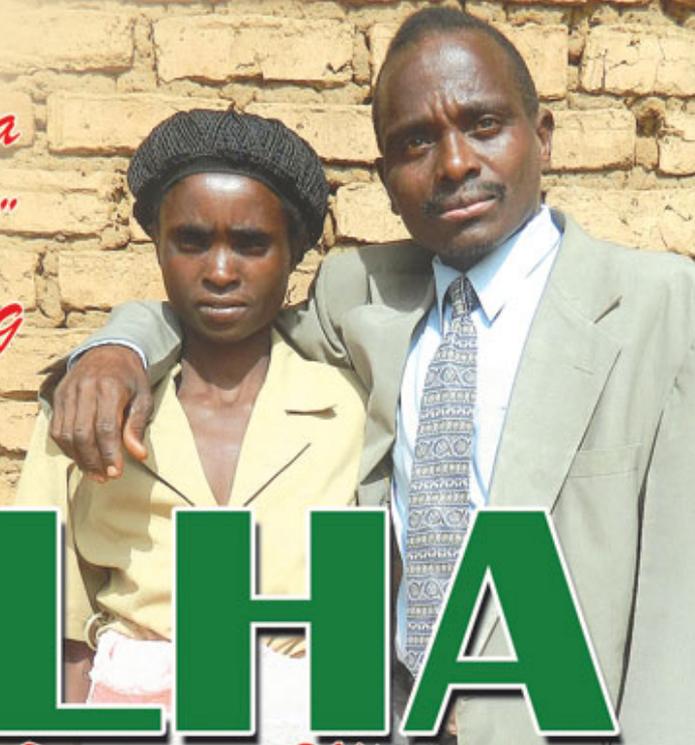




"I am now a family man"

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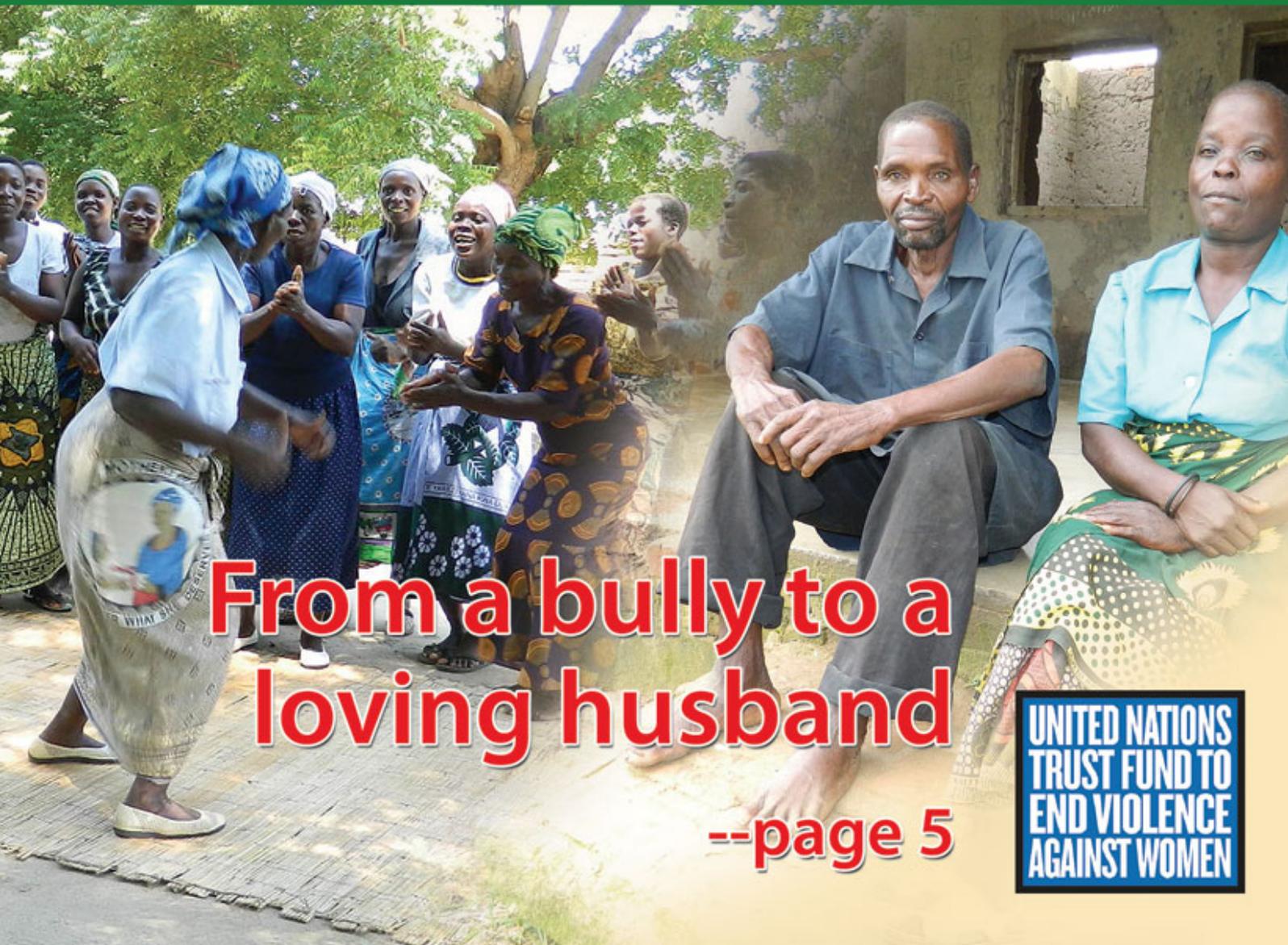


COWLHA

JULY - DECEMBER 2012

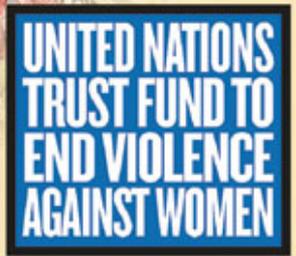
News Update

Coalition of Women Living With HIV and AIDS



From a bully to a loving husband

--page 5





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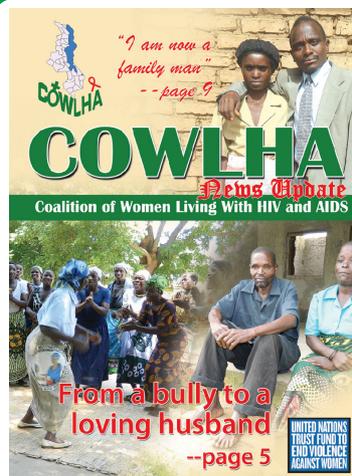
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COVER PICTURES

Main Picture:

Wesley Biton and his wife Florenciano from T/A Bvumbwe, Thyolo are a loving couple after Stepping Stones training.

On the other side are women from T/A Tengani in Nsanje in a traditional dance with songs derived from Stepping Stones lessons.

