



Salamander Trust

TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT HIV

Stepping Stones Annual Report April 2011 – March 2012

Stepping Stones is a training package on gender, HIV and communication issues in communities. It was developed and written by Alice Welbourn between 1993 and 1995, based on the first workshop, held in Uganda in 1994. At the time, there was no tool of its kind to tackle these issues, so Stepping Stones was very quickly adopted in many situations by various organisations around the world. Today, Stepping Stones is used across all the continents, has been translated into over 25 languages, has been used in a wide range of settings – from prisons to the military to rural communities to urban environments – and has started to spawn a family of related projects such as Stepping Stones PLUS, which widens the scope of the original manual.

The Stepping Stones Training Programme is the longest running and most widespread programme of its kind. Developed and written between 1993 and 1995, by December 2011, a total of at least **28,065 copies** of the 'Stepping Stones' manual - in **20** languages - had been distributed worldwide (to over **120** countries).

Further, **8,450** workshop video copies, **485** copies of the 'Stepping Stones Revisited' DVD and **459** copies of the 'Stepping Stones PLUS' manual had been distributed.

Salamander Trust (www.salamandertrust.net) coordinates the network of over 1,000 users worldwide from the UK, provides key information on the programme and develops its content. Our partner Strategies for Hope (www.stratshope.org) is the editor and publisher for the programme. TALC (www.talcuk.org) is in charge of the distribution of the material.

This year – April 2011 to March 2012 – has been very active in the development, promotion and collection of information on Stepping Stones.

Key achievements and highlights of the year have been:

- Country visits to Senegal and to India
- The translation of Stepping Stones Plus into Spanish and French
- The representation of Stepping Stones at international events
- The great improvements in our ability to communicate with the Stepping Stones Community of Practice

1. Country visits

Country visits are a very important part of our activities. They enable us to:

- Understand better how Stepping Stones is being used in communities
- Get a feel for how implementers and participants are reacting to the material
- Identify areas where we can best support local teams
- Share learning from other implementers in the worldwide network

Generally, the in-country teams are thrilled when we visit them. They are often not aware of the international dimension of the work. It makes them feel validated and part of something far bigger than just the work they are doing locally (especially for participants at village level) – it's very motivational. Teams are eager to share what they are doing and what they've learnt. They often are aware of gaps in their knowledge and are really keen to find answers. Everyone likes to ask questions about other countries.

An example of our learning: our feedback had indicated that there were issues worldwide with retaining male facilitators – and this was verified when we visited the teams in the Pacific and Central America. However, when we went to Senegal and India this year, we learned that in both of those countries, trainers were predominantly male and it was more difficult to recruit and retain female facilitators. Challenges for female facilitators included travel far from home (husband's permission in India, leaving family behind in Africa), safety (sessions finish late and going home can be dangerous) and the social sensitivity of the subject matter (sex, HIV).

SENEGAL

In April 2011, Salamander sent its Stepping Stones Coordinator, Amandine Bollinger, for a 10 day-mission to Dakar, Senegal. There, she managed to meet with various organisations who had developed, implemented and adapted the programme locally.

Stepping Stones has been present in Senegal since 1997. Originally introduced by ActionAid, the methodology has been actively developed locally by the Alliance Nationale Contre le SIDA - ANCS (the Senegalese branch of the International AIDS Alliance) following the kick-off training session in Morocco in 1997 coordinated by the AIDS Alliance. A Senegalese adaptation of Stepping Stones was then developed and called "Participatory Approach to Prevention". It included new sessions on areas such as genital anatomy and function, STIs, and contained new warm-up exercises based on traditional Senegalese games and songs.

Amandine met with and interviewed:

- Mr. Baba Goumbala – AIDS Alliance Africa representative
- Ms. Magatte Mbodj – Executive Director of ANCS
- The team at ACI – Africa Consultants International
- The President of ABOYA ("United in Hope"), the network of women living with HIV in Senegal

Meeting Baba Goumbala was very informative. Baba provided the context in which Stepping Stones (Parcours in French) took off in Senegal, and mentioned the on-going support that he had received at the time from Linnea Renton, ActionAid. Baba also explained that an important member of the Senegalese development team had been Alioune Badara Sow who is now leading development in DRC, and with whom we are still in regular contact.

