

6th draft

Stepping Stones in Buwenda: Ten Years Later
A Qualitative Study
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ACRONYMS

SS	Stepping Stones
IGA	Income Generating Activity
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
TASO	The AIDS Support Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1994 a team from the Strategies for Hope project, led by Alice Welbourn, with support from Redd Barna and ActionAid, spent three weeks in the village of Buwenda, Masaka District, in southwestern Uganda, a community where Redd Barna (Norwegian Save the Children) had been working for some time on Child to Child programmes. The team organised a workshop to test the applicability and effectiveness of the 'Stepping Stones' manual (written by Alice Welbourn) as a tool to enable people from all walks of life, irrespective of their literacy levels, to make informed choices on issues regarding their sexual and reproductive health, division of labour, HIV/AIDS and gender relations. The activities of the workshop were recorded and later edited to produce the video which accompanies the 'Stepping Stones' manual. The 'Stepping Stones' training package (240-page manual and 70-minute workshop video) was completed in September 2005.

In November 1995, Alice Welbourn led a small research team which revisited Buwenda and interviewed local people about changes and attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that had taken place since the video was recorded. The following changes were identified:

Table 9 - Changes in Buwenda, Uganda recorded 16 months after Stepping Stones workshop, November 1995

(OM: older men; OW: older women; YM: younger men; YW: younger women)

Changes: mentioned by	OM	OW	YW	YM
less quarrelling between couples and more sharing of household costs	Y	Y	Y	--
less wife-beating	Y	Y	--	--
a respect for the wills of those who have died, regarding the rights of their spouses and children	Y	Y	--	--
a greater sense of well-being and respect for others	Y	Y	Y	Y
greater mutual respect between young men and young women	--	--	Y	Y
greater ability of women to discuss sexual matters with their children	--	Y	Y	--
greater self-esteem among young women	Y	--	Y	--
a reduction in alcohol consumption, by older men especially	Y	Y	--	--
a sustained increase in condom use by participants from all peer groups and others	Y	Y	Y	Y
continued peer group meetings	--	Y	Y	Y
wish to become economically self-sufficient	--	--	Y	Y
improved relations amongst others in the community who had learnt about the workshop from participants	Y	Y	Y	Y
development of care and support for HIV positive people and their carers within the community	--	Y	--	Y
enquiries from other communities about the workshop process	--	Y	--	Y

In 2003 a report from Panos (**Missing the Message** 2003 www.panos.org.uk) stated:

“Communication strategies need to be redirected so that they give prominence to the creation of communication environments which encourage interpersonal communication, dialogue and debate, and which focus as much on providing a voice to those most affected by HIV as they do on educating them through messages. The evidence increasingly suggests that only when people become truly engaged in discussions and talking about HIV, does real individual and social change occur.”

The approach promoted by PANOS in this statement is certainly what the Strategies for Hope team hoped that it had created in developing Stepping Stones: and this hope also seemed to be borne out by the findings in Buwenda 16 months after the workshop. But 16 months is one thing – what about *long-term* change?

Between November 1995 and November 2005, there was no contact between the people of Buwenda and the producers of the 'Stepping Stones' training package. The Norwegian NGO, Redd Barna, which had been working in Buwenda, withdrew from the area in about 1996 (check).

Therefore when Baron Oron, one of the team which tested the draft 'Stepping Stones' manual and helped to make the workshop video in 1994 agreed to revisit the community in November 2005, there was a sense both of hope and of trepidation. Maybe the community would feel resentment and anger that their stories had been captured on video and circulated for all to see around the world, without any personal remuneration for them, despite all our efforts at the time to seek their fully informed permission for this? Maybe they would feel frustrated that there had never been any follow-up to that initial workshop, owing to lack of project funds? Maybe the workshop had opened up all kinds of long-term wounds between different community members through asking them to delve so deeply and publicly into their relationships? These were some of the anxieties in the minds of the Strategies for Hope team.

Nonetheless, one rarely has the opportunity to revisit the site of a workshop over 11 years after it was first held. In particular this was a workshop that has become the model for similar workshops adapted from the Stepping Stones training manual, in thousands of communities across many countries, in widely diverse rural settings, across Africa, Asia, L America and beyond. How could we then not accept this challenge and hope that Baron might find a community which had its own story to tell about what has happened to them since?