Picture on Top

Abishai Mkandawire and his wife Ellen are enjoying the benefits of Stepping Stones training

FOREWORD

Efforts to address gender imbalances that lead to the violation of the rights of women living with HIV and women in general have been at the center of COWLHA's programming. In our programming, we continue to engage men as partners in championing the rights of women through promotion of meaningful couple dialogue and communication.

COWLHA received a grant from the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF) towards implementing a project titled "Leveraging Positive Action towards Reducing Violence Against Women Living with HIV". The project is being implemented in twelve districts of Lilongwe, Ntchisi, Salima, Dedza, Nkhatabay, Mzimba, Karonga, Rumphu, Blantyre, Balaka, Thyolo and Nsanje. The project seeks to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) by among other things ensuring men's active participation in interventions aimed at eliminating gender based violence. The main strategy of engaging men is through use of the Stepping Stones approach that allows men and women to dialogue and communicate on issues of relevance to intimate partner violence.

This edition of our newsletter is a follow-up on our maiden edition under the UNTF project. In this edition, we will highlight the activities that the project undertook between July and December 2012. Among the main activities of the project in the period under review were Stepping Stones Trainings of Trainers, training of community paralegals, rolling out of Stepping Stones to communities, advocacy initiatives with legislators on the inclusion of a marital rape provision in the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act 2006, and a media campaign during the 16 days of activism against gender based violence just to mention a few.

Our focus in this edition is not only to give highlights of the activities implemented under the project but also to provide insight into the outcomes/impacts of the project this far. It is a fact that gender-based violence or the threat of such violence hinders women's

ability to negotiate risk reduction or to engage in safer sexual practices. It limits women's abilities to seek HIV testing, treatment, care, or support, and can hinder them from disclosing their HIV status. In this edition, we would like to highlight some of the success stories that have resulted from the activities that were implemented under the project in the period under review that show a reduction of the vulnerability of women living with HIV and women in general to gender based violence/intimate partner violence.

We are also featuring some moving and sad stories, a UNAIDS funded uncovered, especially in relation to sexual violence against girls, as an addendum to the UNTF project. It is now our conviction as COWLHA that we need to do more to protect girls and young women from violence.

It is our hope that this issue of the COWLHA News Update will be full of insights and lessons that will enable you to desist from perpetrating intimate partner violence. Aluta Continua! Happy reading!

Annie Banda
NATIONAL COORDINATOR

Linking Gender-Based Violence and Economic Empowerment

Much of COWLHA's research and training sessions address issues of gender-based violence (GBV) directed at women and girls living with HIV and AIDS. In addition to a number of HIV-related health constraints, women face many social constraints that limit their ability to make decisions on issues that directly affect them. As we have discovered, a key component of domestic violence is a woman's financial dependency on a man (her husband, partner, elder) because it is he who controls how household income is used – even if he himself has not earned it. With limited ways to support herself financially, a woman cannot simply walk away from a physically and/or emotionally abusive relationship.



Hilary Dragicevic

A woman's positive status also increases the likelihood that she will endure GBV because she is viewed as being at fault or less able to fulfil her 'role' as a woman in the household. COWLHA's work on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) revealed that, amongst the female and male respondents, 38% of women in the study said that they had suffered sexual violence *by her partner*, most commonly being forced to have sex without a condom.

Also, the enduring stigma associated with being HIV-positive further reduces a woman's options for engaging in certain community-based activities where she might earn money – this is supported by findings that single, young people living with HIV are unwilling to disclose their status and 64% of couples attended HIV Counselling and Testing (HTC) alone because of fear of discrimination. In addition, the IPV study discovered that men were likely to withdraw economic support over disagreements about responsibility for HIV status or 'over-questioning' about their behaviour. This type of economic 'violence' serves to exacerbate the woman's economic attachment to her partner, and leaves her vulnerable to continued abuse.

Therefore, COWLHA is actively promoting the economic advancement of women by developing income-generation activities that respond to their specific needs and constraints. A woman's economic advancement can improve her confidence, her status in the household, and her ability to demand safe sex practices (i.e. condom use or refusing sex). But advancement is not empowerment and it must be stressed that empowerment is premised on behaviour change – from both women and men.

We are slowly expanding our programming to include the economic empowerment of women to earn income and to *decide* how that income is used. We will pursue women's empowerment by continuing our successful training programmes that seek to equalise the relationship between women and men in domestic partnerships in order to reduce GBV. We are in a unique position to build on our grassroots advocacy work that has brought women and men together to discuss issues of sexuality, violence, sexual health and rights, HIV and AIDS, and gender dynamics.

Pairing income enhancement programming with COWLHA's gender-based trainings aims to reduce both GBV and HIV risk behaviours by giving women more independence, more decision-making power, and more security. The IPV study found there was a relatively low participation rate for men in the support groups (roughly 20% per district) and COWLHA highlights this as both a challenge and an opportunity to improve the status of women in general and specifically as income-earners.

Follow our article series about the development of our economic empowerment programming over the next few months as we discuss the challenges we've faced and successes we've achieved.



Wesley and his wife Florenciano

From a bully to a loving husband

...through Stepping Stones

One Wesley Biton, 70 from Group Village Headman Naphiyo 2, in T/A Bvumbwe's area in Thyolo is a member of Nguluwe Support Group.

He confesses to have been severely beating up his wife Lauma Florenciano, 52, for no apparent reason. He blames his excessive beer drinking as the reason that leads him to indulge in wife battering.

"I used to beat up my wife severely, almost on a daily basis when I return from a beer-hall," he said adding "she has even been fainting at times after a beating; she could have died at some point."

According to James Ngwangwa, Chairman of

the Nguluwe Support Group, Wesley had been brought before different traditional courts and different forums to answer charges of wife battering. But the man, after serving whatever punishments have been slapped on him, continued with the act.

"It was in October 2012 year when the woman approached us with this issue so that we could intervene if it was possible. She

complained that the husband used to severely

beat her up, that he does not care for the household and that her home as a result, was engulfed with extreme poverty," said Ngwangwa.

Ngwangwa said Florenciano who is a member of Nguluwe Support Group, wanted the group to facilitate divorce from the man.

"Indeed I wanted nothing else but divorce because I feared for my life due to daily bullying and beating, that the traditional courts have even failed to address,"

"Through Stepping Stones I came to realize the root cause of my problem, which was my addiction to alcohol, once I stopped that, everything has changed for the betterment of our household"

said Florenciano.

But when members of Nguluwe Support Group approached Wesley, the man was convinced to attend one Stepping Stones session.

Today, Wesley is a changed man. He has stopped drinking beer, stopped beating his wife and he is now providing for his family.

"I have realized that I was subjecting my wife to domestic violence which is a crime before the law. Through Stepping Stones I came to realize the root cause of my problem, which was my addiction to alcohol, once I stopped that, everything has changed for the betterment of our household," said Wesley.



Robin Mwenendeka and his wife Brenda

Restoring family ties

Excessive beer drinking and the beating of his wife had been traditional practices in the household of one Robin Mwenendeka, 39 of Sefu Village, Group Village Headman Mwandosha, in the area of Traditional Authority Kyungu in Karonga.

