

**Can recent research in
interpersonal neurobiology and
solution-focused therapies help us
move beyond gender-based
violence?**

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Network for Promoting Gender Approaches
Daino gya wite-entred/ cawelcote

www.steppingstonesfeedback.org

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[1] See www.steppingstonesfeedback.org for more information about the Stepping Stones programme



[2] The Stepping Stones programme is a training package on gender, HIV, communication and relationship skills. It was developed first in Uganda in 1994 by Alice Welbourn, a social anthropologist and international specialist on gender and participatory approaches to development, who had recently been diagnosed with HIV. The late scholar, playwright and actor, Professor Rose Mbowa, who was head of the Makerere University Department of Music, Dance and Drama, from where Germine Sebuwufu and I had recently graduated, was our lead trainer. I was involved in that first Stepping Stones workshop facilitators' team in 1994 as the young men's peer group facilitator and Germine was the young women's facilitator.

Welbourn A 1995 "Stepping Stones" Strategies for Hope, Oxford
www.steppingstonesfeedback.org



[3] The programme has since gone global to over 100 countries. Adapted and translated into at least 30 languages, it reduced intimate partner violence (or IPV) in an RCT conducted by the South African Medical Research Council. The What Works for Women website grades it as Gray II evidence level for effectiveness, both in addressing violence against women and transforming gender norms. Women in countries including Malawi, India (where it has also ended child marriage in communities where it's been used) and the Gambia. have *themselves* reported IPV reduction, in response to being asked “what has changed for you?”.

Jewkes et al 2008 ***Impact of Stepping Stones on incidence of HIV and HSV-2 and sexual behaviour in rural South Africa: cluster randomised controlled trial*** BMJ 2008; 337 <http://www.bmj.com/content/337/bmj.a506>
<http://www.whatworksforwomen.org/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=%22Stepping+Stones%22>
<http://pag.aids2014.org/flash.aspx?pid=1806>
 (eg COWLHA/Salamander Trust 2013; Bradley et al 2011, Paine et al 2002).



[4] The programme was designed from the outset to run with four different peer groups simultaneously, based on age and gender, each with a facilitator of their own gender and similar age. With about 18 sessions, over about 9 weeks, a few sessions also bring them all together to share and compare their learnings. Thus they build bridges of understanding, empathy and compassionate support between the four peer groups. All the programme is based on discussions, role-plays, games and drawing, with no literacy needed. This ensures that anyone can take part, irrespective of their formal educational level. The idea of working with four peer groups simultaneously is one of the most fundamental “foundation stones” of the Stepping Stones programme, to forge cross-gender and cross-generational understanding.



[5] The Karamojong pastoralist community in NE Uganda, along with many other similar communities across Northern Uganda, South Sudan, Northern Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia, have been beset by long-term small arms proliferation, much of it the end product of decades of extractive colonial cold war strategies across the region. This small arms proliferation has resulted in immense instabilities, much attendant violence, including sexual violence, associated with replacing traditional spears for stock theft, associated with occasional injuries and deaths, with mass injuries and killings through machine gun fire. With elders' traditional authority structure, disciplinary sanctions and powers often undermined and eroded by colonial administrations and internationally supported post-colonial dictatorships, young men's adventures in raiding have morphed into undisciplined massacres associated with increasing levels of sexual violence.

So with support from the World Bank LOGICA Project and invaluable inputs and evaluation support from the Feinstein Center at Tufts University, we adapted the original programme and conducted it in 10 parishes in Karamoja over 9 months in 2013. Tufts University conducted baseline qualitative interviews with 195 people of different genders and ages; and 1,556 quantitative interviews with young men in 7 intervention and 3 control sites. The quantitative survey had a stepped wedge design in 4 different stages. You can learn more about the whole survey process in the final report.



[6] Since Stepping Stones was first created, we have always sought to support participants to work together to view the bigger picture, to understand the issues and challenges facing each separate section of their community, to step out of their own box and to view the world differently through stepping into one *another's* sandals and perspectives. We have always worked from the principle that we all carry the power of good within us, from cradle to grave and that, although we might lose sight of it at times, owing to ways in which we have been treated by others and our defensive responses to these, we can always re-find that good within us with the care and support of those around us. We have often been asked what our theoretical framework was and have always found that a hard question to answer. However with new evidence on inter-personal neurobiology, we can now answer that clearly. Here we explain briefly Dr Dan Siegel's triangle of mental health*, which we see connects strongly with our programme.