ANCS (www.ancs.sn) has been active in the implementation of the methodology and in the training of trainers. At the time of its introduction, there was no other programme of its kind. Prevention was addressed through mass messaging and not in a participatory way involving key populations. Magatte Mbodj, Director of the ANCS, explained to us that Stepping Stones had been very effective in Senegal at solving the problem of getting communities to open up talk about sensitive issues that affect them – in fact it has been the only programme to date that has been able to achieve this. Key exercises are used depending on the topics that seem taboo. Interventions are then planned and implemented based on the outcomes of these working sessions. This has led to interventions on gender violence, early marriage, traditional rites; and to work with sex workers, people in prisons, men having sex with men, people living with HIV...

Stepping Stones has been implemented in the fourteen regions in Senegal where ANCS is active. It is regarded as a key tool that allows communities to begin to express themselves on sex and other sensitive topics in a safe, friendly and supportive manner. ANCS said that, subject to funding, it would be interested in further developing and implementing the manual, for example in adapting Parcours PLUS – our latest edition, Stepping Stones PLUS – for Senegal.

ACI - Africa Consultants International (www.acibaobab.org) - is another organisation that uses Stepping Stones. Its trainers were trained by ANCS. ACI works predominantly with women (Region of Kaolack), with men having sex with men (south of Senegal) and with young people (in the Dakar region).



Stepping Stones trainers of trainers: Mr. Dieng & Mr. Konaté

In an interview, the President of **ABOYA** (the Senegalese network of women living with HIV), summarised the situation of women and HIV in the country: *“Senegalese women are very active, politically engaged and they fight economically; but in the context of HIV, it’s a different situation: HIV is a disease that makes you poor: ‘your husband makes you poor’ – most of HIV-positive women here are widows with children.”* She explained that most HIV-positive women are from poor or modest backgrounds – husbands were typically taxi drivers or did menial work.

We learnt that the level of stigma is still very high, including amongst medical staff; that the epidemic has taken ‘the face of a woman’; that traditional practices such as levirate and sororate are still widespread; and that, in fact, the main problem is increasingly women’s self-stigmatisation and lack of self esteem.

For more information, please see our website (page and interviews in French only for now):

<http://www.stepsstonesfeedback.org/index.php/page/Resources/gb?resourceid=54>

INDIA

In July 2011, Salamander sponsored a mission for the Stepping Stones Coordinator to another region of the world where Stepping Stones has been extremely active: India.

The mission was coordinated with ActionAid India and KHPT (Karnataka Health Promotion Trust) in Bangalore. These are the key implementers and developers of the programme at the national and regional level. ActionAid has been providing training of trainers every year since the implementation of the programme in the late ‘90s. KHPT has implemented the programme in many villages, especially in the municipality of Belgaum, one of the most HIV- affected places in India.

Amandine learnt that Stepping Stones started in India as a result of a push by Linnea Renton (HIV unit, ActionAid) and Jacqui Bataringaya from Zimbabwe. The first training of trainers was delivered by Gill Gordon, Linnea Renton and Lovemore Magwere in the province of Assam, in the North-East of the country.

One of the biggest challenges for ActionAid at the time was to address HIV issues on the one hand, while also addressing education, food, gender issues on the other hand. Stepping Stones was adopted as a way to integrate all these different areas of work into one single project.

Stepping Stones has been translated into 8 Indian languages: Telugu, Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Urya, Tamil, Marathi, Gujarati. There is also a Braille English edition.

“Most popular sessions are ‘What is love’ (especially for children and adolescents), ‘River of Life’ (which is often a heartbreaking session) and ‘Spider Web’. Role-plays are also generally very popular.” – William Christopher, Stepping Stones Trainer of Trainers, Coordinator of APACHA (Asian People’s Alliance for Combating HIV/AIDS)

In India, the four peer groups are divided according to their marital status – married men, married women, unmarried men, and unmarried women. This is deemed to be more relevant in the Indian cultural context than looking at age groups.

Examples of groups that have been targeted are people with disability, transgender, MSM, people living with HIV, seminarians (pastors), adolescents (14 to 18 years old) and sex workers – see the manual designed by KHPT specifically to work with sex workers.

