



COWLHA

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news update

Coalition of Women Living With HIV and AIDS

**Traditional leaders
Spearheading
Prevention & Redress
of GBV**

**UNITED NATIONS
TRUST FUND TO
END VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN**

INSIDE



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MAIN COVER PHOTO:

Group Village Headman Kapalamula of Balaka leads his people in a traditional dance with songs derived from Stepping Stones training

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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 (UNTF) to End Violence against Women 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.

In this edition we continue highlighting activities that the project undertook between January and June 2013. Among the main activities of the project in the period under review, much of it include rolling out of Stepping Stones to communities.

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/ impact 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 looking into how traditional leaders have embraced Stepping Stones methodology, either as facilitators or agents of change, acting as role models.

In this same edition, we are also trying to critically look into and at the same time provoking debate on whether a woman has a right to say no to sex to her husband.

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

Annie Banda
NATIONAL
COORDINATOR



Does a woman have the right to say no to sex?

C O W L H A
Programme
Manager
Steven Iphani says what matters most is that the couples should discuss

COWLHA, says Iphani, wants to encourage openness and dialogue in marriages because the organization believes that if couples are open to each other and satisfy one another's needs, there will be peace and no violence in the family.

Iphani says COWLHA through the community centered Stepping Stones trainings which also put the family at the centre of it all want couples to open up to each other and discuss issues that affect their lives including making decisions as whether to have sex or not at a particular time, "says Iphani adding that peace that starts in the home extends to the community and finally to the nation."

"When a woman says no to sex, she has as right to say no.

"We want couples to discuss any issue that arise between them to avoid engaging into violent acts. Let us say the woman is sick and is taking drugs, and the husband is forcing her to have sex, would you say she is denying her husband sex?" it will mean the man has not understood the whole issue. It means there was no discussion on that.

"As matter of fact, a woman has a right to say no to sex for whatever reasons," he says

In most households, men let women handle all

Does a Woman have the Right to say NO TO SEX?

Iphani speaking to Stepping Stones groups in Balaka



chores at household level. You will find out that when returning from a farm, the woman is carrying firewood on her head, a baby on her back. When they get home, the woman is the one preparing food and cleaning the house. Before she rests, you find the man asking the woman for sex and if she says no, would you accuse her of denying you sex? Wonders Iphani.

"Lets say that a man has gone drinking, and reports have reached his wife that he was seen in the company of sex workers. The man

comes home and wants to have sex with his wife; do you expect the women to succumb to that? But if they discuss and iron out any other issues, there will be no such issues as 'denying a husband sex' says Iphani.

Meanwhile, research has shown that most couples that contract HIV are in stable relationships, indicating that something has gone amiss in the homes, says Iphani.

This is an indication, says Iphani, that despite being married some of the couples are also involved in extra marital affairs

which requires attention.

"Stepping stones trainings are tailored to address challenges that couples in marriage that end up pushing one of them outside," says Iphani.

He says openness is a key component in any marriage as it breeds love and understanding which is a basis of any good marriage," says Iphani.

Iphani says notes that charity begins at home and instilling desired behaviors in the children should start from a tender age and parents play a crucial role.



From Left to Right: Anna Jere, Sera Mumba, Naomi Mhango, and Ezenia Kumwenda.

Anna Jere from Kamangira village T/A Mtwalo in Mzimba says through Stepping Stones the couple has known how to handle each other when they are both sexually aroused.

"We speak openly about issues that affect our sex life," says Jere.

She says it is not good to force each other to have sex as that is tantamount to intimate partner violence.

Sera Mumba from Kamangira village T/A Mtwalo says Stepping Stones training has helped her and her husband as they no longer have sex when one of them is not ready.

Mumba says a husband and a wife should strive to satisfy each other in bed so that no one goes out of the matrimonial home in search of satisfaction.

According to Mumba all resources that the family finds are shared and used for the intended purpose amongst all members of her family something that was not happening.

Naomi Mhango from

Mzimba women EXPERIENCES ON SEX ISSUES after Stepping Stones training

Mateyo Mhango village in T/A Mtwalo, Mzimba says she did not have the knowhow to satisfy her husband in bed as the couple reached orgasm at different times when making love. But now through Stepping Stones training she has learnt the art of sex that has helped strengthen her marriage.

"My husband no longer goes out to chase other women for sex as he used to do in the past," she said adding, "He confessed to me that he used to do that because he was not getting sexually satisfied with me."

Evelyn Phiri also from Mzimba says trust and confidentiality topic during Stepping Stones training left an impact on her as she was told that it is not good to share personal information with people whom "we know little."

Agness Mwaimba also from Mzimba recalls that jealousy was the order of the day despite testing HIV positive together with her husband.

"My husband was very jealous and wanted us to bear more children and as a result he refused to put

on a condom. It was until we underwent Stepping Stones training, that's when he changed," says Mwaimba.



Evelyn Phiri: My husband was very jealous

**"We speak openly
issues that affect our
sex life"**

NTCHISI COUPLES benefit from Stepping Stones

Christina Siliya from Traditional Authority Chikho in Ntchisi District was on the verge of leaving her matrimonial home due to abusive tendencies of her husband.

Christina says her husband was difficult to please as he had little time to spend at home and did not entertain anything from the wife.

"My husband could spend all the money on beer and other women despite working together with me to generate income," says Siliya.