"I used to beat up my wife every time I have returned from a beer hall, without any particular reason. It just turned out like a traditional practice in my household. But now I have realized, after Stepping Stones lessons, that by doing so I was subjecting my wife to intimate partner violence," said Mwenendeka.

Apart from beating up the wife, Mwenendeka, a maize and rice farmer used to spend proceeds realized from the sales of his farm produce on women and beer, living his wife and three children to fend for themselves.

Mwenendeka confessed that at one point in time, he insulted his wife after she had disclosed her HIV positive status to him.

"I used to suffer from persistent sicknesses, like coughing and sneezing, but didn't know what the cause was until I underwent an HIV test after realising the importance of going for such tests. But upon coming back and disclosing it to my husband, he insulted me and chased me away," said Mwenendeka's wife, Brenda, 35.

But now the couple, after attending Stepping Stones lessons, confesses that love has returned in their home.

"I have completely quit drinking, I no longer beat up my wife and I provide for my family," said Mwenendeka.

Mwenendeka has also gone for HIV testing and accepted his HIV positive status. The development has enabled him stop insulting his wife like he used to do before.

"We are a healthy family. We farm together and when we sell our produce, we plan together on how the money could be spent," said Brenda.

Group Village Headman Chilipapa of Rumphhi has confessed that cases of domestic violence in his area have lessened following Stepping Stones lessons that members of Tasangane Support Group have been conducting in the vicinity.

"I used to receive a lot of cases of women running away from their homes because they have been subjected to bullying by their husbands. But the situation is no longer the same now after Stepping Stones interventions," he said.

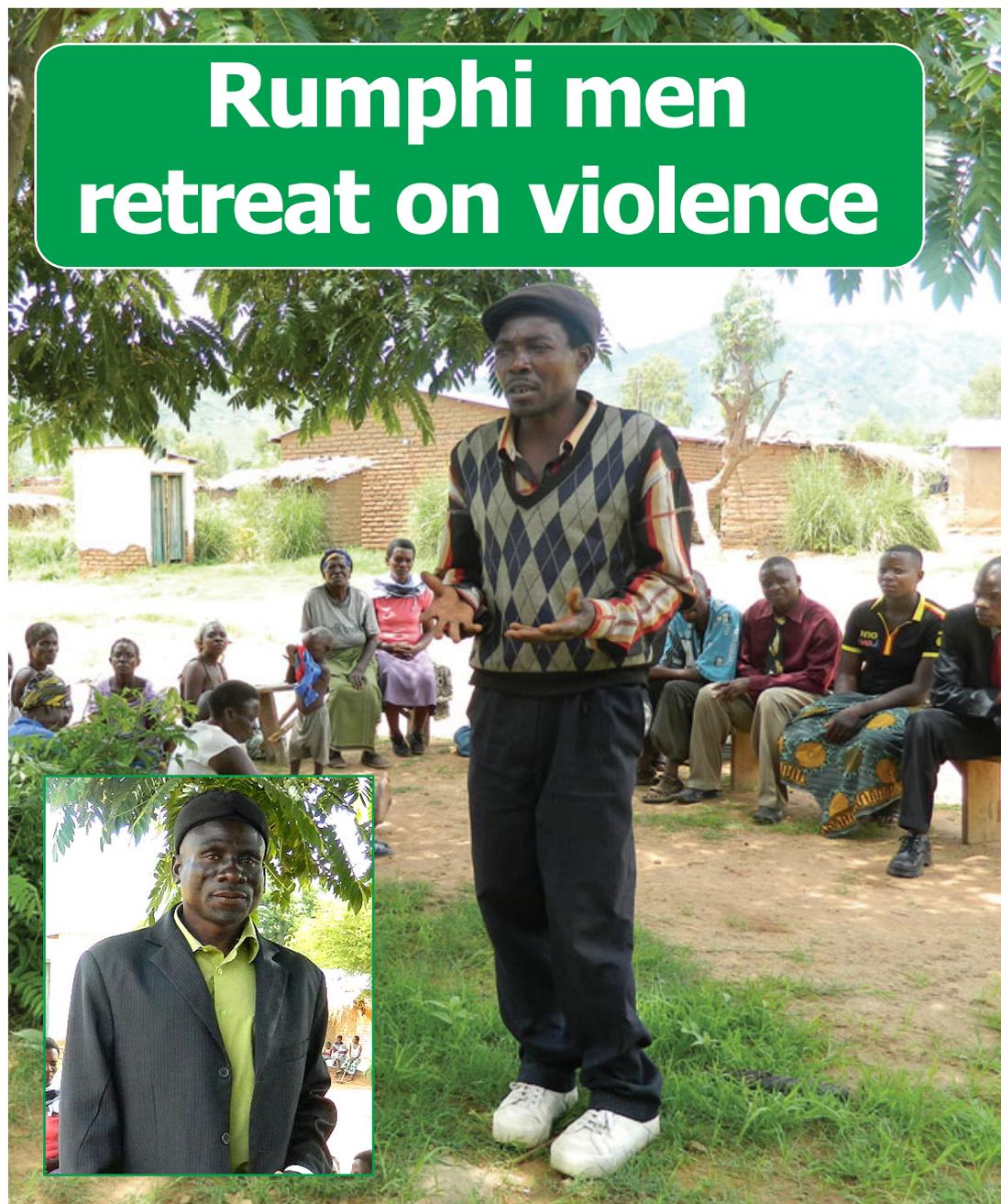
The traditional leader said his subjects have been enlightened on various forms of domestic violence which they were ignorant of before.

The traditional leader also attributed the lessening of cases of domestic violence to establishing of Victim Support Unit (VSU) by Police.

Tasangane Support Group works hand in hand with VSU in the dissemination of awareness messages to do away with domestic violence.

"Most men who have been ill-treating their wives are no longer doing that because they fear being reported to police and get arrested.

"We are also grateful to government for introducing VSU which are also helping curb gender based violence," said the Traditional



GVH Chilipapa speaking before some of his subjects. Inset is Ben Mumba

leader.

The traditional leader gave an example of a case where his own brother used to beat up his wife for no apparent reason.

"He was locked up in police cell after several approaches to enable him to stop the act were tried. After spending three nights in police cell, he has come out a

changed person. He has vowed never to lay his hands on his wife again," said the traditional Chilipapa.

"So we thank COWLHA for bringing up a mechanism, through Stepping Stones in my area which is indeed helping to stop domestic violence," said GVH Chilipapa.

Facilitator of Stepping

Stones training in the area Ben Mumba, who is also a traditional leader, concurred with Chilipapa that women have been empowered through Stepping Stones lessons to report various abuses that they are subjected to in their matrimonial homes, and the development has reduced the number of men who were indulging in such acts.

ST/A Mzolokere hail Stepping Stones

Sub Tradition Authority Mzolokere of Mzimba has hailed Stepping Stones saying the lessons have contributed to a drop in cases of domestic violence in his area.