Poornima, Stepping Stones trainer for ActionAid, who has specialised in working with people with disabilities through the Narandra Foundation, explained that *“people with disabilities rarely get married in India and are not talked to about sex. The use of Stepping Stones in these settings has helped improve communication skills and opened up discussion on taboo subjects such as sex and self-stigmatisation. After the workshop, four people got married. 30 trainers of trainers have been organised for organisations working in this field. In the case of HIV-positive people who also live with a disability, Stepping Stones has helped communicate around different issues such as love or sex; and in the case of widows has led to advocacy campaigns to obtain medicine, microbicides, etc. “*

KHPT organised a communities trip to the district of Bagalkot so Amandine could meet with Stepping Stones facilitators there and better understand the context in which the programme is being used.



Stepping Stones facilitators, link workers and coordinators

In this part of India (between Pune – under Mumbai – and Goa), HIV is a real issue. The practice of the Devadasi system is widespread: a religious tradition in which girls are "married" and dedicated to a deity or to a temple. Initially dedicated by their family to priests, the Devadasi system has now taken the form of sex work with religious overtones.

Child marriage is common and there is a significant proportion of unmarried males and females reporting pre-marital sex; and married males and females reporting multiple partners. This reflects the low level of HIV risk perception. The district has also a high population mobility, with migration of sex workers to high HIV prevalence neighbouring destination points in the states of Maharashtra and Goa.

From 2001 to 2006, the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) undertook HIV/AIDS prevention activities in approximately 600 villages in the Bagalkot district of Northern Karnataka. Stepping Stones was introduced by trained link workers as a key behaviour change tool in 202 of these villages.

Amandine had the opportunity to visit a KHPT programme at a village in Bagalkot and was able to interview both the groups of women and of men.

“Since the workshop, nobody drinks any alcohol or chews betel anymore in the village”.

“‘Fixed Positions’ is my favourite exercise, especially when we were asked ‘what do you feel when you look at this person?’”

- Male participants



group of women



group of men

In this village, the impact of Stepping Stones was reported as being:

- Many of the participants were practising dowry payment before taking part in the sessions and stopped afterwards
- Many families were also dedicating female children to the gods. Participants convinced many families not to dedicate their daughters any more as this effectively led them to underage sex work
- Children were being married well before 18 years of age; they now wait until the person is 18, even if that means waiting as little as 6 months

- Under-age mass marriages were stopped
- Improved knowledge and awareness – “we are now acting on what we’ve learnt”
- Improved capacity to communicate with others and to share learning
- They have put in place a Rs 5,000 fine for users and sellers of alcohol and betel
- Greater awareness of how HIV is transmitted
- They now have a condom depot at the VIC (Village info Centre)
- Less anger and violence towards children: *“instead we try now to listen more and communicate in ways that are encouraging.”*

Another organisation reported by ActionAid as being extremely active and also specialising in the organisation of training of trainers is CYDA (the Centre for Youth Development and Activities), based in Pune.

CYDA has been promoting Stepping Stones through regional, national, state and village level training. With ActionAid cutting back its HIV team, CYDA is likely to now be the only organisation delivering Stepping Stones training of trainers regionally.

CYDA has trained around 240 people from different backgrounds, including HIV/AIDS activists, doctors, coordinators of State AIDS Control Societies (SACS), regional, national and state level NGOs trainers, and counsellors from all over the world. Since 2004 CYDA has organized 10 training of trainers sessions in India.

A Stepping Stones trainer was facilitating a body mapping exercise for a group of young people in a village in Maharashtra, India.

A villager, who was not part of the training, noticed. He was shocked as to why the facilitator was talking about body parts related to reproductive health.

The villager saw something foul in the training. He felt that the trainer was corrupting the young people. He immediately summoned the police.

The police came and discussed what was happening with the trainer. The trainer informed the police that he was a master trainer of Stepping Stones methodology. He showed the police his certificate issued and the Stepping Stones training manual. He explained that he was trained by CYDA to teach Stepping Stones, to create awareness about HIV/AIDS and to prevent young people from infection by educating them about issues of sexuality. This satisfied the police.