She says after a Stepping Stones training she discovered that there was no openness with the husband and using the knowledge she gained

started to correct the situation.

"I realised that I was paying little attention to my personal body hygiene that did not go down well with my husband and instead of telling me, he simply resorted to avoiding me," says Siliya.

According to Siliya, it did not take long for the husband to change his ways which later made the couple to live happily.

Stepping Stones Trainer Chrissy Kadzanja from Malomo in T/A Chilowoko area says cases of gender based violence have reduced drastically in Ntchisi, attributing to the change to Stepping stones training.

Kadzanja says some



Christina Siliya: It did not take long for my husband to change

couples did not want their partners to see their private parts even after spending many years together in marriage.

"Sex was only done in darkness which is not supposed to be the case if the marriage is to be sustainable," says Kadzanja.

Thomas Bauleni from Traditional Authority Chikho in Ntchisi says a man that is sexually contented cannot go out and engage in extra marital affairs that can contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

He says Stepping Stones is the right tool coming at the right time to address some of the challenges that many families are facing today.

"Women are economically empowered as husbands no longer confine their spouses to the kitchen courtesy of Stepping Stones," says Bauleni.



Bauleni: Women are economically empowered as husbands no longer confine their spouses to the kitchen

Sexually contented man can't engage in extra marital affairs

Just like any other district in the country, Mzimba has not been spared from issues of property grabbing.

Most of the victims of such acts are women. They fall prey when they lose their husbands through death.

But the coming of Stepping Stones training coupled with interventions of community paralegals seem to have enlightened the people of Mzimba over the evils of property grabbing.

Charity Lungu, Mzimba South COWLHA coordinator and a community paralegal herself says complaints from widows whose land has been grabbed by their husbands' relatives have drastically gone down in the area because people have now realised through Stepping Stones training that such acts are tantamount to domestic violence and that it is a punishable offence by law.

Chrissy Nyirenda is one of the victims of property grabbing in Mzimba. She suffered violence in the hands of the deceased husband's relatives who wanted to possess all land that her late husband left.

Nyirenda recalls that the land that was taken from her crippled the sole food source of the family thereby exposing the family to perennial hunger.

The mother of six, two boys and four girls, says the situation looked insurmountable as she could not return to her people as well.

"It is through interaction with members of Stepping Stones and intervention of

Stepping Stones, Community Paralegals intervene in WIDOW'S GRABBED PROPERTY



Charity Lungu (left) and Chrissy Nyirenda

our community paralegal officer Charity Lungu that I realized that not all was lost as this was an example of

Charity Lungu and traditional leaders she was given back the land.

In a related

Stones trainings have brought a new lease of life among couples that experienced diverse gender based violence.

Lungu explains that some women did not enjoy the fruits of their labour since their husbands could grab all returns from various types of economic activities they are engaged in.

"Most husbands have become more responsible when it comes to resource management at household level, after attending Stepping Stones training," says Lungu.

"It is through interaction with members of Stepping Stones and intervention of our community paralegal officer Charity Lungu that I realized that not all was lost as this was an example of gender based violence"

violence," says Nyirenda.

With assistance from

development, Lungu observes that Stepping

Enhancement of Family Communication -THE CASE OF SALIMA

What one does not know does not exist. Communication comes in to bring into reality what was not known. Couples that lack communication skills turn to face many challenges due to misinterpretations of words and actions.

Magret Mhone's husband Emmanuel is a fisherman. The couple hails from Traditional Authority Ndindi in Salima. The man hardly found time to stay at home and take care of his family after running his errands for each day.

After a good catch in the lake that translated into good sales, Emmanuel used to lavish his moneys on other women thereby leaving his wife in abject poverty.

"He used to leave me alone at home and spend days at the Lake. No time to sit down and talk about any other issues affecting our home, including sex life.

"I used to suffer from emotional violence because I was not sure what used to keep my husband away from home



Emmanuel and Margret Mhone
now live a happy married life

for so long. Until when members of a Support Group in our area, who had been trained on Stepping Stones approached us as a couple and started teaching us on HIV, gender based violence

as well as being open to each other on issues of sex and sexuality.

"Now as you can see, I have given birth, a sign that my husband now finds time to be with me at home" she proudly says while holding

her baby in her hands.

On the other hand, Emmanuel realized that his addiction to alcohol was the main source of his behavior of womanising and not caring for his wife.

"Through Stepping Stones I realised that I was victimising my wife by subjecting her to domestic violence, a thing which I no longer do. I also realised that chances of contracting HIV become higher when sleeping around with various women."

He explains that in the past, before he underwent

"It is only after attending Stepping Stones training that I realised that I was losing out and married life could take another interesting turn"

Stepping Stones training, he did not bother to enhance communication with his wife assuming that she would know what to do and as a result conflicts were endless.

"It is only after attending Stepping Stones training that I realised that I was losing out and married life could take another interesting turn," says Mhone.

Mhone's wife Magret concurs with the husband that the training has made a difference in their marriage.

"He used to go fishing for days without bidding farewell which I found unfair and upon returning, he could drag me in bed without creating a conducive environment.

"But with Stepping Stones, we learnt the importance of communication before sex, which helps to prepare our bodies physically and psychologically thereby making sex enjoyable," says Margret.

Another family that has also benefitted from Stepping Stones training in Salima is that of Miriam Mwanjisi and her husband Christopher.