Dr Siegel's triangle consists of three equal prime points, the BRAIN (which is connected through our spinal column to the workings and energy of all our essential organs of our body, including our heart, lungs, liver and kidneys), the MIND process that regulates our information flow in us; and RELATIONSHIPS – which is how our information and energy is shared between us and individuals and 1, 2 or more other people.

The Triangle of Mental Health continued....

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Dr Siegel then identifies nine key components that make up all of us and which need to be integrated in this triangle framework for us to achieve good health and well-being.

All 9 of them really relate to all the parts of the triangle we have just seen but for ease of explanation we have grouped them in threes around the triangle.

*See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGYUbc73JwY&app=desktop%3E>

MIND

Component	Programme Structure & Exercise
Insight – mapping where you are now, where you've been in the past, where you're going in the future ("mental time travel")	Spider's web (Gender identities through) Past images and Current realities Peer group composition (based on age and gender)
Understanding why we behave as we do - Ability to extinguish fear from learned events by retelling past stories and learning a <i>different</i> narrative	Ability spotting – as story-teller Traditions Alcohol (Gender identities through) Past images and Current realities Money – economic stresses Politics of small arms industry Peer group composition (based on age and gender)
Emotional balance – not chaotic or depressed	Assertiveness training Breathing & meditation exercises Termite mounds

[7] Firstly, let's look at our minds. The three components that Siegel identifies which are perhaps most connected to our minds (though they are all inter-related remember) are: insight; understanding why we behave as we do and emotional balance, shown in this chart here.

For each of these three components, we have various different exercises throughout the programme which support these qualities to develop in the participants. We show some examples of relevant exercises in the right hand column here.

The exercise in red we will explain in more detail shortly.

BRAIN/BODY

Component	Programme Structure & Exercise
Regulating your body – coordinating your heart rate, intestines, breathing	Breathing and meditation exercises Body language exercises Assertiveness training
Ability to pause before you act – response flexibility	Termite mounds – what lies beneath anger Peer group support to (re)act differently (based on age and gender)
Intuition – bringing the wisdom of the body up into our awareness	Dreaming and back-lighting Ability spotting – as listener Support from peers

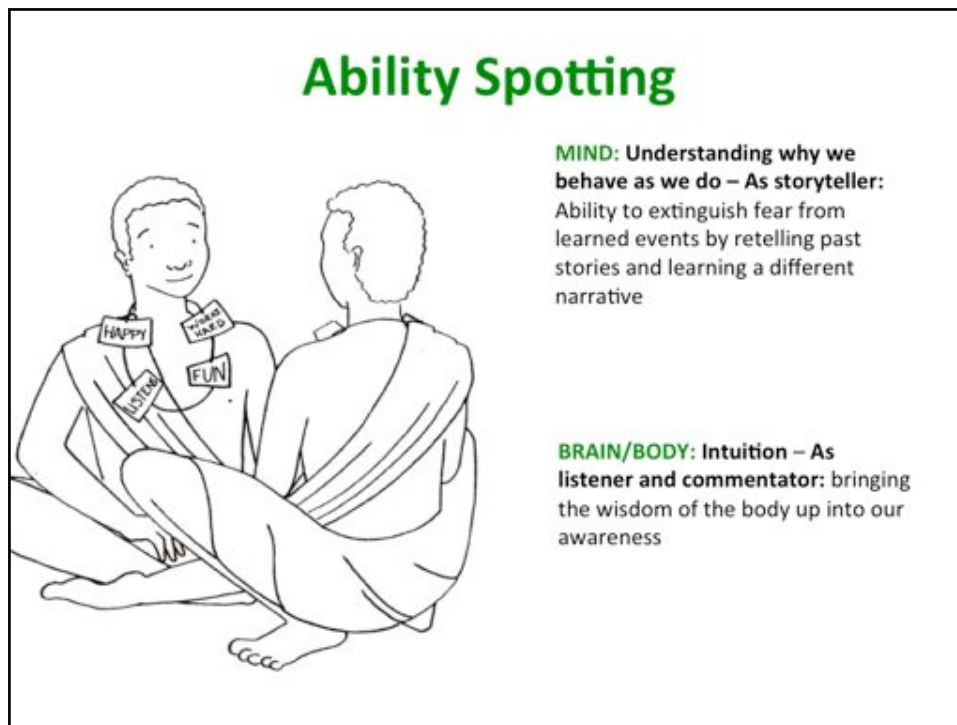
[8] Now let's move on to the next 3 components identified by Dr Siegel. These relate more to our brains, which are connected to all our essential organs in our bodies and are shown in this chart with more related exercises. They are: regulating our bodies; learning and *using* an ability to *pause* before we act; and intuition – bringing the wisdom of the body up into our awareness.