Then the police admonished the nosy villager, saying that the trainer was providing essential information to these young people that, otherwise, nobody else would give them. The police told everyone that they should be grateful to the Stepping Stones trainer for saving many lives. The facilitator continued his training in the village.

Story by Mathew Mattam, CEO, CYDA

Unfortunately, due to funding issues at most of the Stepping Stones donors, the HIV team of ActionAid India has been disbanded, which means that there are no longer dedicated resources for the work on Stepping Stones within ActionAid. 2011 was the last training of trainers that ActionAid India was able to provide.

It was also sad to learn that the Samastha project of KHPT, which was sponsored by USAID and which includes the work on Stepping Stones in Bagalkot, has reached the end of its funding cycle. USAID has decided to focus its HIV work on different parts of India where KHPT is not present. This means that the tens of facilitators who received a financial consideration for their work will have to find alternative employment. All the great work of KHPT in the region will be taken over by the government and Stepping Stones is not likely to be included as it requires specific knowledge and is not a means of working that the government is familiar with. This was probably the last opportunity to meet the great trainers, facilitators and coordinators of Stepping Stones who have worked on the project. There was much sadness that the project was coming to an end.

KHPT has also undertaken in 2011 an M&E study of its work, which is available here: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/11/496>

2. International Events

Stepping Stones was represented this year at a number of events and conferences:

In October 2011, Womankind Worldwide in association with the Gender and Development Network And the UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development held a meeting on “Successes and challenges in reducing women’s susceptibility to HIV: Ghana a case study”. The meeting took place at the offices of Plan International in London. Womankind’s partners in Ghana, of which one – ProLink – uses Stepping Stones, were invited. The event was co-chaired by Amandine Bollinger of Salamander Trust and Silvia Petretti of Positively UK. The audience comprised NGO practitioners, HIV activists, and children’s organisations. The session focused on gender-based violence and emphasised the value of working with people living with HIV in prevention programmes, and of working with men when dealing with gender-based issues.

Integrating Strategies to Address Gender-Based Violence and Engage Men and Boys to Advance Gender Equality through National Strategic Plans on HIV and AIDS
This workshop, hosted by members of the UN family, together with Sonke Gender Justice and the ATHENA Network took place in Istanbul in November 2011. Two presentations at the conference featured the use of Stepping Stones. One was the film of Baron Oron and his work in N Uganda, which can be viewed at http://www.salamandertrust.net/index.php/Resources/Video_Resources_3_-_Stepping_Stones_in_Uganda/ The second presentation was by Steven Iphani of COWLHA Malawi (see below). Both Steven Iphani and Baron Oron attended this workshop. To view more information about this workshop and presentations, see

http://www.salamandertrust.net/index.php/Projects/GBV_Workshop_Istanbul_Nov_2011/

An Afternoon With Stepping Stones

In February 2012, Salamander organised a workshop for UK-based organisations that are either implementing Stepping Stones internationally or keen to find out more. The workshop was facilitated by Alice Welbourn and Gill Gordon. A summary of the information shared can be accessed here: http://www.steppingstonesfeedback.org/resources/6/SS_An_Afternoon_With_SteppingStones_2012.pdf.

3. News from around the world

Salamander receives much feedback from the Community of Practice network of Stepping Stones users worldwide. It comes via email, via word of mouth, from meetings, or via the online forum. Here is a selection of some information gathered throughout the year:

- **Information about new organizations and groups of people who are using Stepping Stones**

"I will be keeping in touch with you soon and very soon, How are you doing, am well in Kenya, have got my Deaf group really love this books [Stepping Stones Manuals], will keep in touch, lets work on HIV/Aids and water. Africa has that great problem."
Rev Tom Ochuka - Kenya, Africa

"I met a young woman who was using Stepping Stones for her training, I was immensely impressed by all the exercises. Later she started an organization addressing issues of leadership, sex and sexuality among young women. I supported. It's an amazing organization called Katswe sisterhood." **Ms Hope Chigudu – Zimbabwe, Africa**