Miriam says in the past, her husband who used to be a drunkard used to beat her up every time he returned home from a beer hall without any apparent reason.

Among others, Christopher used to starve his wife by not leaving behind money for food and other basic necessities needed at household level.

"But now, I have quit beer drinking. After Stepping Stones training I

realised that my excessive beer drinking was the root cause to my bad behavior of beating up my wife all the time," says Christopher.

Among other things, the couple has learnt the importance of using condoms.

"In the past, despite being HIV positive, we never used condoms and as a result, our health was deteriorating. But now Stepping Stones has taught us the importance of condom use, which helps among other things to stop multiplication of HIV in our bodies," said Miriam.



Miriam and Christopher marriage has been cemented

"But now, I have quit beer drinking. After Stepping Stones training I realised that my excessive beer drinking was a root cause to my bad behavior of beating up my wife all the time"

Isaac Wyson from Group Village Headman Bwanali T/A Kambwiri says he decided to have a second wife for lack of satisfied in bed with the first wife.

“Our sex styles were the same which reduced my interest in her but after attending Stepping Stones training we have improved tremendously and I have now divorced the second wife. He says it was unfortunate that he married another wife something that could have brought diseases like HIV and AIDS in the family.

“Through Stepping Stones, we have learnt how HIV is transmitted, one of the ways how HIV is transmitted is by having more than one sexual partner,” he says.

Wyson says they divorced with the second wife mutually.

“I have one child with my ex-wife the second wife and I am still taking care of my child. But there is no relationship with the mother,” he says.

COWLHA Board Member Vincent Mpaluko says Stepping Stones is



Wyson carrying his child.
Beside him is his first wife

Man quits POLYGAMOUS LIFE

aimed at promoting communication among partners and unearthing issues that are considered

as taboo by society.

“COWLHA is helping to ensure that those living with the virus should live long

and those that have not yet contracted the virus should not contract the virus,” says Mpaluko.

“Through Stepping Stones, we have learnt how HIV is transmitted, one of the ways how HIV is transmitted is by having more than one sexual partner”



Mpaluko: Stepping Stones is promoting communication among partners

Julius Kaole 28 from Group Village headman Katumbi in Traditional Authority Kambwiri in Salima is married to Lucy 27 and between them they have three children, the oldest being six years.

The couple grow cotton which is their main source of income.

Despite the fact that during cultivation the family works in the farm together, every time they harvest, and take the cotton to the market, Julius was using all proceeds realised on beer and women, leaving his wife and home without a penny for food and other basic necessities.

"Sometimes after making hefty sums from cotton sales, I could just show and share with my wife a few bucks like I didn't make good sales at the market. The other money I used to spend it on my own on beer and sex workers," he says.

Julius was always returning home after a week or two after the sales with empty pockets.

After returning home, he used to harass his wife to provide him with food yet by the time he was leaving, he left little or no money at all for the household.

This has been the trend for the past five years until last November, 2012 when men and women in the area that had been trained as trainers on Stepping Stones conducted training sessions within Julius' vicinity.

Julius was among the community members that

Salima man stops being STINGY



Julius: I have stopped harrasing my wife.

received the Stepping Stones training.

He has learnt that by having multiple sex partners, he was increasing

his chances of contracting HIV.

Julius, after the training, realised that he was failing to develop his household

because all the money were channelled towards beer and sex workers.

Even his Village Headman Katumbi concurred with Julius saying "It is true that he is a changed man today. he is one of my subjects and i have been following his lifestyle because he doesnt leave far from my compound."

"The other money I used to spend it on my own on beer and sex workers"



Adam Omali ABANDONS bad habit

Adam Omali 43 has been married to Esnara 40 for eight years now. The couple has been into tomato and onion selling business as their source of

income.

But their business failed to develop, or enabled the couple to uplift their lives at household level.

The reason was that after making the sales, Adam

used to hand over all the moneys that he had made from a day's sales to his wife.

Then he used to go behind his wife and steal a chunk from the same money that he had presented to his wife. He could leave home for a beer drinking spree. The end result was that after the wife cautioned him, upon realizing that some moneys were missing, Adam used to beat her up, accusing her of stealing.

Their tomato and onion selling business then took a nose dive because later on there wasn't enough capital to operate and expand their business base.

"After Stepping Stones training, I realised that I was stealing my own money that led to the collapsing of our business," he says.

Now their business has picked up because there is openness when it comes to sales. Development wise, the couple, from savings they have been making from their business, intend to build a modern house with iron sheets, and move away from the dilapidated one they have been staying ever since. The couple hails from Traditional Authority Kambwiri in Salima.

"After Stepping Stones training, I realised that I was stealing my own money that led to the collapsing of our business."

NKHATA BAY men desist from illtreating their wives

Few years ago cases of domestic violence were common in Nkhata bay like most parts of Malawi. In most areas of the district, husbands exploited their wives and children by taking all farming proceeds after harvest despite working together tirelessly. Fights erupted between couples due to misunderstandings bordering on suspicion as well.

The introduction of Stepping Stones training has brought significant change in the lives and homes of many families in northern lakeshore district according to Coalition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (COWLHA) Nkhata bay district coordinator Mary Mhone.

"There's mutual understanding in homes as couples are able to work and then enjoy farming proceeds. Some women engage in income generating activities a feat that was difficult to achieve in the past," observes Mhone.

