



“Beyond the Clinic Door” NEWSLETTER No.3:

The Stepping Stones training packaging on gender, HIV, communication and relationship skills

Welcome!



Greetings to you all

This 3rd Stepping Stones newsletter is entitled: “Beyond the Clinic Door: how Stepping Stones can support the work of health staff”

We all know how overstretched and under-paid health workers are. Here, we highlight some of the ways your use of the Stepping Stones programme supports and advances the work of health workers, through supporting them in their own work and personal lives first, and then also through reaching into communities. In this issue, you’ll again be able to see the breadth of issues that Stepping Stones is addressing worldwide!



**Stepping
Stones:
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Did you know... that according to WHO, 80% of all health workers globally are female; that only a maximum of 10% of all health workers with HIV have contracted it at work; that many health services in highest prevalence countries are severely affected by loss of health staff through AIDS-related illnesses? **Health staff need all the help they can get. Stepping Stones can support them too....**

Supporting the Health Staff *first*.....

1 Human rights based approach: *Protecting and promoting the rights of health staff*

All health staff have rights: rights to have access to the same quality of treatment and care that is expected of them for their clients. Rights to safety and security at work. Rights to retain their livelihoods for as long as they can work. However, when it comes to supporting clients with sexual and reproductive health and HIV issues, many health staff feel under strain because they often haven't been given the extra training and support they need to address these issues in their own lives, let alone in the lives of their clients. Moreover, since 80% of healthworkers worldwide are female, they may also be juggling with having people with HIV in their families, with all the attendant anxieties, whilst also fearing to talk about the added physical and psychological stresses with their colleagues or bosses at work.

This is why it is so important to think about the effects of HIV in the workplace, *especially* when the workplace is a health centre. In Mumbai, India, the Women Centred Health Project, in developing an urban slum gynaecology out-patients programme, decided to **adapt Stepping Stones** and ran a training programme with 30 participants, (12 men and 18 women), including NGO staff, project staff and Municipal Corporation staff together. The training took 9 days - the first 7 days with the participants looking at these issues in their own lives. The last 2 days gave them a chance to work on how they could use Stepping Stones with others with whom they work. As a result of this initial workshop, plans were then drawn up to use an intense, 6-day adaptation of Stepping Stones, to roll out training of health staff, including ultimately doctors, across all 3 Mumbai Health Authority areas.

The aim of the 6-day training workshops was to train health care providers, enabling them to help individuals, their peers and communities to change their behaviour - individually and collectively - through various sessions provided by the Stepping Stones programme.

The programme was not without the usual logistical challenges. However here is some feedback from it. You can read the full report on the [Stepping Stones](#) website.

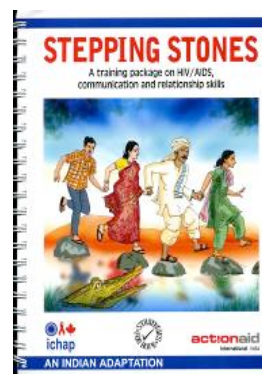
Some feedback from the Mumbai programme for health staff....

“All the four trainers expressed that Stepping Stones was a profound experience. One Public Health Nurse said she would not call Stepping Stones a ‘Training’. She thought of it as a process to get people to think about themselves, their position in life, ‘As a human being where am I?’ and find solutions to their problems. They felt that SS related to sensitive topics, to emotions, attitudes and behavioural changes. It dealt with people in the community.

The trainers felt that SS Trainer’s Training was very relevant not just for HIV/AIDS but could be applied to Family Planning, family welfare and other issues for modification and adaptation in the module.

Stepping Stones does not have only curative approach, it is also preventive and promotive.

It can be applied to all social issues. For any community work, any social issue, being member of a family, we need Stepping Stones. It promotes liberal thinking, rational approach, not fatalistic approach. Flexibility is inbuilt in this methodology, flexibility to time situation, locality, community. It can be adapted to suit any situation or group.”



“The Stepping Stones Trainers’ Training seems to have been a profound experience for the trainers whom we interviewed. It set off a process of introspection and reflection. One CDO said ‘I learnt that one should not have double standards.

There should be no gap between professed values and practical values. It taught me to think. ‘Charity begins at home’ meaning start from ourselves, improve our own thinking and behaviour. Be models for community change.”

The UN Inter-Agency Task Team on "Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission" has four components.....

1 Prevention of HIV in Women:

Stepping Stones is based on developing communication and relationship skills, mutual respect and understanding amongst community members. The examples explored in exercises always come from participants' own experiences. This methodology, which encourages members of a community to know and understand their own and others' behaviour better, has been shown to work in very diverse settings. Local humour, games, music, crafts etc are incorporated throughout the process.