- **Adaptations of the Stepping Stones manual**

It is great to read this [newsletter]. The war is on in order to ensure a better environment for people who are living positive... Personally and from experience, Stepping Stones is NOT only focusing on HIV, I facilitate the package for Perceptions and Attitude Change Communication and Interpersonal Relationships; I have discovered that Stepping Stones becomes more powerful when facilitated in a continuum which I have tested. I facilitate it for performance improvement thus I have designed Couples Performance Improvement Package; Staff Performance Improvement and many more. I shall share this across the board in my next communication. **TJ Mboya – Kenya, Africa**

- **New interventions incorporating the Stepping Stones methodology**
 - **Violence against women in sex work.**

Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) has been recently awarded a grant from the United Nations Trust Fund (UNTF) on tackling the issue of violence against women in sex work and its interface with HIV. Evidence from the southern state of Karnataka suggests that around 26.4% of sex workers had reported having been beaten or raped in the past year. In addition to the physical and sexual violence, women in sex work face emotional, verbal and economic violence too.

Using Stepping Stones within this project. *The project will use Stepping Stones package as a tool to involve intimate partners in addressing violence against women and its interface with HIV. By conducting sessions with the couples on issues like gender, communications and relationships skills, the intimate partners will be sensitized on the issue of violence against women and prevention of HIV. The tool has previously helped in our programs and has resulted in positive results in addressing gender and power imbalance in relationships. The attempt is to involve intimate partners in alleviating violence against women by understanding gender inequalities and violence issues. **Dr Srinath M Maddur, Kanatarka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT), Kanatarka, India.***

- **Using Stepping Stones with the Maasai Community.**

“I am a Stepping Stones trainer since 2003. I recently worked for African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) on a short-term contract and felt Stepping Stones would add value to the work they do. I therefore requested the manager to support me to conduct Stepping Stones training for three community groups. This was done in Magadi Division at a place called Shompole and in Loitokitok District at a place called Elangata Enkima and Amboseli Enkong

Community members are introduced to chief trainer, Martin Opondo.

Narok. The experience was wonderful. I do not speak Maasai so I needed to train a team of experienced trainers who have basic skills of adult learning background mainly consisting of community health workers and youth peer educators. After going with them through a three-day experimental program, we went to the field to conduct the same with the four peer groups, where each person was addressing a peer group of the same gender and age set. The outcome was wonderful.



A younger group of Maasai men doing the Stepping Stones “Body Mapping” exercise.

I designed to conduct the training in Phases using the manual adapted in South Africa and focusing in Reproductive health. I intended to conduct the training in three

*phases of 3 days per month for three months. As I write the training should be going to second phase though u can share the initial out come. **Martin Opondo, Kenya.***

International Translations of Stepping Stones PLUS

We are delighted to announce that Stepping Stones PLUS has now been translated into Spanish and French. The launch of these editions took place in January and March 2012 respectively. The Spanish version is available via Plan International's website at: <http://plan-international.org/where-we-work/americas/publications/paso-a-paso-plus>

Stepping Stones with Children – Comic Relief Application

We are delighted to announce that Salamander Trust, having become a charity in August 2011, has been successful in an application to Comic Relief, for 3 years funding in order to adapt Stepping Stones for use with Children from 5-14 years and their guardians. Led by Senior Technical Consultant Gill Gordon, who has many years of experience of adapting Stepping Stones for communities in different parts of the world, our work begins in March 2012 with long-term Stepping Stones user, PASADA in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. We will provide regular updates about the progress of this work on our website and ning platform.

COWLHA Malawi at UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women meeting, New York

The Coalition of Women living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi has received funding from the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. At a meeting in New York in September 2011, Salamander Trust Alice Welbourn met Director Annie Banda and Programme Officer Steven Iphani. They are using Stepping Stones to reduce gender-based violence and improve the quality of life of their members and their families. This is already happening across 8 districts. With the new funds they plan to extend the programme to another 10 districts. Please click here: <https://vimeo.com/29733302>

Pacific Region

We were saddened to hear that many of the key people who developed Stepping Stones in the Pacific have moved on to other employment. These include Margaret Leniston, Emily Miller and Leaine Robinson. However we welcome Tura Lewai and Nicol Cave, from, respectively, FSPI and SPC, who have joined the programme in the capacities of Regional Health Manager and Prevention - Health Promotion & Communication Team Leader. Albert Cerala remains our Gender Champion at FSPI and the work on M&E is still actively being developed there. We look forward to hearing more from them about the work in the region. Meanwhile, we understand that Stepping Stones has been adopted as a key strategic part of the Fiji National AIDS Control Programme.