She says this was not the situation before the introduction of the training of the project especially in Traditional Authority (T/A) Kabunduli, Nkumbira and Timbiri areas.

Mhone says some areas that have not been reached are anxious to receive the training so that they can also benefit and transform their



Funny Phiri and her husband Mustapha Mbewe have benefitted from Stepping Stones

lives.

The district coordinator said the training is yet to reach out to most support groups especially along the lake shore villages pointing out that plans are underway to extend the impact areas.

Funny Phiri, a beneficiary of Stepping Stones training in Nkhatabay says her marriage was going through difficult times because of misunderstandings with her husband.

"The training has helped

to return peace in my home that was lost due to poor communication and lack of openness," says Phiri.

Phiri says she is now able to engage in different income generating activities which was not the case in the recent past.

Funny's husband Mustapha Mbewe who hails from Nsanama in Balaka but lives in Nkhatabay says the COWLHA facilitated project has helped him to easily settle among people

that are not his kinsmen due to the good working relationship with his wife courtesy of Stepping Stones.

"I now talk gently to my wife and kids after understanding different forms of gender based violence contrary to what I was doing in the past," says Mbewe.

Rabecca Kamange from Chamawoya village says her husband used to drink beer excessively and abused her upon returning from the drinking spree.

Kamange says after attending Stepping Stone training, the abusive husband changed for the better and now she has a reason to stay in marriage.

Rabecca's husband George agrees with the wife that drinking is no longer his hobby that was draining all the hard won resources for the past ten years.

Eston Kashani is another community member whose behavior has been transformed because of trainings that were organized by COWLHA.

"There's mutual understanding in homes as couples are able to work and then enjoy farming proceeds. Some women engage in income generating activities a feat that was difficult to achieve in the past."



Rebecca Kamange and her husband George are also enjoying the fruits of Stepping Stones



Mhone: Training has brought significant change in the lives and homes of many families

"I now do all household chores when my wife is away something that I was

not doing because I was afraid of public ridicule," he says.

Kashani is optimistic that the good behavior he is displaying to his family now

will benefit his kids to be caring and loving individuals.

Couple engages in meaningful business after Stepping Stones

One of the Stepping Stone training facilitators Elina Longwe, 40 from Group Village headman Chamawoya in Nkhatabay says the information she acquired at the start of the training has transformed her life and that of her family.

She is living with her husband of five years, Lukeman Mbewe, as a discordant couple.

"Am HIV positive and my husband is HIV negative and he used to scorn me because of my HIV status but after taking part in Stepping stones trainings he has changed," says Longwe.

The training facilitator

says the support she gets now from the once abusive husband is helping her to lead a healthy life.

"Now he is the one who always reminds me of the goodness of taking ARVs religiously," she says.

The couple, because of the peace that has returned in the family, has been able to engage in income generating activity.

"In the past, he used to spend all his moneys on beer drinking but now since he has quit drinking, the proceeds from his timber selling business are being put into good use. We raised 100 chickens which after selling we have managed to realise over MK200,



Elina Longwe: In the past he used to spend all his money on beer

000," she says adding, "the money realised is going to be re-invested in the poultry business."

Among others things, Longwe says her husband

used to refuse to use a condom. But now after Stepping Stones training he has learnt the goodness of condom use as a discordant couple



Joyful COWLHA Balaka women present a gift to NAC Board Chairperson

NAC applauds COWLHA's GBV fight

National AIDS Commission (NAC) has applauded COWLHA's Gender Based Violence (GBV) mitigating interventions saying issues of HIV spread can best be dealt with in an environment that is domestic violence free.

NAC Board Chairperson Ms Mara Kumbweza Banda said the fight against HIV and AIDS can best be won only if stakeholders intensify their efforts in addressing intimate partner violence which is one of the catalysts for HIV spread.

Kumbweza Banda made

the remarks recently when she visited Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) Stepping Stones project in Balaka which is being supported financially by United Nations Fund (UNTF) to end violence against women

Ms Kumbweza Banda

observed that violence against women and violence of all forms is one of the breeding grounds for HIV spread hence the need to address it.

The NAC Board Chairperson said she was impressed with how the COWLHA project, through Stepping Stones workshops

“COWLHA is doing a commendable job. People, particularly women have to know their rights and where to report to when their rights have been violated”

has managed to turn around lives of people for better and she has since pledged NAC's full support towards the initiative to enable a lot of people to benefit.

“COWLHA is doing a commendable job. People, particularly women have to know their rights and where to report to when their rights have been violated.

“I have also seen that gender has manifested itself by allowing equal participation of men and women in Stepping Stones,” she said.

Ms Kumbweza Banda also wondered why couples should not have



Mwansambo: Am encouraged to see that alot of people are now coming in the open, to have their blood tested for HIV.



GVH Kapalamula: In the past I used to handle alot of gender based violence cases.

Continued..... NAC applauds COWLHA's GBVmitigating interventions

access to one another's body.

It has been observed that a lot of intimate partner violence emanates from bedroom issues, mostly when a woman refuses her husband's sexual advances, which later leads to a fight.

In turn, after being refused sex in their matrimonial homes, most men, it has been observed, switch their attention to sex workers or start engaging in extra marital affairs as an alternative for sexual satisfaction.