RELATIONSHIPS	
Component	Programme Structure & Exercise
Attunement - to feel <i>with</i> another person	Fixed positions Circular questioning – how do <i>you</i> think he or she feels? Goat scenario Assertiveness training Role-plays as members of other peer groups Thinking about <i>other</i> peer groups beyond our own Meeting with other peer groups to share and compare Random Acts of Kindness Sharing information from the programme with others
Empathy – ability to make maps in your mind of someone else's subjective experience	Fixed positions Circular questioning – how do <i>you</i> think he or she feels? Goat scenario Assertiveness training Role-plays as members of other peer groups Meeting with other peer groups to share and compare
Morality – the greater good – a "we"-map	Ability spotting Dreaming and back-lighting Goat scenario I-statements to We-statements ("We-dentity") Meeting with other peer groups to share and compare Full Community Meeting – to share programme with all community

[9] Dr. Siegel's last 3 components of mental health well-being are shown in this chart here.

They are: **attunement** – to feel *with* another person; **empathy** - ability to make maps in your mind of someone else's experience; and **morality** - for the greater good of society – a "we" map.

Again please remember that all 9 components relate in some way to **all** the triangle.



[10] As well as that great framework from Dr Siegel, new research has also shown us the power of **positive** thinking instead of **problem**-oriented exercises. So now we will look at 2 of the exercises we highlighted earlier in red.

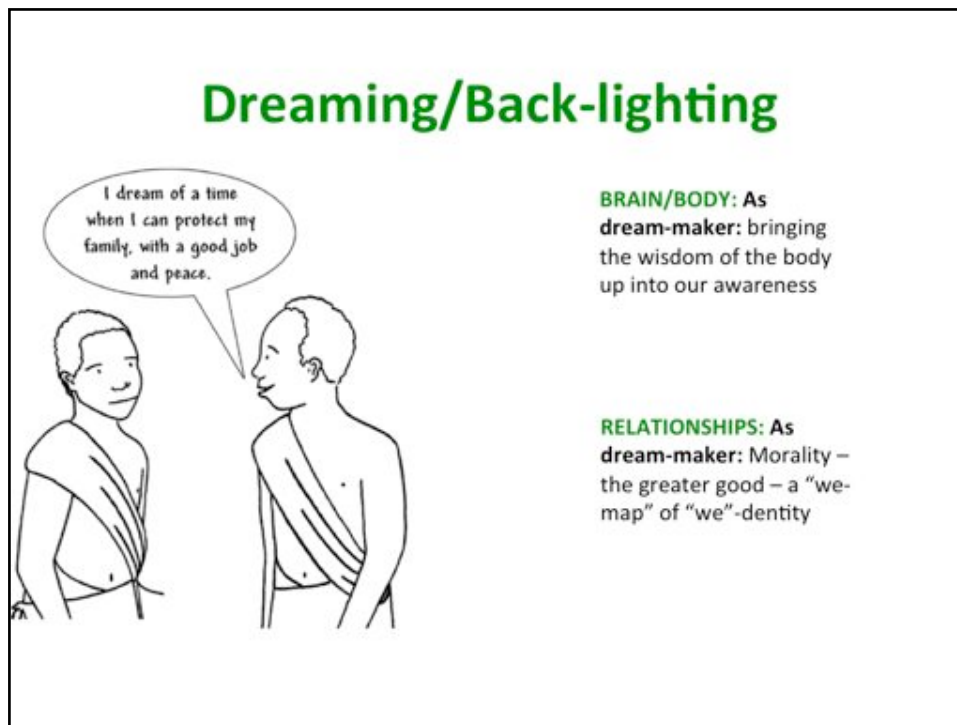
Created by psychiatrist Dr Elspeth McAdam, as a part of the Namweza project (www.namweza.org), ability spotting gives us the powers to awaken participants' awareness of the strengths and skills they have within them, built from their own experiences and **abilities to overcome past challenges and fears**. Participants work in small groups, so that each shares with the others in turn a story of something that he or she felt had challenged them in the past, which they felt they had managed to overcome, no matter how small. The participant describes briefly what the challenge was and how he or she managed to overcome it. The other participants listening to this story praise her or him as the story is retold, for courage, imagination, persistence, kindness, thoughtfulness, generosity or whatever quality comes to their minds. As the others identify these qualities, they either write or draw them on pieces of paper, which they then stick all over the story-teller. At the end of the story, the story-teller then gathers all the papers together and threads them onto a piece of thread or ribbon which he or she then ties, as a necklace, around his or her neck. Then it is the turn of the next participant in the group to tell her or his own story and the other participants then respond in similar fashion until all members of the group, having related their own story, have their own necklace of their own strengths,

Ability Spotting continued...