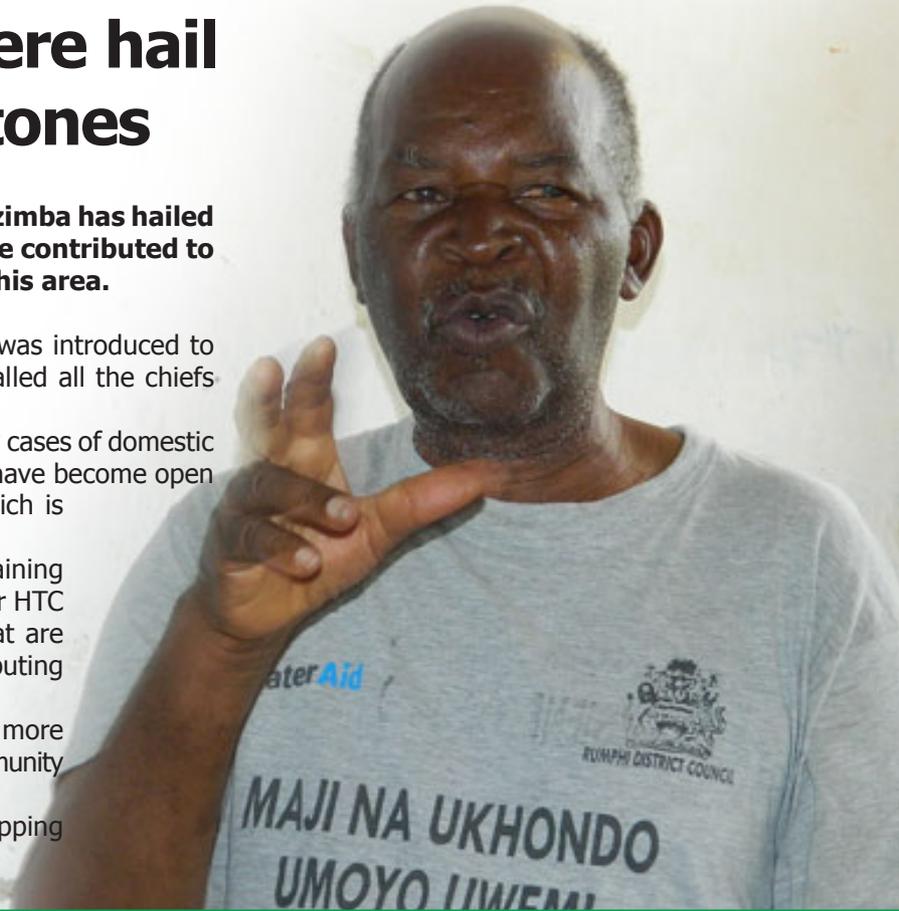
"I am impressed with this project. When it was introduced to me by those people you trained earlier, I called all the chiefs under me to support the intervention.

"Now because of this project, there are few cases of domestic violence being reported to me. My subjects have become open to talk about issues of sex and sexuality which is promoting and strengthening marriages.

"We as chiefs, take advantage of the training sessions by encouraging our subjects to go for HTC because we have seen that those people that are taking ARVs are much stronger and are contributing to the development of the community.

"My people look health now. There are no more persistent HIV and AIDS related death in my community as it used to be in the past" said the chief.

Ngweru Support Group is spearheading Stepping Stones lessons in ST/A Mzolokere's area.



Traditional Authority Mzolokere

Rumphi abandon Chokolo

Chokolo (wife inheritance) has been the traditional practice in Jalawe, Rumphi that has been contributing to the spread of HIV and AIDS.

But today the community has changed the approach. When a husband dies, people first find out what has killed the person. If it is found that the man died of HIV and AIDS related illness, the traditional practice of chokolo is never executed.

"People have been enlightened through Stepping Stones over some of the traditional practices that are fuelling the spread of HIV. Currently, people in this areas are no longer practicing chokolo and other forms of cultural practices that are deemed to be catalyst for HIV spread.

"We are no longer forcing widows to be inherited because that too is a form of domestic violence," said Evram Mponda, Board of Trustees for Tigwirizane Support Group in Rumphi.



Evram Mponda

Mzimba man rescued

Alcohol is enjoyed by many people during social occasions, but for others like Abishai Mkandawire, 43, from Vongo Village, Group Village Headman Guru Chirambo, T/A Ntwalo in Mzimba, addiction to alcohol had brought nothing but misery in his household.

Due to his addiction to excessive alcohol intake, Abishai, for several years, has been starving his home.

Every little money he used to get from piecework that he did in the community in which he lives, ended up being spent at a beer hall.

Visiting Abishai's home, one could vividly see the abject poverty his family has been subjected to for some time.

"It's now that I have realized that I cannot make any economic progress at home because all the moneys that I make, is used for drinking beer, while my wife and children have been starving. I have not been giving them money for food, for clothes and for any basic necessities for the household," said Abishai.

Abishai confesses that he has been subjecting his families to harsh conditions of life without necessarily realizing that by doing so, he was practicing domestic violence

But the situation in Abishai's family, has recently changed for the better thanks to COWLHA.

COWLHA, with financial assistance from the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF), is implementing a project that seeks to address intimate partner violence (IPV) by among other things ensuring men's active participation in interventions aimed at eliminating gender based violence.

Abishai and his wife Ellen Banda are some the community members who have been taking part in the training and have since started realizing the benefits.

"I am now a family man and I have completely quit drinking beer. Group Village Headman Guru of this area is my witness because right now I serve

as an Induna for him," said Abishai.

His wife Ellen bares testimony that indeed her husband is now a changed man.

"Now things have changed. In the past, he used to abandon us with no food at home and use his money on beer. He could not even buy clothes for the family. But now after quitting beer, he is able to provide for his family and love has been restored," said Ellen.

Abshai and his wife Ellen

Laston Sizimpita 41 and his wife Frida 35 come from Chuma Village in T/A Kuntaja's area in Blantyre.

T/A Kuntaja's subjects hail Stepping Stones

The two are among some families in T/A Kuntaja that have undergone Stepping Stones training and are enjoying the fruits of it.

Before attending the training, the youthful couple used to face a lot of problems that emanate from gender based violence.

"We were not open to each other on various issues and as a result we used to fight a lot," said Laston adding "for example if my wife went out to fetch water and returned late, that was reason enough to start beating her because my suspicion was that she had a secret love affair with another man."

The same applied to his wife Frida. When Laston had gone out on his daily errands and came back home late, the wife's suspicion was that he was operating a secret love affair somewhere, and that alone qualified for an exchange of blows.

The couple which has been together for 13 years says now, the situation in the house has completely changed for the better due to Stepping Stones lessons they underwent together with fellow community members.

"We are now at peace with each other because



The Sizimpita family

when there is an issue and one of us is suspicious of another, we sit down and talk it over. We are open to each other and we are able to understand each other when we have a misunderstanding," said Laston.