By practicing multiple concurrent sexual partnerships, the men put their lives and those of their spouses at risk of contracting HIV.

On condom use, Kumbweza Banda said she was impressed to learn that the project has also enlightened women about

female condom use.

She observed that a lot of women have failed to negotiate for safer sex which has resulted in contracting HIV. But with lessons on female condoms, which women can wear hours before sexual acts. It puts women at safer position.

She thanked UNTF for the financial support that has

enabled COWLHA undertake Stepping Stones project.

Taking her turn, NAC Head of Policy, Support and Development Dr Andrina Mwansambo who accompanied Kumbweza Banda to Balaka said she was equally encouraged to see that because of Stepping Stones, a lot of people are now coming in

the open, to have their blood tested for HIV.

"It is good to know your status because you know how to take good care of yourself whether you have been found HIV positive or negative. Those that are hiding are the ones that are at risk," she said.

Representing the office of Balaka District Commissioner, Marshal Zenengeya said through Stepping Stones couples in Balaka are now free and open to each other, a development that has helped to lessen cases of intimate partner violence.

He appealed to COWLHA to extend the initiative to urban areas where he observed that even people who are respected as the learned, are subjecting each other to intimate partner violence,

"It is good to know your status because you know how to take good care of yourself whether you have been found HIV positive or negative. Those that are hiding are the ones that are at risk"

Continued..... **NAC applauds COWLHA's GBVmitigating interventions**

which is leading to HIV spread.

Senior Group Village Headman Kapalamula of Balaka while expressing his gratitude to the introduction of Stepping Stones to his subjects asked COWLHA to upscale the initiative so that many people benefit.

"In the past, I used to handle a lot of cases of gender based violence with issues emanating from the bedroom. When you quiz a couple that has brought their issues before me, you will find out that a fight could erupt on sex related issues. At times, women have been complaining of their men engaging in extra marital affairs with other women or even sex workers. The root course you find that it is coming from the bedroom because these people though married, they are not open to each other in terms of each one's needs," said Kapalamula.

But now Kapalamula said such cases no longer come before his court as people in his area through Stepping Stones have learnt how to be open to each other and how to meet each one's needs in their matrimonial homes.

He also said cultural practices that were putting people's lives at risk of contracting HIV have been checked due to the coming of Stepping Stones.

COWLHA Board Chair Ulanda Mtamba said funds permitting, her organisation plans to roll out the initiative to all corners of Malawi so that a lot of people are



COWLHA Board Chairperson Ulanda Mtamba speaking to Stepping Stones groups at the headquarters of GVH Kapalamula

spared from HIV and violence.

The NAC monitoring team to COWLHA projects in Mangochi and Balaka was accompanied by

COWLHA Board Chairperson Ulanda Mtamba, COWLHA National Coordinator Annie Banda, Malawi Network for People Living with HIV and

AIDS (MANET +) Executive Director Safari Mbewe, government officials from Balaka District Council and other stakeholders in HIV and AIDS fight.

"In the past, I used to handle a lot of cases of gender based violence with issues emanating from the bedroom. When you quiz a couple that has brought their issues before me, you will find out that a fight could erupt on sex related issues"

Stepping Stones.....

Behind every child there are parents and the parents have responsibility over their children. But some parents have taken an extra mile by forcing their children especially girls to go into early marriages with the aim of benefiting materially from the husband to be.

Amos Stewart from Michesi Village in the area of Traditional Authority Kalembo in Balaka says the girl child used to complain in silence as the parents were adamant to accept the views of their children. Stewart says Stepping Stones training has helped most parents in his area understand gender based violence including forcing girls into early marriages for economic gains.

"We are thankful to COWLHA as we now know that forcing girls who are under the age of 15 into marriage is part of promoting gender based violence," says Stewart.

Stewart also observed that a lot of young girls were dying in labour because their bodies were not mature enough to contain the pressure that comes with child bearing.

Concurring with Stewart, Balaka district COWLHA Coordinator Elizabeth Njeula says most parents have changed their old ways especially forcing their daughters into early marriage.

"Reports we are getting from primary and secondary schools in the

STOP EARLY MARRIAGES

... reduces dropout rate

in Balaka



Stewart: A lot of young girls were dying upon giving birth



Njeula: There is high demand for training to be extended to other parts in the district

areas we are working indicate that drop-out rate among girls has reduced because most parents have learnt the importance of keeping the girl child in

school rather than forcing her into an early marriage for economic gains," says Njeula.

Currently, according to Njeula, there is high

demand for the project to be extended to other parts of the district as it is only in T/As Kalembo and Nsamala where it is being implemented.

"Reports we are getting from primary and secondary schools in the areas we are working indicate that drop-out rate among girls has reduced because most parents have learnt the importance of keeping the girl child in school rather than forcing her into an early marriage for economic gains"

Women in Balaka CHERISH

Stepping Stones

Another beneficiary of Stepping Stones training Grace Nong'one from Khoswe village T/A Nsamala says the lessons learnt will go a long way in enhancing love in her family.

"Love was drastically fading in my marriage as we used to do things as a habit and the training has helped me to refresh and bring in new ideas into my marriage," says Nong'one.

She says even on sharing of household chores, the situation in her family has improved for the better to the effect that her husband is able to undertake some of the chores which were deemed as fit for women.

"When I am preparing a dish, you see my husband washing plates and when I am washing clothes you see my husband ironing clothes," she says.