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The very act of telling a story of something difficult in one's past – often for the first time – and having it met with support, encouragement and praise – can often be a first step to readjusting and overcoming past memories of fear and loss into foundation stones of strength, resilience – and renewed self-esteem.

Past memories of fear or loss are like broken pieces of glass inside us. The process of retelling these fragmented stories and being supported to piece them together into a whole with a new positive narrative, which appreciates the strength and resilience of the story-teller, is like sticking back together a broken mirror, in which we can now view ourselves with pleasure rather than pain and sadness or anger. How we relate to and have responded to our memories of past events can have a significant effect on how we respond *in future* to potentially similar events. Similarly, becoming the listener and appreciator develops our sense of connectedness to others – our “we”-identity. So this ability spotting exercise, especially one where each participant in turn acts both as the story-teller and as the appreciator, empowers each participant in turn to both learn new skills in retelling past sadnesses or challenges and hearing a different narrative about them; and identifying and articulating one's appreciation for others' qualities. This ability spotting exercise supports participants to see their own histories in a different, more positive light. This apparently simple exercise is one which has proven immensely powerful in our programme.



[11] Another lesson in positive solution-focused thinking from Dr McAdam (see also www.namweza.org) has been an exercise on dreaming our futures and back-lighting. This helps us develop our ability to connect with the deep *intuition* of our profound creativity and good which is held in all our bodies. In this, participants are invited to work in pairs or threes. Each in turn is invited by the others to dream of something successful they are doing in five years' time, which they feel proud of then. Through intensive questioning from their peers, using who, what, how, where, when questions, the participant is invited to fill in the story, working backwards through time to the present, in order to dream how he or she has achieved this personal dream. Participants are invited to understand that dreaming and imagining are creative processes that come from beyond our regular 'thinking' minds. We are not talking about thinking and planning our futures, but rather making use of the right side of our brains, letting our deeper wisdom and values emerge as a dream, a hope or an imagined future. Participants are invited to let this dreaming happen, through initial relaxation and breathing exercises, which can support us all to learn how to clear our minds, to slow or even stop thinking, and just listen to our deeper selves.

Dreaming/Back-lighting continued....

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IN SUMMARY, Through constant and repeated use of all these exercises and many more, we use acting, listening to each other, watching and talking. This all enables participants to make use of all their mind, brain/body and relationship-building faculties and skills to learn new ways of feeling, thinking, doing, being and *connecting* in the world.

We also endeavor to make sure that all exercises finish with a *positive* feeling, thought and action, since we have again learnt from new research that it is what we have done *most recently* that imprints its memory on us. This is why we work as much as possible with *positive* ideas, dreams, visions, and actions, in order to train our minds, brains and bodies to “rehearse for reality” how we want to do and be – and connect and relate with others around us - in the future together.

RESULTS: what women said

A group of women surveyed in the evaluation summarized the changes achieved:

"[The program] changed attitudes completely, [things are] totally different since the coming of Stepping Stones. It has brought cooperation within family members like mothers and fathers. The man used to be lying under the tree, today they share ideas together. If it's cultivating—they all go together; if it's looking for survival, they share together."

Interview with group of women, Stepping Stones, Nariameregae Parish, Lotome Sub-county, August 30, 2013. Reported in 'Engaging Male Youth in Karamoja': An examination of the factors driving the perpetration of violence and crime by young men in Karamoja and the applicability of a communications and relationships program to address related behavior. LOGICA Study Series No.2 June 2014.

[12] Here is a quote from women about their experience of the programme.

So you can see women really felt something big was changing.

See <http://www.logica-wb.org/home.php> and <http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/engaging-male-youth-in-karamoja-uganda/>

IMPROVED INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS:

“Respondents of both genders reported a decrease in domestic violence as well as improved relations at the household level. They attributed this change directly to the Stepping Stones program.

The quantitative results support this finding: 43 percent of respondents at the baseline felt it was acceptable to hit a woman, compared to 23 percent at the endline in intervention locations.”

Tufts evaluation report 2014

[13] We also have strongly reported improvements in inter-personal relations. Whilst at the start, 43% of respondents thought it was ok to hit a woman, at the end 23% thought this. Meanwhile, in the non-intervention sites, 43% still thought it was ok. So this was a big change, directly related to the programme.