On her part Frida concurred with Laston that indeed, the situation in the family has changed for the better.

"My husband used to go out and come back late. If you ask him why he was coming in late hours, he would beat me up. But I used to fight back.

"But these days, if he comes late, you look for the best time to ask him about how he had spent

his day. And the best time is during bedtime, and we are able to understand each other.

Frida said days are gone when Laston used to report home late.

Another couple that has also benefitted from Stepping Stones training in the area of T/A Kuntaja in Blantyre is that of Joseph Mandala 38 and his wife Rose 32.

Although the couple has been together for 15 years, the Mandala family from the area of Group Village Headman Kammata has not been at peace.

"We have never enjoyed peace in our house for the years we have been together, although we have two

children together," said Joseph.

Joseph acknowledges that he has been the source of gender based violence in his family as he used to beat up his wife for no apparent reason.

"The problem is that when there is an issue that is hurting me, there was no room for discussion because we were not open to each other," he said.

For example, said Rose on her part that her husband used to sleep with clothes on, and when she asked him to take them off, the man's response were slaps.

Apart from beating his wife, Joseph had also demonstrated another

form of intimate partner violence by refusing to go for an HIV test when it was clear from medical personnel that their first-born child was born HIV positive.

"I was found HIV positive in 2004, but it took three years for my husband to go for testing. He had been refusing all along," she said.

What prompted Rose to undergo HIV testing was the persistent sickness of her first born child.

"We have a 15 year old boy who the medical personnel, in 2004, after testing his blood, told us that he was born HIV positive. But my husband refused to accept the results and refused to undergo a test on HIV," she said.

It was only in 2007 that Joseph underwent the exercise and found that he was HIV positive.

But through COWLHA, the couple learnt that it was possible for an HIV couple to have an HIV negative child.

Today, the couple, which has lost three more children in between, to HIV and AIDS related illnesses, have now a two year old child who was born HIV negative.

"Things have really changed in our family due to Stepping Stones lesson. Love has returned and we know how to make each other happy for the betterment of our lives and those of our children," said Rose.

Group Village



Joseph and Rose Mandala

Headman Kammata, from T/A Kuntaja thanked Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS for bringing Stepping Stones lessons to his subjects.

"These lessons have helped lessen cases of gender based violence that used to flood my court. If these lessons had come earlier, they would have helped lessen cases of HIV among my subjects because what we have realized is that domestic violence has been a breeding ground for HIV spread.

"What happens is that when a man or woman is not sexually satisfied in his matrimonial home, instead of telling each other what each one of them wants to be satisfied, they go out and have sex with other partners and by so doing they end up bringing the virus home," said Kammata.

But today, said the traditional leader, a lot of couples, that have attended Stepping Stones training, are open to each other, a situation that has restricted multiple concurrent partnerships.

He also said persistent death cases in his area have minimized because his subjects through Stepping Stones, have realised the importance of going for HIV testing and how they can take care of themselves, either when found

positive or negative.

As of today, said Kammata, 80 people have gone for HIV testing as a result of Stepping Stones training, which among other things teach them the importance of doing so.

"Those that are not willing to come in the open are the one dying of AIDS. But those that have come out in the open and are on ARVs have a healthy life and are contributing to the development of this community," she said.



GVH Kammata speaking before her subjects

EVENTS IN PICTURES



Members of a Support Group in Chileka, T/A Kuntaja pose for a group photograph



Joyce Kanduwa (left) and Rose Mafunga from GVH Butao, T/A Malemia, Nsanje demonstrate body mapping



Tengani Support Group women in Nsanje perform traditional dances with songs derived from Stepping Stones training



Group Village Headman Tengani of Nsanje and Stepping Stones facilitator himself speaks before his subjects on matters of domestic violence



A drama group entertaining and educating members of Tisangane Support Group in Rumphi with a play derived from Stepping Stones lessons



Group Village Mapando, from B... area of T/A Kalem... before his subject... on issues of intim... violence



A member of Ngweru Support Group in T/A Nzolokere's area, Hewe-Mzimba testifies how she has benefitted from Stepping Stones training



Members a support group in Karonga, in T/A Wansambo's area, pose for a group photograph



Members of a Support Group at Vongo in Mzimba North who are spearheading Stepping Stones lessons in T/A Ntwalo's area pose with traditional chiefs and COWLHA officers

Headman Malaka, in the photo speaking, is a partner in Balaka

Stepping Stones helps Karonga man overcome stigma and discrimination



Tembo (standing) and members of Tuyule Support Group

Chancy Tembo is a member of Tuyule Support Group. He comes from Kuyula Village in the area of Traditional Authority Kyungu in Karonga.

He was found HIV positive in 2007, after being bed ridden for over a year with a chronic illness.

Tembo had been taking ARVs without the knowledge of his two wives. He had not even disclosed to his wives that he was HIV positive.

Though medical personnel advised him

to be using condoms, Tembo had gone against the advice and instead he had been having unprotected sex with his two wives.

"I feared if I introduced condom use, my wives would start suspecting something, secondly, I didn't want to disclose to my wives that I was HIV positive, I feared they would leave me. Thirdly I was afraid that once members of my family and the community I live in know about my status, they would discriminate against me," he said.

But Tembo did not know that by failing to disclose to his two wives about his HIV status, taking ARVs in secrecy and having sex with the two women without any protection, he was subjecting his intimate partners to domestic violence.

"It was until when we underwent Stepping Stones lessons, that is when I learnt that I was subjecting my wives to intimate partner violence," he said.

Right now Tembo is a different man as he has now become open and

disclosed his HIV status to his two wives.

"I have also started using condoms to prevent further multiplication of the virus in our bodies. My two wives have since gone for HIV test, one was found positive and the other one is negative," he said.

After following medical advice on reproductive health, Tembo, and one of his wives that is HIV positive have managed to bear a child who is HIV negative.

"We are now living a happy family, enjoying the fruits of openness," he said adding "You can not be taking ARVs in secrecy. You need to disclose to your relatives or any of your close confidantes because when you get sick, these are the people that are going to provide you with essential care," he said.

One of his wives who was found HIV positive, said Tembo, had been subjected to a lot of abuse from her relatives after she disclosed her status. Her brothers have been throwing away the ARVs that she had been getting from the hospital.

"Ironically, today, those that were subjecting my wife to lots of abuses on this HIV matter are also on ARVs and some who did not go for HIV test and seek proper medication, have since died," he said.

Group Village Headman Ndenguma from the area of Traditional Authority Malemia in Nsanje says Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) through Stepping Stones training in collaboration with other stakeholders have helped wipe some cultural practices that fuel the spread of HIV in the district.

“There is a cultural practice here where when you marry, and you are perceived to be treating your wife quite well, for the in-laws to show their appreciation, they give you another wife, a sister to your wife,” said Ndenguma.

But through massive sensitization, the cultural practice is on the verge of extinguishing.

The traditional leader also pointed out that COWLHA, through Stepping Stones training has lessened cases of gender based violence that used to be brought before traditional courts for resolution.