She says in the past, there was lack of communication between the couple to the effect that it was not possible for one of them to express their needs.

"In the past there was a lot of animosity. Like in my

case I couldn't tell my husband about my needs fearing he would beat me up, particularly on sexual satisfaction. I feared if I tell him I want us to engage into some sort of sexual act, he would call me names like prostitute. But today, we are able to talk and satisfy each other. We are able to talk about our needs," says Nong'one.

Chifundo Mlozi also from T/A Nsamala says a couple should not stop each other from having sex after a quarrel but should strive to find a solution as soon as possible so that no one attempts to go outside.

"The coming of Stepping Stones training particularly to young women like me, have had our marriages transformed. Like in my case, each time I had a quarrel with my husband during the day, I could wait till bedtime for revenge. I could deny him sex," she says.

"To fight back, apart from engaging extra sexual relationships, my husband would deny me an



Nong'one: Love was drastically fading in my family

opportunity to engage into any economic activity like business. But now things have changed because we

are able to sit down and talk whenever there are any differences on various issues," she says.



Mlozi: (blue) Stepping Stones has transformed our marriages

"When I am preparing for a dish, you see my husband washing plates and when I am washing clothes you see my husband ironing clothes"

Group Village Headman Magombera, real name Kangoni Chipapala, from the area of Traditional Authority Nsamala in Balaka, was nicknamed “Ntchafu Zinkomola” by his subjects.

The nickname simply means that the chief gets obsessed with women’s thighs.

Ntchafuzinkomola, has been a skirt chaser in his past life. He could not resist at a sight of a woman’s thighs up until he finds his way and have sex with that woman.

“I was not staying at home most of the times. I used to spend much of my time with other women including sex workers. If I see a woman that catches my eye, I would make sure I have sex with her,” he says.

His wife Emily confessed that Stepping Stones has strengthened her marriage with the chief.

“In the past when we had a quarrel during the day, I could bring the issue forward during bed time and revenge by denying him sex as punishment. But I didn’t know that those were some of the issues that drove him away from home and sleeping with sex workers wherever he used to go. But today, my man stays at home. He has stopped his bad behavior because he has learnt through Stepping Stones that by practicing multiple concurrent sexual partnerships, he was increasing his chances of catching HIV”. She says.

After attending Stepping Stones lessons, ,

he abandoned his immoral behavior.

GVH Magombera has also been in the forefront spearheading elimination of cultural practices that fuel spread of HIV.

“Cultural practices like chokolo (wife inheritance), my subjects have realised that such practices fuel spread of HIV and need to be stopped. We are no longer practising that here. The problem with chokolo is that you don’t know what has killed your relative before inheriting his wife,” he says.

GVH Magombera said Stepping Stones has also taught him and his subjects what it takes for one to be called a real man. “We have learnt that a real man is that one that takes good care of his family and his wife in particular,” he said.



GVH Magombera and his wife have had their love rekindled

Balaka chief stops chasing skirts



Bernadetta: I have learnt about female condoms

Balaka woman knows female condoms

Bernadetta Kaufulu from Mponda Village in Traditional Authority Nsamala in Balaka is one of the women that had gone through Stepping Stones lessons.

She testifies that she is among the many women in her area that have now learnt the goodness of using condoms to avoid contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Just like many other women in her area, Bernadetta didn’t know that there were male and female condoms.

“Now we have learnt about female condoms and how effective they are. The good thing about a female condom is that you can wear a female condom anytime and stay with it for a day. It empowers you to be ready for protected sex act anytime,” she said.



Senior Chief Tengani (2nd from right)

Nsanje MODIFIES TRADITIONS to suit changing times

Every society has its unique traditions. But in some areas where tradition is promoting practices that lead to the spread of HIV change is necessary.

Senior GVH Tengani in Nsanje says people of his area used to force widows to sleep with other men immediately when a husband dies.

"We have modified our tradition and we no longer force or allow a widow to

sleep with a man she does not know for the sake of the traditions to control the spread of HIV," says Tengani.

He observes that the coming of Stepping Stones training has intensified love in marriages at the same time has reduced cases of gender based violence.

The traditional leader attributed the change to interventions introduced in the area through COWLHA's Stepping Stones

workshops, that is promoting openness in marriages.

Tengani explains that he did not hesitate to recommend the trainings to his subjects after observing that most widows were struggling in forced marriages in the name of

following tradition.

Group Village Headman Mgona from T/A Tengani acknowledges that it was unfair to force widows into marriages much as it is part of the tradition as the practice exposed them to HIV/AIDS.

"We have modified our tradition and we no longer force or allow a widow to sleep with a man she does not know for the sake of the traditions to control the spread of HIV and AIDS"



GVH Mgona: It was unfair to force widows to enter into marriages

John Banda is a member of Police Forum based at Sinyala Police Unit in Malingunde.

He testifies that due to the nature of his job, he used to handle a lot of cases to do with various forms of violence, such cases have dwindled due to the introduction of Stepping Stones in the area.

"In the past, we used to receive a lot of cases of men beating women in their houses. Many issues were to do with women denying their husbands sex in bed. As a result men used to beat the women. But now things have changed. There are no more cases of violence against women, particularly from marriage set ups. And we found out that it is because of the coming of Stepping Stones.