Promoting Voice and Visibility: In Uganda, after a Stepping Stones workshop, Professor Rose [Mbowa](#) of Makerere University, Kampala, described how a group of girls as young as 10 stood up, acted a role play and spoke out in front of the mayor and elders, calling on "sugar daddies" to stop chasing them. Shocked, the elders responded immediately that all men should hold one another to account in the community.

Tackling Gender Violence: In a 2009 report, [WHO](#) listed Stepping Stones as "the most widely established and rigorously evaluated "community programme to "challenge gender norms and attitudes that justify intimate partner violence." Gender [violence](#) is widely recognized to increase vulnerability of girls and women to HIV.

Condom negotiation and use, reduced alcohol use, increased equity in decision-making... All these and other social, economic, legal and cultural factors also are known to contribute to reduced HIV transmission to girls and young women. Stepping Stones has been shown to have positive effects in all these areas. View our [website](#) for more details.

2 Prevention of unintended pregnancies among women with HIV:

Whilst there are undoubtedly women with HIV who wish to avoid (further) pregnancies - and this is their right - the most widely identified issue by women with HIV to date is the *lack* of support they receive in relation to ante-natal and peri-natal care, from health workers and society in general, many of whom consider that women with HIV should not have ([more](#)) children. Moreover, it is during pregnancy that many women learn about their HIV status for the first time.

This can be deeply traumatic news at the best of times, but especially so if the women are treated judgmentally by health care staff, partners, other family members, neighbours, their religious groups and employers. Indeed there are reports from S. Africa of pregnant women, who may not even be HIV-positive, avoiding their local ante-natal clinic because they know they will be (wrongly) *made* to have an HIV test before receiving any care and they fear what they have seen of how other women are treated when their test result is positive. So this policy is actually undermining maternal and child health policies as well as HIV.



Young men role-playing support for young HIV-positive pregnant woman"

Stepping Stones [Plus](#) supports and enables a community-wide awareness of all these dilemmas for people with HIV. Women and men are then encouraged to think about having an HIV test together *before* conceiving – and thus preparing for the pregnancy in advance. It also enables sero-discordant couples to learn how to both avoid unintended pregnancies, how to enjoy safer sex in their relationships – and how to conceive with minimal HIV risk. Community-wide information and support promotes respect and solidarity for people with HIV, their carers and those in their care. The sessions enable participants to explore together safely: the female condom, Medical Male Circumcision, VCT, SRHR issues in general, issues facing positive people wanting children, ante-natal and peri-natal care issues, breastfeeding (including heat-treatment), ARV access, support for orphans, issues relating to disclosure and many other issues relating to an HIV diagnosis.

Having this kind of information widely available at community level shifts a huge burden from the workload of each health centre into the community, thereby reducing physical and psychological burn-out for counsellors and front-line health staff alike.

3 Prevention of transmission of HIV from a woman living with HIV to her infant:

This is the most challenging component, because there are unfortunately many policy makers and practitioners alike, who don't think that women with HIV have the right to have any children at all. However, as you can read above, having this kind of Stepping Stones programme available within the community can shift a huge burden of work from health staff to community members themselves. Once community members in general understand these issues for themselves, the workload of the health centre can improve substantially, as the community and health centre start to support one another in a common goal.

4 On-going treatment, care and support for HIV-positive women and their children:

Health workers can provide ARVs and SRH information and services but are often too overworked to provide on-going care and support. Yet we know that people with HIV are best able to [adhere](#) to treatment and benefit well from it in a loving, caring, supportive environment. This is where the Stepping Stones programme can come in so useful again – because it is entirely designed to provide understanding, support, mutual respect, practical action and solidarity for, by and with people with HIV and their families, including orphans. It promotes gender equity, promotes inter-generational respect, reduces gender violence and, even in post-conflict settings, has been seen to support community rebuilding and re-establishment of community [coherence](#).



“For every worn, rain-splattered copy of Stepping Stones that is in circulation, there are thousands of people that have benefited from it. This enduring manual has been passed around, copied, memorized and acted out in countless communities, who are hungry for its clear information and empowering, learning-centred approach to HIV and AIDS education. As a result, communities have been mobilized, lives saved and hope restored.”

Laura van Vuuren, Medical Teams International, Seattle, USA

All Stepping Stones drawings are by Petra Röhr-Rouendaal

We're always glad to hear your stories. Please send them in!

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Thank you to Packard, UNESCO CAFOD and Plan International for their generous support

Message to donors: by supporting Stepping Stones programmes you can also be supporting the hugely overstretched and under-resourced health services of high-prevalence countries.... read how here.....