“We have noted a decrease in cases of Gender Based Violence brought before our traditional courts and

“We have noted a decrease in cases of Gender Based Violence brought before our traditional courts and this has been attributed to lessons under Stepping Stones.”



Group Village Headman Ndenguma

Stepping Stones halts cultural practice in Nsanje

this has been attributed to lessons under Stepping Stones,” he said.

But the chief observed that T/A Malemia is vast and for COWLHA

members to reach out to all corners is a challenge.

T/A Malemia’s area stretches from Langwe to Nyamatchenga and from Mpompha to Mbang’ombe.

“I am confident that with proper transport available like bicycles, these COWLHA members in my area would be able to reach out to all corners and as a result we can achieve a lot in terms of eliminating gender based violence and all other cultural practices that are deemed as an obstacle to the fight against HIV and AIDS,” he said.

Kenneth Alumenda Gale 32 from Mtemangawa Village in the area of T/A Malemia in Nsanje had three girlfriends from three different tribes, Yao, Lomwe and Sena.

Nsanje men quit multiple concurrent sexual partnerships

Though a married man, Gale had heard a lot of stories of how good Yao, Sena and Lomwe women are in bed during sex.

"I wanted to feel it (taste) all and experience it, that was the only reason I had all these three," he said.

But after Stepping Stones training, Gale has realized that he can find in his wife all that he was looking for in the three girlfriends he had.

Gale has also realized that by having multiple sexual partners, he was increasing his chances of contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

At the same time, he was putting his wife's life at a risk of catching HIV.

"After these lessons I have realized as a couple we can satisfy each other and that my wife can do all what these three girlfriends could offer. All that I had to do is to be open with my wife," he said.

Another man who has quit multiple sexual partnerships practice is Kingson Fradson, 52 from Chokolo One, in the area of T/A Tengani.

Fradson has stopped flirting around with other women and lavishing his earnings on them at the expense of his family.

Fradson confesses

that he had been practicing multiple concurrent sexual partnerships because he had not been open enough with his wife on sexuality issues. He said most of the times the couple used to deny each other sex without any particular reason, and instead of engaging in discussion, he resolved in walking out for other women.

"Instead of engaging in dialogue when angered by anything in the house, I used to beat my wife up and i would leave for other women," he said.

And to punish his wife further, Fradson used to leave his wife with no money for basic home necessities and spending his cash on other sexual partners elsewhere.

"After these lessons I have realized as a couple we can satisfy each other and that my wife can do all what these three girlfriends could offer. All that I had to do is to be open with my wife"

But after Stepping Stones training, the couple opened up to each other and agreed to engage in dialogue when one is upset with anything in the house, including sexual matters.

"Now I have stopped flirting around with other women and the development has brought joy and happiness in my home," he said.

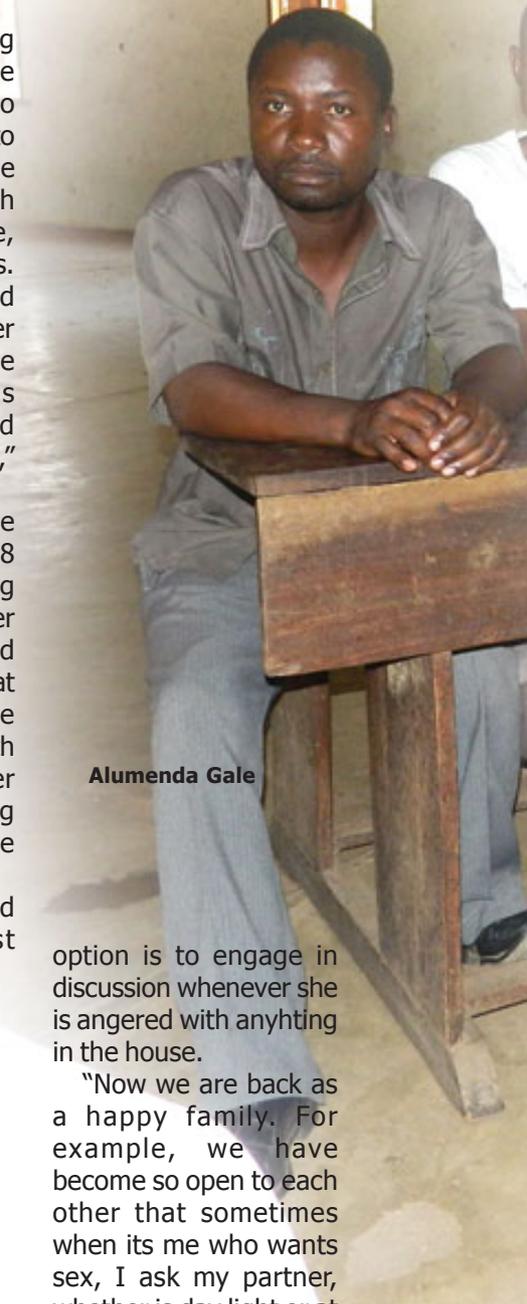
Fradson's wife Dorothy Kingsley 38 confessed that among other things, to show her anger when her husband had done something that did not please her, she would jump into bed with clothes on to stop her husband from making advances anytime he wanted.

But now she had learnt that the best

option is to engage in discussion whenever she is angered with anything in the house.

"Now we are back as a happy family. For example, we have become so open to each other that sometimes when its me who wants sex, I ask my partner, whether is day light or at night," she said.

She also said the her husband no longer beat her up when there is a misunderstanding but



Alumenda Gale

Rev Nkumbadzala



that they resolve issues through dialogue.

Another person that has benefited from Stepping Stones training from T/A Tengani's area in Nsanje is Paul Phiri, Headmaster, Nkona Primary School.

Phiri said he used to hide his purse from his wife and five children, reserving money for other women outside his home.

"We have been enlightened to be open to each other through Stepping Stones and now each one of us is able to engage one another in dialogue when there is an issue

"My wife used to insult

me and I thought I was the problem. But when I changed my ways, she also stopped throwing all kind of insults at me and we are back to happy terms as a couple," he said.

Rev Misheck Nkumbadzala of Mpatsa CCAP in the area said, issues of marital disputes that were often intervened at church level

"My wife used to insult me and I thought I was the problem. But when I changed my ways, she also stopped throwing all kind of insults at me and we are back to happy terms as a couple,"



Fradson and his wife Dorothy

have gone down, thanks to Stepping Stones lessons.

"I have never heard or received such issues at church level since these

lessons were introduced here," he said.

Africa Evangelical Church Rev James Lijero concurred with Nkumbadzala saying cases of gender based violence have gone down in the area.

"A lot of families have been strengthened through this program because we pastors have been empowered and we talk about gender based violence as the root cause to HIV spread," he said.

In 2012, Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS participated in the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV) whose launch took place at Champiti Trading Centre in Ntcheu in November

Representing COWLHA at the launch was National Coordinator Annie Banda.