"A lot of people here have been sensitized and they are aware of all forms of violence and whenever they have differences, they have learnt that the best way to resolve them is through dialogue," he says.

Some cases which police forum used to handle, says Banda, were to do with men beating their wives



Banda (left) and Chadza recounting their experiences with Stepping Stones

Malingunde experiences A DECLINE in GBV

after they had been found HIV positive.

"A lot of women have been chased out of their

matrimonial homes because they had been found HIV positive. But now this is no longer the case," He says

Health Surveillance Assistant in Malingunde James Chadza also observed that there has been an increase in HIV testing as a result of sensitization that has come through Stepping Stones workshops in the area.

"Now men come with their wives for HIV testing. In the past a lot of men used to shun HIV testing. If I am to go into our register book you will notice that there are a lot of women names. But now things have changed, men's names are also appearing in large numbers," he says.

"Now men come with their wives for HIV testing. In the past a lot of men used to shun HIV testing. If I am to go into our register book you will notice that there are a lot of women names"

For 18 years he has been married to his wife, 45 year old Group Village Headman (GVH) Chikankhe, real name Paulo Chimombo, from the area of Traditional Authority Masumbankhunda, Lilongwe has been practicing multiple concurrent sexual partnerships with various women in his area and outside.

Two years ago, the traditional leader went further and officially married one of his several concubines, now making it two wives. Despite rejection by his subjects over his decision to pick a second wife, GVH Chikankhe did not heed the outcry and continued with his second marriage. But the coming of Stepping Stones in his area, end 2012, turned around the life of GVH Chikankhe.

He attended one of the training sessions that took place in his area conducted by couples that had been trained as trainer of trainers on the subject.

"I didn't want to put myself at risk of HIV multiplication. And as a group village headman, I wanted to become a role model to my subjects, and it was easy for me to divorced the second wife because we had no children between us," he says.

There was jubilation in his village, his subjects celebrating the chief's decision to stick to one partner.

"In the first place they didn't like my idea of having two wives. So when I divorced the second one, people celebrated

Lilongwe Traditional leader changes his ways



GVH Chikankhe: I didn't want to put myself at risk

because that's what they had been longing to see ever since," he says.

"The disadvantage was that I was failing to develop at household level because the moneys I used to get after selling my harvests, used to be shared amongst the many sexual partners I had," he said.

The first wife was not benefitting at all. She used to be ignored with preference being given to the new wife and the sex workers.

But now, the traditional leader has managed to mould bricks and wants to build a modern house with corrugated iron sheets.

"Now I am able to save money that I used to

squander with other women," he says.

In his village which has approximately 60 adults, 25 have attended Stepping Stones training so far, he claimed.

"Cases of men beating their wives no longer come

before my court because people have learnt that such behavior is uncalled for and it falls within domestic violence which is a crime. Couples are open to each other whenever they have a problem amongst themselves, they resolve them at household level.

"I didn't want to put myself at risk of HIV multiplication. And as a group village headman, I wanted to become a role model to my subjects, and it was easy for me to divorce the second wife because we had no children between us"

Village Headman (VH) Pitilosi from Phiri la Njuzi in Malingunde, Lilongwe is another character that used to beat up his wife every time when the wife refused him sex in bed.

Almost on daily basis, VH Pitilosi used to come home late from his drinking spree where he also used to have sex with sex workers.

But now after Stepping Stones training was introduced in his area, VH Pitilosi is a changed-for-the-better man than before.

He has learnt that what he was subjecting his wife to, is domestic violence.

"I have learnt from Stepping Stones training that what I was doing, by beating my wife every time she refused me sex, without necessarily enquiring from her why she was making that decision, is intimate partner violence of highest order," he says.

VH Pitilosi had also learnt through Stepping Stones training that by having multiple sexual partners, he was increasing his chances of contracting HIV.

The Village Headman revealed that it was after one of Stepping Stones training sessions that he made a decision with his wife and went for voluntary HIV testing and counselling where both were found HIV negative.

"We now know how to take care of ourselves in order not to contract HIV," he says.

Many of his subjects, says VH Pitilosi, have followed suit to have their blood tested for HIV.

"I have also



Village Headman MAKES U-TURN on Intimate partner violence

spearheaded the revolution in my village to stop violence against women and all other forms of violence and I am now one of the trainers in Stepping Stones and I conduct Stepping Stones lessons at my court for my subjects on weekly basis," he said.

"I have learnt ... that what I was doing, by beating my wife every time she refused me sex, ... is intimate partner violence of highest order."

More Malingunde Stepping Stones experiences

Village Headman Mizeki from T/A Masumbankhunda in Lilongwe is another beneficiary of Stepping Stones training. VH Mizeki used to leave his wife Sofileti Njovu Dazmata at home and sleep around with other women.

But today, the village headman and his wife can stand before their subjects and demonstrate what love is all about and the positives it can bring at one's household.

Sofileti testified that VH Mizeki used to ill treat her and subjected her to all sorts of domestic violence before he transformed due to the introduction of

Stepping Stones in Malingunde.

"This man used to beat me up, particularly when I insisted on using condoms. I went for HIV test and was found HIV positive. The doctor advised that we resort to using condoms whenever we have sex. The doctor also stressed the need for my husband to go for HIV test, which he refused. Instead he was forcing me to have unprotected sex which was detrimental to our health," she says.

