of the most significant changes is that the level of partner physical and sexual violence reported by women and girls for the last 12 months was cut in half over course of the program in the intervention communities (from 23% to 12%). This is a huge, community-level achievement. In addition, non-partner sexual violence reported in the past 12 months fell from 9% to 4% in La Vallée. However, unfortunately sexual harassment increased from 7% to 9%. Key informants attribute this in part to increased insecurity related to gang activity in some areas of the community, but more investigation would be needed to confirm this.

Girls

For girls age 15-23, there were also positive results, with an almost 40% decrease in partner physical and/or sexual violence for the past 12 months (from 26% to 16%). For girls in that age range, sexual violence by someone other than a partner (non-partner sexual violence) first increased from the baseline in 2017 (16%) to the midline in 2019 (21%) but then decreased to 10% by the end of the program in 2021.

Women and girls with disabilities

For women and girls with disabilities, the data is more complex. *Safe and Capable* did not begin until two years into the program, so the baseline of the overall program did not have data on prevalence for women and girls with disabilities specifically. If we assume that the levels of physical and/or sexual partner violence were the same as in the general population



Annette Payen, Community Activist and Advocacy Committee member



“Parents learn that girls and boys have the same importance and the same rights.”

– Girl’s group member, La Vallée



“In the past, I and some young people used to make fun of people with disabilities. It doesn’t happen anymore because we now know that [people with disabilities] have the same value as we do.”

– Girls’ group member, La Vallée



"If. . . [a parent kept a girl out of school while her brother went to school] in our neighborhood, it would be our duty as trained people to go and talk to these parents several times and make them think, make them understand that girls and boys have the same values and the same rights."

– Girl's group member, La Vallée



Yveline Joseph, member of Girls' Group and Girls' Advocacy Committee

(23%) or higher, then we can see considerable success. Reported levels by the end of the program in 2021 were 15%, a reduction of 35%. However, there was no change between the 2019 measure of past year physical and sexual partner violence and 2021—both were 15%. Economic violence against women and girls with disabilities increased slightly in La Vallée (from 14% to 15%) between 2019 and 2021; however, economic violence increased dramatically in the comparison communities of Marigot in that time period (8% to 21%). This suggests that the program protects against increases in economic violence during periods of insecurity. That said, the seemingly slower progress on reducing levels of violence against women and girls with disabilities is further discussed in the *Where do we go from here?* section of this report.

Other program effects

The research in La Vallée included extensive focus groups and other qualitative methods to help interpret the survey data and further understand changes to girls age 10-15 (who were part of girls' groups but who were not surveyed) and women and girls with disabilities.

Community members participating in the qualitative research perceived that all forms of violence have decreased because of the program and the change in consciousness it has brought in the community. They said that couples are expected to communicate and make decisions together. In addition, many community members feel equipped to and do sometimes intervene when they witness violence. However, one person shared an experience of the risks still present for the person trying to intervene. People widely point out that girls are in school just like boys are, and that parents are giving girls the opportunity to play soccer and pursue hobbies outside of school.

Girls with disabilities participating in *Power to Girls* developed skills for opportunities that would have been unavailable to them before. However, girls with disabilities describe emotional violence continuing; some attribute this to being more commonly in public spaces now, but still being not well known in the community because they were mostly kept at home before the program. Girls with disabilities reported being in school and feeling supported by teachers and classmates; those with disabilities that affect mobility may still have difficulty attending.

Finally, women and girls with disabilities in the qualitative groups reported that verbal harassment and beatings have decreased, both in public spaces and homes. They did not report changes in levels of violence they experience due to insecurity. Many did not report being aware of overall violence in their communities but felt empowered to intervene and knew who they could go to for assistance.



"They cannot make fun of [girls and women] because of their disabilities. Yes! People can stop her from being ridiculed."

– Women and girls with disabilities focus group participant, La Vallée

Where do we go from here?

Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo's use of *SASA!*, *Power to Girls*, and *Safe and Capable* clearly made a strong, positive difference overall in La Vallée; it effectively prevented violence and changed attitudes toward girls' power, rights of women and girls with disabilities, and overall equality between women and men. It achieved these positive results, despite the increasingly difficult community conditions. It is clear that *SASA!*, *Power to Girls*, and *Safe and Capable* can be effective in Haiti, as well as in other difficult contexts and periods of crisis. Achieving positive results required the right funding, staffing, and methodologies, along with strong commitment of local community leaders, activists, schools, and girls' groups. Further activism to prevent violence against women and girls is still needed in La Vallée. Three advocacy committees that were created out of the Rethinking Power network have secured legal status and are still leading their own prevention activities.