There are of course all kinds of limitations to the validity of this visit. It was conducted by one of the original four facilitators, so community members may have just wanted to be polite, whilst hiding their real feelings. Baron and the small team who accompanied him were conducting the exercise in their own volunteered time, and therefore the process was brief.

Nonetheless, this report has some important stories to tell about what did happen in this community after that original workshop and the video footage which accompanies this report adds a supplementary record.

STUDY AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to identify changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours since the survey carried out by Alice Welbourn and colleagues in November 1995, ie over 11 years since the original workshop.

A qualitative methodology was used in November 2005 to collect primary data from participants in the original Stepping Stones workshop, (which had been held in June 1994). Ten persons were interviewed over a period of two-and-a-half days, using a simple question guide to cover key areas of interest. All interviews were carried out in the local language, Luganda, and were later translated into English. The data was then analysed, using a simple grid analysis.

Baron to fill in the list of questions and an example of the grid analysis.

The first time we interviewed participants in November 2005 was in their original peer groups, and we also recorded a few testimonies.

Then we returned in January 2006 and interviewed more individuals in their homes. Three we interviewed with their partners and the rest we interviewed by themselves.

STUDY FINDINGS

Below appear information which we collected relating to some of the key areas identified by many research bodies in relation to behaviour change analysis (see for example (we could add these refs in later...))

1. Knowledge of HIV/AIDS and methods of prevention

All the interviewees had a high level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS, and of the main methods of prevention, namely, condom use, abstinence and being faithful to one uninfected partner. The interviewees insisted that this was not theoretical knowledge, but something which they were applying in their daily lives.

2. Voluntary counselling and testing

The Stepping Stones workshop in 1994 had led to a high awareness of the importance of knowing one's HIV status through VCT. Based on the knowledge they had acquired through the workshop, several widows whose husbands died of AIDS-related illness had gone for VCT. A number of other community members had gone also for VCT, including two of the young men and one of the young women whom we interviewed.

3. Abstinence from sex

A number of widows whose husbands had died from AIDS-related illness decided to practice sexual abstinence as a means of avoiding HIV infection or re-infection. Those who were single at the time of the Stepping Stones workshop in 1994 were able to abstain from sex until marriage, if they wanted to.

4. Condom use

In this community (unlike many others), it is no longer taboo to discuss condoms, regardless of the age group concerned. Couples are willing to discuss and practise condom use, which they attribute to the knowledge acquired through the Stepping Stones workshop. Some married women reported finding condoms in their husbands' pockets, suggesting that these men are using condoms when having sex outside marriage. Moreover, women feel empowered to purchase condoms themselves. Josephine Nakabiri said: "Now we can go and buy condoms where need be, without fear. Young people reported using condoms as a means of family planning and prevention of STIs. Some widows used condoms with their current sexual partner. For instance, one widow told us that she uses condoms with her new partner. (Recent attempts by the Bush administration through PEPFAR, and from the Ugandan leadership to cast doubt on the effectiveness of – and even to demonise - condoms are largely confined to urban centres and schools and fortunately have not yet reached rural areas such as Buwenda.)

5. Openness about sex and related issues

All the interviewees reported being able to talk with their children and young people in the community about sex, sexual behaviour and HIV prevention strategies. "The workshop gave them confidence to talk with their children about issues concerning HIV/AIDS and STIs, which was not the case before," said Jane Nakato.

6. Self-reliance and team work

The interviewees reported a high level of teamwork in the community, which they attribute to the Stepping Stones workshop. Each couple interviewed had an income-generating activity - e.g. dairy cows, poultry, piggeries, crafts - which they managed in a collaborative way, as groups. This enabled them to attract NGOs to come and help them establish IGAs. Julius works in his garden and in his home together with his wife. They also discuss how they will spend their money. The Kauma family also work together.

7. Stigma

There has been a marked decline in HIV-related stigma in the community. For example, a widow whose son died of AIDS-related illness remarked on the high level of practical as well as psychological support which they received from other members of the community, without any hint of discrimination. For instance, she described how her friends who had gone through the workshop were able to counsel her and visit and support her materially as well as physically and psychologically. The young men talked about having a mutual support system through a joint banana plantation; and giving each other advice about how to handle domestic issues and generally supporting each other. About 50% of the young men have stayed in the Buwenda community and been involved in businesses and farming. The rest, who have got an education are working in Kampala.