But today Sofileti confirmed, VH Mizeki is a changed man unlike in the past when beating and bullying was the order of the day.



VH Mizeki and his wife Sofileti Njovu

"He used to beat me up for no apparent reason. Beer drinking and womanising were his habits.

But today he is a changed man after Stepping Stones lessons. Whenever we have an issue, we sit down and resolve it amicably," she says.

VH Mizeki through Stepping Stones lessons has learnt the importance of having his blood tested for HIV and he has gone for it. VH has learnt the importance of using condoms to halt multiplication of the HIV in order to remain healthy.

"Many of my subjects are alive today because of Stepping Stones. They have realised the importance of going for HIV testing and those that have been found HIV positive are on ARVs, and they lead a healthy life. Those that are HIV negative have been counselled on how to live an HIV free life," he says.

VH Mizeki believes that if Stepping Stones training had come a bit earlier, many of his subjects that have lost their lives to HIV related illnesses would have been alive today and contribute to the area's development.

Abel Malenga had paid dowry (lobola) to marry Leviness, his wife of 13 years.

So when Leviness tested HIV positive in 2003, and medical personnel advised her on the need to use condoms every time she had sex, Abel used to refuse.

First when Abel was advised to undergo HIV testing, he refused; secondly, he refused to be using condoms. He used to argue that he could not have sex with his wife using a condom because he had paid a lot of money as lobola to secure his wife and as such he could not have sex with her using a condom.

So since 2003, up 2012 when he attended Stepping Stones lessons, Abel had been having unprotected sex with his wife.

"I paid lobola to get my



Abel Malenga and his wife Leviness

wife. So why should I eat a sweet while it is still in a wrapper when you have bought it with your own money?" he says.

Abel continued to force his wife to have unprotected sex until one day when he had a chance to attend Stepping Stones lessons in his village.

Abel learnt through Stepping Stones the importance of undergoing HIV testing as well as the effects of having unprotected sex with an HIV infected person.

"I went for HIV testing and I was found HIV positive. From that moment as a couple we started using condoms every time we wanted to have sex. Now since I started using condoms, my health has extremely improved, unlike in the past, when I used to get sick frequently. I learnt that having unprotected sex, when both of you have HIV, you give room to multiplication of the virus."

The couple has four children and hail from Traditional Authority Masumbankhunda in Lilongwe



Hyton proudly holds his wife: Stepping Stones has enlightened us that even men can also perform household chores

Rumphi man cherishes GENDER EQUALITY FRUITS

For 20 years they have been living as husband and wife, Hyton Zikani Mkandawire 41 had never lit a fire, grabbed a pot and cooked food for his family.

Even at times when his wife fell sick, or she was busy with other household chores. Hyton was brought up in an environment and tradition that only women and not men, do the cooking and relevant

household chores. But today Hyton, who hails from Mwachuwa Village, Sub Traditional Authority Njikura, Jalawe, Rumphi has a different story to tell after undergoing Stepping Stones lessons.

Hyton said he has benefitted a lot from Stepping Stones lessons, particularly on gender issues. In the first place before Stepping Stones it was a tradition in his family

and the community in which he lives that women are the ones that are supposed to be doing the cooking in the house and doing all other household chores.

To this effect, Hyton, even at times when he was free and his wife Witness had plenty of household chores to do, Hyton never lent a hand.

“But Stepping Stones has enlightened us that even men can also perform

household chores and this culture has now been planted in my house and in the community I live, particularly in those households whose members belong to Jalawe Tigwirane Manja Support Group. These are the people who have undergone Stepping Stones training.

Men and women are working in unison at household and community level.”

Stepping Stones Restores Love

Margret Kondowe hails from Mlowe in Rumphu.

She is one of the people from Mlowe that have attended Stepping Stones lessons.

She said Stepping Stones has helped strengthen her marriage by restoring love which was wearing thin between her and her husband.

"My husband wanted to marry a second wife because he said he was no longer getting the sexual satisfaction from me. He said he wanted to experience something better. But later he changed his plans of picking another wife."

"What happened was once I started attending Stepping Stones lessons, I learnt quite a lot of things including how best couples can satisfy each other in bed so that no one seeks extra sexual satisfaction outside marriage, a thing that can put couples lives at risk of contracting HIV," she says

According to Margret, today her husband has withdrawn his threats to marry a second wife because he is finding satisfaction in her and sees no need to go out and chase other women.

Margret said that she has also shared with her husband some lessons in Stepping Stones, who has in turn understood on how easy it is for a person who practises multiple concurrent partnerships to contract HIV and AIDS.

"This has also greatly contributed to make him change his stance of picking

a second wife. He is aware of HIV and how one can contract it. He knows now

that if he does that he will be putting his life and mine too at risk of contracting HIV," she says

"My husband wanted to marry a second wife because he said he was no longer getting the sexual satisfaction in me. He said he wanted to experience something better. But later he changed his plans of picking another wife"



Margret: I learnt quite a lot of things including how best couples can satisfy each other in bed

COWLHA PROFILE

The Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi (COWLHA) was formed in 2006. It unites different groups of women as a civil society force in dealing with issues on HIV and AIDS that impact on the lives of women living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi. COWLHA's mandate specifically seeks to enhance the protection and promotion of rights of women living with HIV and AIDS.

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 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
- g) To train and educate health care providers and community at large about the risks women face

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

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