While the results are positive, there are some things that did not change as hoped, and these can be further analyzed and refined even as the methodologies are recommended to be used in other communities. For example, why did physical and sexual violence against women and girls with disabilities not decrease more; why did economic violence increase, and what more could be done to improve outcomes? What could be done to further improve community attitudes about violence being a private matter in a couple, or to better prevent non-partner sexual violence against girls?

It would be expected that, in a time of less upheaval and crisis, even better results may be achieved with the same programming. Further analysis is needed, but a few additional recommendations have emerged from program staff and researcher dialogue as possibilities to further improve positive outcomes.

Recommendations

1. To prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities:

- **Plan enough time.** At least three full years is needed to achieve the best results at a community level. Be flexible and ready to adapt based on community feedback.
- **Promote community inclusion.** Work with community networks to directly engage and promote inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in community life. This allows them to build power in relationships and in their communities, as well as offering opportunities to participate in the program activities held in those spaces.
- **Directly engage women and girls with disabilities.** It is essential that girls' groups make every effort to be fully inclusive. Tap into networks of women with disabilities in the community. If absent, ask women and girls with disabilities in the community whether specific groups to bring them together may feel useful, and follow their guidance.
- **Keep seeking solutions.** Keep asking questions and building relationships. Follow the other recommendations in *Safe and Capable* around partnerships with disability rights organizations, advisory panels, staffing and more!



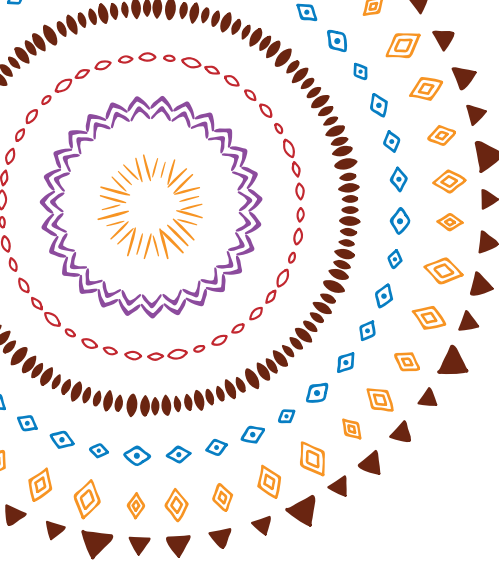
Fabie Saint-Germain and Mexène Mathurin, Community Activists, in a couples workshop

2. Research non partner sexual violence and dating violence.

More research is needed in Haiti and globally on non-partner sexual violence against girls and partner violence against girls in situations where they do not live with a partner, to discern the mechanisms that can support change.

3. Stay committed! Leaving no one behind takes sustained commitment:

- from **funders** for long-term, flexible core funding to women's rights and disability rights organizations;
- from **governments** and institutions to provide quality, accessible services;
- from **organizations** to continuously listen to the voices and leadership of girls, women and girls with disabilities, and other marginalized groups; and
- from **all of us** to find existing organizations and networks of girls and of women and girls with disabilities; and to listen, collaborate, and support!



The primary conclusion of this paper is one of great hope, as communities around Haiti and the world struggle in difficult times:

» *Violence against women and girls can be prevented, without leaving anyone behind, even in times of crisis.*

All of the methodologies used are documented and available, making them easily replicable and scalable with the right funding and commitment.



Members of the *Safe and Capable* creation team

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References

- 1 Adapted for girls from: Raising Voices. (2020). *SASA! Together: An activist approach for preventing violence against women*. Kampala: Raising Voices. raisingvoices.org
- 2 Adapted from: WHO (2001) *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*. Geneva: WHO.
- 3 While Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo did not serve the Marigot comparison communities during this timeframe, the hope is that if the program is still needed after another organizations' current major project on violence prevention and economic empowerment, the program will be offered there as well.
- 4 This age range was chosen to include the population who were adolescents at any point during program implementation.
- 5 Contreras-Urbina, M., Ovince, J., Bourassa, A. and Rojas, E. (2021). *Rethinking Power Program Evaluation in Southeast Haiti: Baseline report of the impact evaluation of the combined methodologies of SASA! and Power to Girls*. Washington DC: Global Women's Institute of the George Washington University. Available at: https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs1356/f/downloads/GWI_1920_10_RethinkingPowerProgramEvalHaiti_ENGLISH_a11_Remediated.pdf



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For more information about the Rethinking Power program, technical assistance on the methodologies we use, or the research, contact: rethinkingpower@beyondborders.net; beyondborders.net