8. Relationships and faithfulness

The three couples interviewed remarked that the Stepping Stones workshop had improved their relationship through better communication, which they had learned through the Stepping Stones workshop. Julius Luswata, who had been in the original young men's group (and in the younger men's video clip) remarked: "Another issue is about better communication between my wife and myself. We talk at length and come to a conclusion about how to be faithful to each other." His wife agreed with this: we spoke to her while Julius was taking the children to school. Julius is now happily married with 4 children and is a business man, with houses which he rents out in Buwenda. He also has a banana plantation, and a piggery project, to earn his income. He also has hybrid cattle.

9. Challenges

(a) Monitoring: The withdrawal of Redd Barna from the area has made it difficult to monitor developments in Buwenda since the Stepping Stones workshop in 1994.

(b) Spread of benefits from workshop: Many of the benefits of the Stepping Stones workshop spread beyond the actual participants in the workshop in 1994. However, this was not always the case. When only one spouse participated in the Stepping Stones workshop, it was very difficult to apply the lessons learned to their relationship. For example, in the Senyondo family (featured in video clip no. 2, 'What is love?'), only the wife participated in the workshop. Mrs Senyondo has since left her husband and now lives in Kampala. Another couple, the Simbwas, (featured in the Trust clip) have also sadly split up, even though both attended the Stepping Stones workshop. By contrast however, the Kauma couple, (featured also in clip 2), both of whom attended the workshop, have really prospered, with a piggery project, a second home, hybrid cattle and their children educated up to university.

Alcohol consumption

The people who were involved in brewing alcohol in the community have left the community, including Mr Simbwa. Alcohol production in the community is still there, but it has reduced and participants of the workshop now say they don't drink locally brewed alcohol, because they don't feel confident that it is good for their health – and bottled alcohol is too expensive.

Girls' education

Zaitun, who featured in the video clip about young women managed to go to University and is a deputy head mistress in a local primary school. The other young woman, (Margaret) has maintained her hairdressing business and has got happily married. The Kauma children, two girls and six boys, have been educated to university. All the Senyondo children are educated: one is a doctor and two of the daughters have also finished university. But the issue of girls' education wasn't specifically discussed by the participants in general.

Good, unbiased sex education for boys and girls

This dominated the discussion, especially from the older women. They all stressed that this is really important and that they no longer feel uncomfortable about talking to their children about HIV and AIDS. Mrs Nsereko, for instance, mainly has boys. She told us how she discusses freely with her children about sex and sexuality. By contrast, this wasn't something mentioned by the older men.

Will-writing

No-one mentioned anything about will-writing in the community. There still seems to be some fear attached to will-writing. In the community there are still some widows who are struggling because their husbands have died – but on the whole they do seem to be looked after by other community members and to have support from poultry and hybrid milk cattle projects (with milk both for their own consumption and for sale). All the widows whom we spoke to testified to the much greater support for them from other community members since the Stepping Stones workshop. They felt that there is now much greater community-wide support than there used to be.

Property and inheritance rights for women

Widows stated that although their land rights are not documented and there is no formal bye-law, that there is certainly more support for their continued access to land and their homes once their husbands had died, as a result of the workshop.

Lack of funds for follow-up activities?

Participants didn't talk about lack of follow-up funds, but asked us why it had taken so long for us to go back to visit them. Two men pointed out that they would like more continuity of follow-up after the workshop.

Treatment access locally – is it free, do the staff have good attitudes?

There is a mobile unit that comes to Buwenda from Kitovu Hospital. Some of the HIV positive participants of Stepping Stones have been trained by and get an allowance from Kitovu and work together to help others in the community to access treatment through this mobile service. This treatment is free.

Involvement of HIV positive people in decision-making about what happens to them in the community and at the health centre

Some of the people whom we spoke to including one young woman (Christine) say that they are totally open about their status and feel well respected and supported by others in the community in their peer education and treatment outreach work. We had the impression that within Buwenda itself, most people feel confident to be open about their HIV positive status. They talked very comfortably to us about this and didn't seem to be shying away from telling us openly about this at all.