Outcome Mapping: staff turnover in Central America and funding difficulties have meant that, despite all the efforts of the team to put M&E via outcome mapping in place, the work has slowed down. For more information on this initiative, please see Amandine's report in English at

www.steppingstonesfeedback.org/resources/7/SS_OutcomeMapping_2012.pdf or the relevant page in Spanish on the website (<http://www.steppingstonesfeedback.org/index.php/page/Resources/gb?resourceid=3>).

Strategies for Hope: our sister organisation, Strategies for Hope, reports:

We continued to collaborate with and support the Salamander Trust, through the publishing and distribution of 'Stepping Stones' materials. By December 2011, a total of at least **28,065 copies** of the 'Stepping Stones' manual - in 20 languages - had been distributed worldwide (to over 120 countries). In addition, 8,450 copies of the workshop video had been distributed, as well as 485 copies of the 'Stepping Stones Revisited' DVD and 459 copies of the 'Stepping Stones PLUS' manual.

The French edition of 'Stepping Stones PLUS' was launched in March 2012.

In Latin America, where Plan introduced 'Paso a Paso' - the Spanish adaptation of 'Stepping Stones' - in 12 countries throughout the region in 2005, Plan has produced a third edition of the manual. In addition, three new resource materials have been produced: a Spanish edition of 'Stepping Stones PLUS', a 'Guide for Training of Stepping Stones Facilitators', and a 'Guide for the Use of Outcome Mapping for the Evaluation of Stepping Stones'.

In the island nations of the South Pacific, 'Stepping Stones' has been systematically introduced by a local NGO, the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI), with financial support from the aid programmes of Australia and New Zealand. The FSPI has also produced a range of attractive materials, including editions of the manual in English and two local languages (Bislama and Kiribati), a monitoring and evaluation toolkit, a facilitator journal and a newsletter.

4. Stepping Stones Internal Developments

Communication:

There have been many new developments that have facilitated communication between Stepping Stones users, thanks to the work of Nell Osborne.

Nell started supporting Salamander in her capacity as Consultant Adviser for E-Communications in June 2011 on a part time basis. A large part of her consultancy role is to support Salamander through restructuring the current tools for communication and to update these in ways that could benefit Stepping Stones as a whole. Efficacy, synergy and accessibility were found to be key to the development of a new, dynamic Stepping Stones communication strategy. An initial communication evaluation was conducted to inform this process.

Communication Strategy Evaluation – Core Objectives

- a) To help Salamander achieve overall organizational objectives**
 - To organize, manage and collate the Stepping Stones data
 - To gain and monitor information about its global usage
- b) To engage effectively**
 - To foster a sense of community and a network of support between the Stepping Stones Community of Practice members
- c) To demonstrate the success of our work**
 - To aid funding applications
- d) To ensure people understand what we do**
 - As a tool for disseminating information and relevant news
- e) To change behaviour and perceptions where necessary**
 - To affect the quality of Stepping Stones implementation
 - To provide grassroots users with information and resources which will benefit their Stepping Stones projects

Stepping Stones already had four communication tools in place. All communicative procedures were looked at in depth to ascertain weaknesses and areas for improvement and development:

Requirement	Previous Resource	Current Resource
Social Forum	phBB forum	NING platform
Contact database	Microsoft Excel	Microsoft Excel
Email Marketing System	None	Mail Chimp
Website	Ginzola CMS	Ginzola CMS

Disadvantages with previous methods of communications

Social Forum:

- Vulnerable to spam and phishing attacks
- Was not being used regularly by Stepping Stones members
- Unattractive, generic design on forum

Email:

- Time consuming
- Issues with spam

- It was not possible to send large numbers of mail simultaneously

Contact Database:

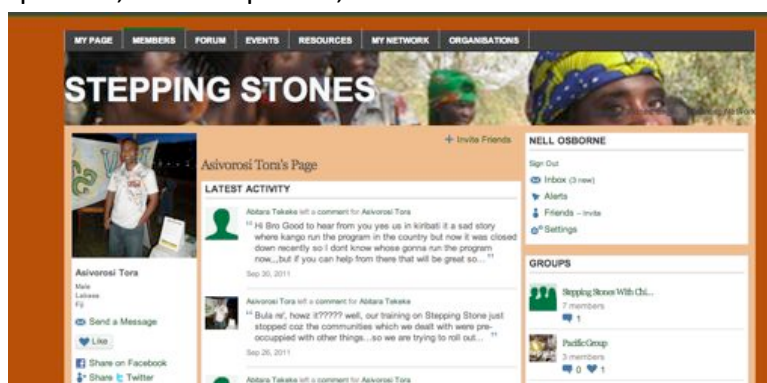
- Contained some errors & out of date email addresses
- It was time-consuming to collect emails manually from the database to send email notices.

Website (<http://www.steppingstonesfeedback.org>):

- Although well designed, the translations and resources need updating
- Web traffic to the site was low

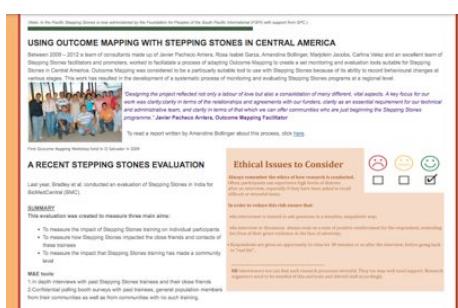
ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE STEPPING STONES COMMUNICATIONS

Social Forum: Introduction of a new social forum utilising a NING. NING is a platform specifically designed to facilitate community social interactions. This was chosen in favour of the previous PHbb platform for a number of reasons. It allows users to create interactive profiles, to share photos, videos and stories with other members, to list upcoming events, to start debates and provoke discussion, nurturing an open, participatory community of users.



A screenshot of Asivorosi Tora's NING

Email Distribution Service: Previously, personal email accounts were being used to send Stepping Stones newsletter to hundreds of people. This resulted in severe problems with spam and a lot of unwanted messages into a personal use mailbox. In order to combat this problem, we implemented Mailchimp. This is used to design and send regular emails. It removes the issue of spam and has allowed us to “clean” our contact database by highlighting bouncing contacts. Furthermore, it keeps data about how many people open our newsletter and how many people click on hyperlinks within the emails.



The most recent Stepping Stones newsletter: on M&E

MailChimp has allowed an increased production of news updates and newsletters:

These include:

- The most recent Stepping Stones Feedback Newsletter on Monitoring and Evaluation
- Stepping Stones Activity Report 2010 - 2011
- Gender Violence Newsletter
- World AIDS day email
- 16 days of activism against gender violence email
- Human Rights day email
- Save the 'Global Fund' petition campaign
- Christmas Wishes email

Increased email interaction with the global Stepping Stones Community Of Practice (emails are produced in French, Spanish and English) has encouraged Stepping Stones community users to inform us about their activities and allows us to keep well-informed of new developments. This now numbers over 1,000 subscribers. Here are some examples of email feedback from recent newsletters:

Hi Nell,

It is of great pleasure to receive this wonderful Newsletter from you. It is of great help to my organization and my entire community members. We are working in an area where Violence against women is very rampant and we are trying our level best to address the same. I would wish to receive as more newsletter as possible. We are going to share with you more in near future. I hope you are aware that am coordinating several organizations in Kenya which are addressing the same. More details of some of the challenges and some success stories will reach you soon. Would you, please connect us with organizations that support such groups financially if there is any.

Thanks a lot for sharing all.