Among other activities marking the 16 days, COWLHA produced radio programs on Zodiak Broadcasting Station and Capital FM which highlighted gender based violence and all other forms of violence, People Living with HIV particularly women are encountering in Malawi.

COWLHA also distributed information education and communication materials like t-shirts which carried theme of 2012: "From Peace in the Home, to Peace in the World"

At the launch in Ntcheu, a member of COWLHA Loveness Matola of Milala Village T/A Kambwiri, Salima testified how she was subjected to intimate partner violence the moment she disclosed her status to her husband

She narrated before a gathering that included Minister of Gender Anita Kalinde, her Principal Secretary Dr Mary Shawa, cooperating partners; UNFPA,

COWLHA participates in 16 days of Activism against GBV



Loveness Matola

OXFAM, UN Women, Action AID, Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre and NGO-Gender Coordinating Network and chiefs that she was forced out her matrimonial home of 12 years after she disclosed to her husband that she had been diagnosed HIV positive at the hospital.

Stakeholders in the fight against gender based violence observed that homes which are supposed to be personal havens, shelter from



Anita Kalinde

both the literal and figurative storms of life have become breeding ground for gender based violence in all forms.

The stakeholders asked government through Gender Minister Anita Kalinde, the guest of honour, to make sure that the gender equality bill was tabled in Parliament for approval as this was deemed as an umbrella for gender equality in Malawi.

Taking her turn, Kalinde while assuring

that the bill is tabled in the Parliament said, she is always saddened with reports of abuse on girls and women that are still on the increase.

"It is the responsibility of each and every one of us that we desist from gender based violence. GBV is one of the things that brings down development, because if people have got these problems in their homes, they cannot develop," observed Kalinde.

The Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) is implementing a project aimed at reducing violence against women in intimate relationships.

The project is funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF). One of the activities of the project was to conduct baseline research on the forms of violence in intimate relationships among people living with HIV in order to inform subsequent activities of the project.

On November 12, 2012, COWLHA organised a meeting with legislators during which reference was made to the findings of the study in reference to marital rape and C O W L H A ' s recommendations and position to legislators on the same.

The meeting that took place at Sunbird Lilongwe Hotel attracted 15 legislators from Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee, Women Caucus and a Committee on HIV and AIDS.

Presenting the research findings to the legislators, COWLHA Capacity Building Officer Steven Iphani said on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among people living with HIV, there was evidence of sexual and reproductive health abuses and



Kezzie Msukwa: Chairperson of Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs taking the floor during the advocacy session with parliamentarians on inclusion of Marital Rape in the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act

COWLHA calls for inclusion of 'marital rape' in Prevention of Domestic Violence Act

violence against women. "Of the People Living with HIV interviewed on their experiences of intimate partner violence, 20 percent of the respondents suffer physical violence, 47 percent of the women suffer physiological violence, 41 percent of the respondents experience sexual violence and 25 percent of women are forced to have sex without condoms," he said

Therefore, as a response to the findings, said Iphani, COWLHA wants government to widen the definition of rape to include 'marital rape' as criminal offence under Penal Code.

"COWLHA calls on

government to facilitate the inclusion of marital rape as a form of sex assault in the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006) to curb the problem of forced sexual contact among intimate partners," he said.

Iphani told the legislators that COWLHA also wants government to widely disseminate the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act to create demand for relevant violence related services among those who require them.

"COWLHA calls on government to adhere to commitments made through signing the SADC Gender Protocol which urges member states to criminalise

rape," he said.

Speaking on behalf of the legislators, Kezzi Msukwa, Chairman, and Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs applauded COWLHA for conducting the research saying the findings would go a long way in eliminating gender based violence at the grassroots level.

Msukwa expressed his commitment to ensure that issues raised in the research findings are dealt with appropriately from a legal standpoint through Parliament by coming up with laws that would deter perpetrators of gender based violence from continuing with the practice.



The women that underwent the paralegal training pose with facilitators and COWLHA officers and

51 women undergo paralegal training

Fifty one women drawn from various districts across the country have been equipped with skills and knowledge of redressing gender based violence on the legal point of view.

Opening the 10 day training for the 51 community paralegals in Mponela, MANET+ Executive Director Safali Mbewe who is also Board Member for Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA), organizers of the training, observed that a lot of women, in particular those living with HIV, are being subjected to various types of gender based violence.

For example, Mbewe pointed out that a lot of married women are finding it hard to negotiate for safer sex like use of condoms in marriage set up when they are HIV positive. Others are being chased out of their matrimonial homes just because they are HIV positive.

He said after being equipped with knowledge and skills on legal matters, the women would be able to stand up and fight against abuse and human rights violations.

“But this training is going to empower such women to be able to stand up and combat stigma and discrimination on legal perspective. They will know where to seek redress when their rights have been violated,” said Mbewe.

Mbewe encouraged the women to enlighten their fellows when they return to their respective communities so that many can benefit from the exercise.

COWLHA Capacity Building Officer Steven Iphani observed that a lot of women particularly those living with HIV suffer gender based violence in silence because they do not know how and where to seek redress hence the training.

The training covered topics like, Gender Based Violence, Malawi Constitution, Wills and Inheritance

Act, The Penal Code, Aspects of Land Law, Advocacy and Lobbying,

The community paralegal training will complement to another programme COWLHA is implementing on reducing intimate partner based violence in relation to culture and HIV and AIDS in 12 districts across Malawi.

In the programme on reducing intimate partner based violence, COWLHA is using Stepping Stones as methodology for building capacity of women and men in preventing gender based violence and harmful practices in relation to HIV.

The programme on reducing intimate partner based violence follow results of a baseline study on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) amongst people living with HIV conducted early this year which confirmed the occurrence of HIV related IPV in all the six study districts.

The study revealed that Men remain the major perpetrators of all types of violence and abuse while women remain by far the major victims.



Mbewe: training to empower women to be able to combat stigma and discrimination on legal perspective.

COWLHA received additional funds amounting to \$33,000 from UNAIDS to support UNTF project efforts to address gender based violence particularly Intimate Partner Violence in Mchinji district. However, through the activities under the UNAIDS grant, we have discovered that in Mchinji district as well as in other districts, more needs to be done curb sexual violence against girls which is on the rise especially in TA Mduwa.

In December 2012, COWLHA did organize an interface meeting with service providers including health personnel, police, judiciary and traditional leaders to present challenges being experienced by women living with HIV in the area TA Mduwa. It transpired in the meeting that sexual violence against girls is on the rise in the community and that COWLHA as a women's rights organization needs to do more programming on protecting girls in general as well as on girls and young women living with HIV who face challenges that no one seems to care about .

It is against this background that we are featuring some of the unfortunate and sad stories that have got us thinking that COWLHA needs to consider having some programming for girls and young women in order to protect them from sexual violence, contracting HIV or mitigating the impact of having HIV as an adolescent or young woman. The feature stories that follow are sad and depressing but they provide us some insights on what we need to do for our girls and young women in order to change the future today.