REQUESTS

The interviewees made a number of requests, as follows:

1. More Stepping Stones -type workshops should be held in the community for those (especially young people) who did not participate the first time.
2. There is a need for liaison between the Buwenda community, the Network for Stepping Stones and Kitovu Mobile to encourage meetings, discussions and the implementation of plans.
3. There is a need for more contacts between the Buwenda community and other agencies that can support their initiatives.
4. It would be helpful to have at least one computer and TV in Buwenda so people can view the workshop video and other related programmes.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEWS with Original Participants

1. Mrs Maxencia Sekabira (older women's group)

(lady in trust game)

The Stepping Stones workshop in 1994 marked a turning point in Mrs Sekabira's life. It helped her to take care of her husband and son, both of whom died of AIDS-related illness. After her husband's death she decided not to remarry but to abstain from sex completely, a strategy which she is still following. She feels that this decision has been the key to her survival: "If it hadn't been for Stepping Stones, I would not be alive today."

When her husband and son were ill Mrs Sekabira received a lot of support from the community - especially from people who had participated in the Stepping Stones workshop. She feels that this was a sign that AIDS-related stigma had decreased in the community.

She also believes that the Stepping Stones workshop gave her the courage and self-confidence to live positively and to raise her family. She also learned about condom use and counselling skills. She now has the courage to talk to her children and the youth in the community about the 'ABC' strategy of HIV prevention. She encourages young people to avoid exchanging sexual favours for gifts, because this would expose them to the risk of HIV infection.

Mrs Sekabira also believes that the Stepping Stones workshop equipped the community with greater team spirit, which has helped them to work together on IGAs such as producing handicrafts and doing dairy farming. Through the latter they get milk for their own consumption and for sale. The income helps to pay school fees for her own children and her orphaned grandchildren.

2. Jane Nakate (older women's group. HIV positive.)

Jane is also a widow, having lost her husband to AIDS. She received support from other women who participated in the Stepping Stones workshop: "After my husband's death I lost hope, not knowing about how to live positively. Now, after getting the information about HIV/AIDS care and treatment from the Stepping Stones workshop and Kitovu Mobile's testing unit, I have learned how to live positively. I also do counselling with those infected with HIV, including men, women and youth."

She also gained courage to work for her children's survival and to get them through school, with the help of income from a plot of land which she managed to get. She got the land through a women's group in the community.

Jane has also decided not to re-marry and to abstain from sex: "I don't want to add to the virus that I already have."

Together with friends, she is part of a brick-making project which has been assisted by a local community-based organisation, MADO.

3. Mr and Mrs Katayira (older men's and younger women's groups)

Both husband and wife participated in the Stepping Stones workshop. Francis Katayira (power clip – holding the stone) attributes the great strides which he and his family have made in the past ten years to the foundation laid by Stepping Stones. He and his wife discuss issues like family planning, HIV prevention and condom use. (His wife acted the scene of the sugar daddy in the young women clip.) They have learned to be faithful to each other as a means of avoiding HIV infection. They have also "picked the courage" to go for VCT as a couple. He has the self-confidence and skills to talk with his children and the wider community about HIV and AIDS. He has since been trained by TASO as an HIV/AIDS peer educator.

Mrs Katayira says she tells girls to be strong and to say 'no' to sex if it is not the right time, and rather to abstain until marriage. If they decide to have pre-marital sex, they are encouraged to use condoms.

Mr Katayira and others in the community are also involved in collaborative IGAs such as poultry raising and dairy farming.

4. Christine Kizito (younger women's group)

When Christine's husband died in 1990, she was left with two small children. She felt discouraged and in despair, and kept asking herself how she could manage to survive as a lone parent. The Stepping Stones workshop helped her to "pick courage". She went for VCT and was found to be HIV-positive. She got medication without which, she says, she would have long since been dead. She can discuss AIDS freely with her children and people in the community.

Christine has been trained as an AIDS community worker and a counsellor at Villa Maria hospital in Masaka.

Together with other participants in the Stepping Stones workshop, she has a small piggery business, which helps her to cover the cost of raising her children and paying for their schooling.

5. Zaitun Naiga (younger women's group)

While still a teenager, Zaitun participated in the Stepping Stones workshop and she appears in the video. She was still attending secondary school at the time. She says that the skills she acquired during the workshop have been the guiding principles of her life ever since:

"I learned a lot about HIV, especially the ways in which it can be contracted and how it can be avoided. I also learned about protected sex through condom use. I was only a young girl at the time, but I was able to change my behaviour and make the right decisions for my life. I am now a qualified school teacher and I'm even doing a university degree course."

Zaitun has also found the right companion for herself, and the couple have a baby girl.

I am sorry but I think it would be really good to have the other participants' accounts too just to back up what you are saying with numbers!