Further Results:

- Programme “wildly popular”
- Improved security (48% --> 60%)
- Better behaviour management
(especially after alcohol)
- Increased sharing of domestic chores
(child-care & food preparation)
- Greater respect for authority of elders

Tufts evaluation report 2014

[14] And we also have these results to share, around the popularity of the programme, a better sense of security, better behaviour management , especially in relation to alcohol, increased task sharing in households and greater respect for authority.

Lessons learnt:

- New research has helped validate our approach (eg Siegel framework of mental wellbeing)
- Positive, solution-focused exercises powerful and popular
- Change is *not* linear and does not happen overnight
- Wider political and economic contexts key to effective programme interventions
- Livelihoods training and seed funds as critical follow-up

[15] So here are some of the lessons we have learnt.

The Siegel framework based on new research in inter-personal neurobiology has helped us to validate our 20 years of work.

The new exercises such as ability spotting and several others, which are positive and solution focused are very powerful and popular

Change does not happen overnight. And sometimes attitudes change AFTER behaviour changes. It is *not* a linear process and takes a long time.

The wider historical, political and economic context is always key in developing a programme which local people can feel is their own

Young men and young women alike are very thirsty for vocational training and then need seed funds to put all their new visions and ideas into action. We need to ensure this is always available after such programmes.

Next Steps

- Funding needed for further research and implementation
- More support needed for young men who are least educated, most marginalised and have less to lose through violence
- Ensure primary schooling completion for all children – to increase non-violent options
- Tufts recommends longer research programme spread to eg S Sudan, Ethiopia, N Kenya and beyond

[16] So here we present some recommended next steps.

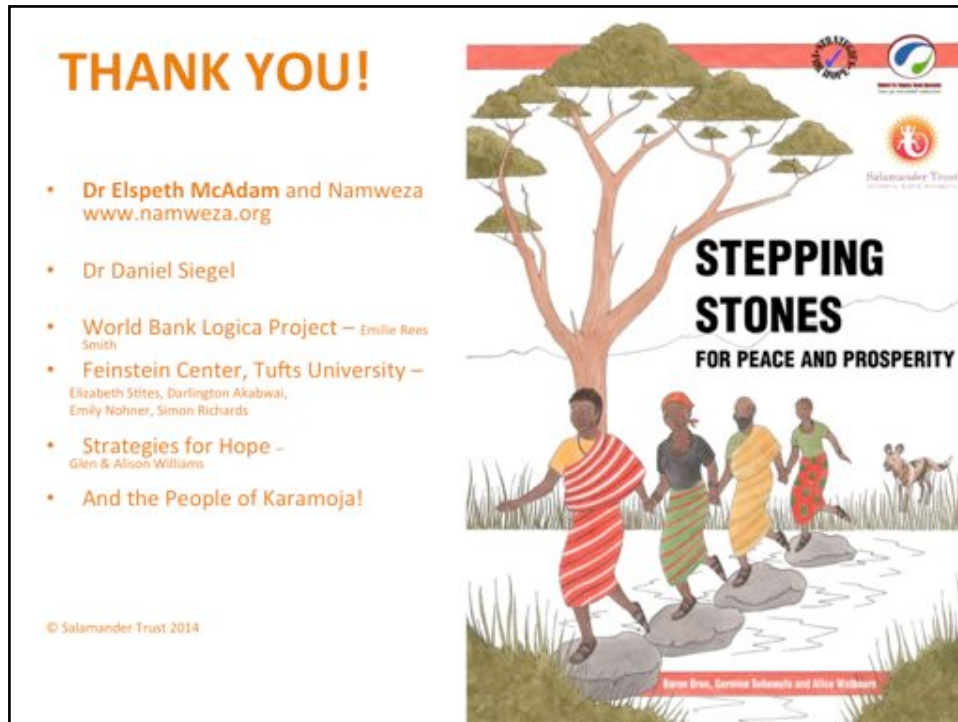
Funding is needed for further research and implementation. This was just a pilot programme but we would dearly like to develop use of this new research more.

More support is needed for all the young men who are most marginalised and have less to lose through violence. These young men are often highly intelligent but had to drop out of school early.

So we also recommend that authorities ensure primary schooling completion for all youth – to increase non-violent options for those who are still young and haven't yet started raiding

Finally Tufts recommends that a programme such as this has great potential and that we need a longer-term research programme with a livelihood component, over a wider geographic area, such as South Sudan, Ethiopia, N Kenya and beyond.

[http://www.logica-wb.org/PDFs/LOGICA_StudySeriesNo3_UGA.pdf]



[17] Finally thank you so much to all our great collaborators including especially the people of Karamoja!