Madras teacher on the run after raping girl 11

Hajira Kassam is an eleven year old girl from Kapiri Trading Centre, TA Dambe in Mchinji district.

Hajira narrates that she was raped 2 times by a teacher of a Madras (Name withheld) where she used to go to attend Islamic lessons in December 2012.

Hajira narrates her story as follows: "I went for lessons to a Madras here at Kapiri as usual with other children of my faith. But on the first day that I was raped, the Madras teacher sent me to his home (which was near the Madras) to sweep his compound. Upon my arrival at his compound, he quickly came and pulled me to a bedroom in his house where he forced himself upon me and eventually raped me. He intimidated me not talk

about the incident to anyone and out of fear, I said nothing about it.

"A few days later I also went to the Madras for lessons and on this day, he asked me to go and clean up his kitchen which I did. He found me in the kitchen some minutes later and pushed me to the corner of the kitchen where he started touching my breasts and then he raped me. He also intimidated me against saying a word about it.

"He also attempted to rape me for a third time but on this particular day, when he sent me to fetch water for his house, there was a woman in the vicinity of the compound who saw him when he was pulling me into his house. The woman quickly informed the Area Chairperson, a Mr Daudi, who quickly ran to where we were alongside other men.



11 year old Hajira Kassam

The rapist peeped through the window because he heard voices coming towards his house and he quickly got himself together and ran away. The men tried to chase him but he outpaced them. He came with a vehicle the following day and quickly moved his family and has not been caught up to date.

Hajira laments that she would feel better if the rapist were arrested so that he does not rape other children in future because he was once accused of attempting to rape another girl who ran away.

Sadly, no-one took Hajira to a health facility for any tests or Post Exposure Prophylaxis according to her.

Zione Nowa is a 13 year old girl who hails from Mchinji district, Traditional Authority Mduwa. She is the second born child in a family of seven children, 3 girls and 4 boys. She lives with her mother and father.

Zione was a standard four pupil at Apani Primary School before withdrawing some months ago due to pregnancy.

One could wonder to say how can a 13 year old girl be pregnant? Well, this is what Zione narrated while looking down with few tears in her eyes:

"I can't remember what day it was when I was raped by a man (name withheld) who lived in the same area where I live .It was in the evening when my mother sent me to collect her phone from the video show room where the phone was being charged. The video show room belongs to Sherriff, the man who raped me.

"As I was waiting for him to give me the phone, lights went off and there was no one else in the room apart the two of us. The man took advantage of that. He closed the door, grabbed me and pushed me down to the floor. He threatened to stab me with a knife just like people do in the movies if I dared tried to scream.

"I was so scared and

Man impregnates



Zione Nowa (standing)

did not scream. After doing what he wanted, he told me not tell anyone about it. I listened to what he said and did not tell anyone even my mom because I was afraid he was going to stab me.

" A few months later,

I was called by one of my mom's friends who asked me if I was using any body lightening products and I told her that I was not. She then asked me if I had my monthly period for that month and I told her that since the first time I had it, I

have never had any. Then she told my mum and we went to Aloma hospital together. At first, my mom thought that I had a swelling in my stomach.

"After being tested at the hospital, the doctor confirmed that I was four

girl 13



months pregnant. That came as a shock to my mom. I also did not know that I was pregnant. She then asked me if I have been sleeping around with boys and I told her what that man did to me. The doctor told my mom not to tell anyone or talk

about it on the way so as to prevent the man from running away.

"We went to the police station and reported the case. Together with the policemen, we went to the man's house and were told by his dad that he was not there."

According to Zion, man's father called him and told him that the police were there to arrest him and he ran away.

"That same day, we reported the case to Imvani Women's Aids Support Group. On the following day together with women leaders from Imvani Support Group and the policemen, we went to the man's house where we were told by his neighbours that he had gone somewhere far from that area where he was hiding. The policemen assured us that they were going to

look for him. My mom together with women leaders from Imvani Support Group went to Apani primary school where I was learning and told the headmaster about what happened to me and that I had to withdraw from school for a few months. After some months as I was passing by the video show room, I saw Sherrif and I told my mom who notified the police about it. The policemen went to the man's house and arrested him."

When asked on how she feels about being raped and being pregnant at such a tender age, Zion said that her life has changed completely.

"I no longer chat or play with my friends because my mom told me to stop just because I am pregnant. I spend most of my time in the house alone, sleeping. I

am bitter and I feel pain in my heart everyday especially when my friends are going to school. I wonder if I will become a primary school teacher, a job that aspires me.

"When I hear about child birth, I get scared because I hear that childbirth is very painful than anything else in the world. I don't think I will be able love and take care of this baby. I ask myself why this man had to rape me?"

When asked if she visits antenatal clinic, Zion said that she does but couldn't remember the next date she is supposed to go the clinic.

"At first, my mom used to escort me to the clinic but now I go there by myself and I feel ashamed because I don't see anyone who is of my age," said Zion.

"As I was waiting for him to give me the phone, lights went off and there was no one else in the room apart from the two of us. The man took advantage of that. He closed the door, grabbed me and pushed me down to the floor. He threatened to stab me with a knife just like people do in the movies if I dared tried to scream"

Know about COWLHA

VISION STATEMENT

A society where girls and women living with HIV lead a healthy life, are empowered, self-reliant and their rights are fully respected, protected and fulfilled.

MISSION STATEMENT

COWLHA, a membership coalition of women and girls living with HIV and AIDS, seeks to enable its members to lead a productive life by promoting sustainable livelihood programmes and strengthening their capacity to effectively lobby and advocate for issues affecting their lives.

VALUES OF COWLHA

In all its undertakings COWLHA is guided by:

- Commitment of its members
- Professionalism in all its activities
- Love and respect for all people regardless of their HIV status
- Being transparent and accountable in all its undertakings

Strategic Objectives of COWLHA

COWLHA is guided by the following objectives to achieve its mission and vision:

- a) To encourage and support women living with HIV and AIDS in the formation and development of self help groups and networks
- b) To ensure that women and girls living with HIV and AIDS have accessible and affordable health care
- c) To ensure that up-to-date information concerning all issues about women and girls living with HIV and AIDS is easily and freely available to all its members
- d) To ensure that women and girls' sexual reproductive health rights are respected and protected
- e) To solicit funds for the economic empowerment of women and girls living with HIV and AIDS to enable them to be self sufficient and independent
- f) To demand that women living with HIV and AIDS be included in decision making processes and consultation at all levels of policy and programmes

PROGRAMME AREAS

Women's Rights are deemed to be a very key component in realizing COWLHA's vision. Hence, advocacy is a key strategy that cuts across all the Programme Areas while gender as a crosscutting issue is mainstreamed in all the programme areas.

The following are the Programme Areas of COWLHA:

1. Sustainable Livelihoods Programme
2. HIV and AIDS Programme
3. Women's Rights Programme
4. Capacity Building for COWLHA

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

- Advocacy sessions
- Capacity building of members on topical issues
- Research
- Community mobilisation
- Networking
- Civic education