



Celebrating 21 years of *Stepping Stones*

1995-2016

Stepping Stones Stories from *Malawi*.....



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Organisation: Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA)

Country: Malawi



When did you first come across Stepping Stones?

In 2009 after I joined COWLHA. At that time, there was a pilot project funded by UNFPA which was coming towards its end in which the *Stepping Stones* approach was used to train women living with HIV only as trainers of trainers. A year later, COWLHA had another project funded by UNDP which was again designed to use the *Stepping Stones* Methodology in preventing GBV and I was asked to coordinate it. It was through this project that I went through the initial training of trainers in *Stepping Stones*, which formed my foundation in utilising the methodology in subsequent projects.



How did you use it and where and when?

Based on the experiences from the first project funded by UNFPA highlighted above, COWLHA got funding from UNDP in 2010 to upscale efforts from the 2009 project across 8 districts in Malawi namely Chitipa, Mzimba, Ntcheu, Lilongwe, Phalombe, Mchinji, Zomba and Machinga. Under this project, couples (men and women) were trained as community facilitators of *Stepping Stones*. Each couple was responsible for facilitating community sessions within their localities and I was responsible for ensuring that the facilitators were following the

methodology in the community sessions to ensure that we are able to attribute any results to *Stepping Stones*.

Based on the results of the UNDP funded project, COWLHA secured more funding from United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF) to upscale the project into twelve districts using the lessons from the initial project. One of the things that was done differently in this project was to conduct a baseline study that informed the adaptation of the *Stepping Stones* methodology to suit the issues that existed in the 12 districts (Karonga, Rumphu, Nkhatabay, Mzimba, Salima, Dedza, Balaka, Lilongwe, Ntchisi, Blantyre, Thyolo and Nsanje) across Malawi. An adapted and translated manual was produced and was used by the 288 community facilitators (144 men and 144 women) who were trained under the project.



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Again I was responsible for coordinating the project and mentoring the community facilitators to ensure that the project objectives are being achieved.

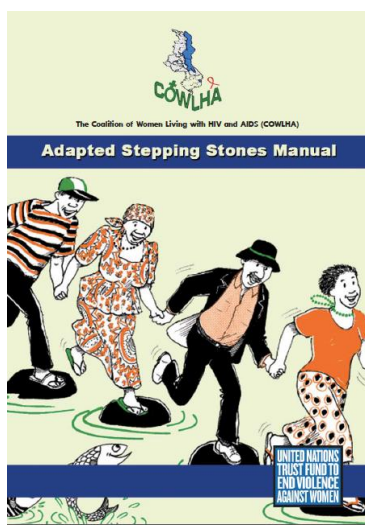
★ *Something that you liked about it:*

One of the highlighted positive effects the methodology had in the communities where we were implementing the project was the admission from beneficiaries that couple communication was one of the major lessons they had learnt from the methodology and that this reduced the incidence of intimate partner violence. The project initially intended to reach out to 7,000 women living with HIV, 20,000 women and girls and 5,000 survivors of violence. But figures gathered from program reports and field reports as well as registers from community volunteers indicate that the program managed to reach out to 1,475 women/ girl survivors of violence, 13,285 women living with HIV and 25,544 women and girls in general.

The evaluation of some work done in 2015 revealed that the incidence of domestic violence of all forms significantly reduced when compared to the baseline findings. Physical violence, psychological violence and sexual violence all significantly reduced by 55 percent, 66 percent and 74 percent respectively in the communities where the *Stepping Stones* community workshops were held.



I am very proud to have been in charge of the project because I got to contribute towards some changes in the lives of many couples, most of who I have a personal touch with and they still contact me up to date to thank me for my role in the positive changes that happened in their lives. Due to the reduced levels of intimate partner violence, some households soared economically due to the trust and mutual support that partners had in making their homes better for themselves and their children.



★ *Do you have a positive message you would like to share with the *Stepping Stones* Community of Practice?*

The key message I have is that *Stepping Stones* is an effective tool for generating some positive behaviour change in relation to GBV and HIV related issues. However, it takes patience, dedication and continuous mentoring of community structures in order to get to a level where they can be left on their own to blossom in the methodology. It is our role as a community of practice to ensure we don't give up on the communities we work for, let alone give up on ourselves and our efforts. It is all worth it in the end when so many lives are changed through our work and this is what gives me the strength to carry on doing what I do every day.



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★ ***Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself or about Stepping Stones?***

Stepping Stones has helped me to help others in overcoming the challenges of life. But most importantly, it has helped me to be a better person, a better husband and a better father. It is a methodology full of lessons that derive from reflection and action.

Thank you Steven!



To view and read more about COWLHA's *Stepping Stones* programme in Malawi, see below:

a) A documentary about the COWLHA *Stepping Stones* programme and films made by COWLHA members about the issues they [face](#). These films were made with support from Dr Dominique Chadwick of Social Films and Salamander [Trust](#).

b) COWLHA 2012 Baseline Report on intimate partner violence experienced by people living with [HIV](#).

c) COWLHA 2015 End of Project Evaluation Report of its *Stepping Stones* [programme](#).

www.salamandertrust.net
www.stepsstonesfeedback.org



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