Samuel Okumu

Hello Nell,

Thank you for sending the newsletter. Gender violence is a painful issue for women. The information in it will be printed and shared with leaders.
Yours,

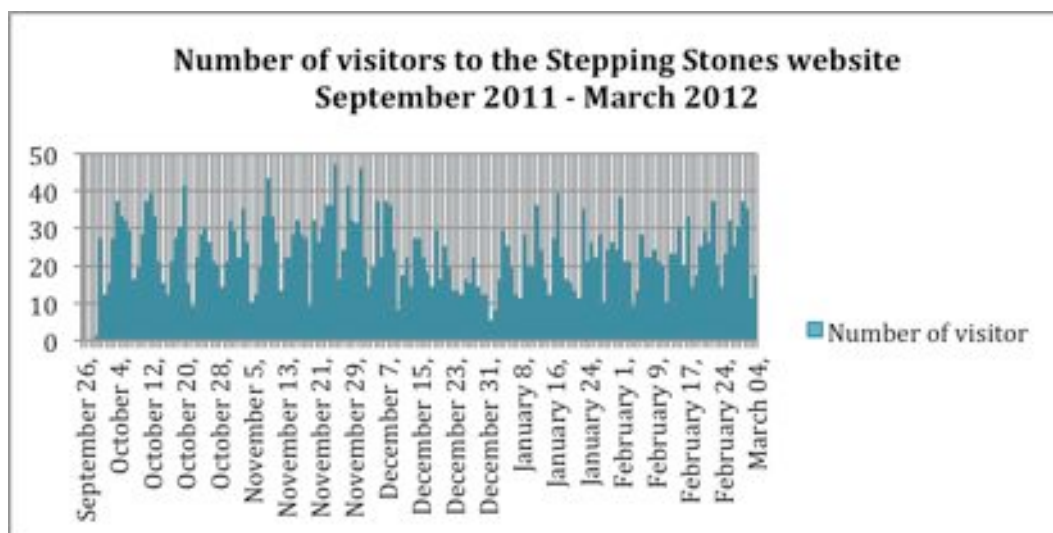
Martha Nthenge

Un cordial y afectuoso saludo desde el Ecuador, felicitaciones por la fructífera labor realizada, aca en Manabí Ecuador trabajando con el manual de Paso a Paso, es importante resaltar el cambio operado en las mujeres que participan y que han comprendido que tienen derechos y que pueden hablar con sus parejas sobre temas de prevención.

Un abrazo .

Ramón Mantilla Ch.

Website: The website has been undergoing a continual process of evaluation and modification to make it more user-friendly and accessible. As part of this, we have improved multi-lingual access by increasing the resources and information available in French and Spanish. Another key objective of the communication strategy has been to increase the Stepping Stones online presence by performing search engine optimisation. Google analytics shows a steady flow of visitors to the Stepping Stones website, peaking at 47 visitors on the 25th November 2011.



Actions taken to improve site traffic have included liaising with relevant organisations to gain backward links and promoting the many resources available on the Stepping Stones website via our newsletters and forum discussions.

Contact database: Updating and maintaining the contact database has been key to the communication strategy. The Stepping Stones contact database has now grown to include over one thousand members.

TEAM DEVELOPMENTS:

In June 2011, Nell Osborne joined our team, providing e-communications consultancy support, with responsibility for developing the Stepping Stones communication infrastructure. Nell is skilled both in written communication, and in the use of web-based communications tools. Nell's presence has made a significant difference to our ability to reach out to our community of users worldwide, by enabling us to produce higher quality communications with greater regularity: you probably will have noticed our new-look emails and newsletters; and for those of you who have joined the Ning forum, Nell has brought a dynamic and light-hearted dimension.



Sadly, we would like to announce that Amandine Bollinger, who compiled much of this report, and covered and travelled widely for the programme, left Salamander Trust at the end of January 2012 to work directly on programmes in West Africa. We would like to thank Amandine for her tremendous contribution to the growth of the Community of Practice over the past 3 years and wish her all the best in her future work.

We would like to send a zillion thanks to both Guendalina Pavesio Chaho and Marijo Vazquez for all the excellent and prompt Spanish translations that they have done for Stepping Stones.

5. Conclusion

This year has had many high points and low points. On the upside, there has been the translation of Stepping Stones PLUS into two new languages, building bridges with India and Senegal, and the addition of Nell to the consultancy support team and the improvements she has made to our systems. On the downside, many partner organisations have been affected by funding cutbacks and so capacity built up with trainers and coordinators has been affected. We do so hope that funding will recover so that all the immense efforts put in by all around the world is not lost.



A few of the many Stepping Stones adaptations in use around the world

THANKYOU

With huge thanks to CAFOD for its extremely generous contribution to our Stepping Stones work.