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COWLHA

Coalition of Women Living With HIV and AIDS

News Update

Samuel (left) bought his wife hair chemicals immediately after one of the training sessions and asked some of the female participants to give her a good hairdo -- PAGE 19

**Love that
stands test of
time**

PAGE 4

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CONTENTS



Love that stands test of time	P4
Training stops various forms of intimate partner violence	P7
The magic of HIV, medical advice	P8
No more wife battering	P9
Pictorial focus on Stepping Stones Trainer of Trainers Workshops	P10
Senior village head in Stepping Stones	P12
Men inclusion in Stepping Stones excites woman	P13
Sexual violence worries DC	P14
Man likens Stepping Stones to evangelism	P15
Stepping Stones training has strengthened my marriage	P16
I have been denying my wife her conjugal rights	P17
Men too suffer intimate partner violence	P18
Man learns how to care for his wife	P19
Stepping Stones excites Midwife Technician	P19

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COVER PICTURES

Main Picture:

*Martin and Beatrice
Kaphamtengo from Dedza are
a loving husband and wife,
despite one being HIV
positive and the other negative*

Picture on Top

*COWLHA National
Coordinator Annie Banda
presents a certificate to one of
the participants to Stepping
Stones Training Samuel
Chikulupati*



FOREWORD

Efforts to address gender imbalances that lead to the infringement on the rights of women can never be successful if men are sidelined and solely viewed as perpetrators.

For this reason, we at COWLHA, with financial assistance from the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF), have embarked on 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. 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 our earlier approaches of addressing women's rights violations we at COWLHA either sidelined men or simply took them as perpetrators and as a result, the impact of such approaches did not produce the best of results. But as a women's rights organisation, we now fully recognise that it is crucial to involve all relevant stakeholders including men in our efforts to eliminate violence against women.

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. Through the UNTF funded project titled "Leveraging Positive Action towards Reducing Violence Against Women Living with HIV" that will be implemented for a period of three years (2012-2014) across 12 districts, COWLHA seeks to prevent intimate partner based violence for women living with HIV and create an enabling environment for the promotion of women's rights. The project among others also seek to increase knowledge levels of harmful practices and women's rights, enhance the capacity of COWLHA in the Gender and HIV and AIDS programming and enhance partnerships and networking on the elimination of violence against women.

Earlier this year, COWLHA commissioned a study to collect baseline data on the incidences and forms of IPV amongst PLHIV by sampling Ntchisi, Salima, Thyolo, Nsanje, Rumphu and Karonga districts out of the 12 districts where the project is being implemented. The results of the study reveal that Support Groups, that were the main entry point to communities and people living with HIV, are mainly patronized by women. Men and young people lag behind in all the districts. It also revealed that more women are involved in HIV Testing (HTC) than men. The latter wait until they are very sick in order to undergo HTC. Consequently, couple Counselling is low in all districts with only 27% of couple Counselling taking place if it is female partner initiated while it is at 56% when it is male initiated. This shows that decisions on couple Counselling are largely dominated and influenced by male partners in a relationship.

In terms of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), the study reveals that 20% of the PLHIV suffered physical violence, 50% were subjected to psychological abuse and 41% suffered from sexual abuse. Men are more susceptible to verbal abuse than women and 22% of them suffered from verbal abuse against 16% of the women in intimate partnerships.

Other dominant forms of psychological IPV include reporting home late, observed in 11% of the respondents and is perpetrated largely by men; divorce and separation which is mainly perpetrated against women and hiding one's HIV positive status from a partner which was observed in 9% of the respondents. Sexual abuse was reported in 41% of the respondents and the most common sexual IPV type was forcing a partner to have sex without a condom especially among people living with HIV.

In this edition we are highlighting various forms of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) women and men infected with or affected by HIV are being subjected to and how Stepping Stones, a methodology that is being used to address various forms of domestic violence is working wonders.

It is our hope that after reading this issue, you will be able to draw some lessons and you will never perpetrate IPV from now on.

Happy reading

Annie Banda
**NATIONAL
COORDINATOR**





After Steppig Stones Training, Martin and his wife Beatrice have always used condoms and arguments arising from the use of condoms no longer happen

Love that stands test of time

Until 2006, Martin and Beatrice Kaphamtengo from Dedza did not have the slightest idea that it was possible for one member of a married couple to be HIV positive while the other did not live with the virus.

But in fact, from year 2000, the couple lived in bewilderment as to why Beatrice was persistently coughing and sweating in the night.

In April of that year, she was diagnosed with Tuberculosis. The couple never even thought about

getting Beatrice test for HIV as not long before that, Martin had on several occasions had his blood tested for the virus and each time, he tested negative.

However, today Martin 43 and Beatrice 39 live with that reality as loving husband and wife.

Between 2001 and 2006, Beatrice was hospitalized several times. She persistently had pneumonia and other respiratory health problems. In January 2006, she developed sores (Candidiasis) all over her mouth and the alimentary

canal. She had diarrhoea that could not stop.

But one day she chanced into a magazine published by the National AIDS Commission in which was a story about discordant couple that had been married for a long time. That marked the turning point as she and

Martin begun thinking along the lines of themselves being discordant.

In fact, when they went for testing in March of 2006, Beatrice was HIV positive and Martin negative.

For Beatrice, the way out of the situation was initially

that they disband the nine-year-old union. However, Martin objected to the idea insisting he would still live with the love of his life to death.

"I went through psychological and emotional problems as a result of our situation while Beatrice was socially and emotionally withdrawn," Martin recalls.

And for Beatrice, the period was torturous as the couple had challenges using condoms because sometimes there were times when Martin felt he had already contracted HIV hence no need for the protection.

Because of this, sometimes they could stay sexually inactive for some time.

It was until Beatrice joined People Living With HIV support group and Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) that she was assisted to deal with her problems, after discussing her troubles with colleagues with similar problems.

But Martin demonstrated extraordinary support for his wife.

Beatrice narrates that Martin always says he is not going to end their marriage "because he promised to be with her in good times and in bad times and this was one of such times".

Beatrice further narrates that she thanks God for giving her a husband who is very understanding and she strongly believes that if Martin was another man, they would not have been together up to now.

The situation of Martin and Beatrice was a potential trigger of gender based violence if it were a set of different people involved, like in the case of one Loveness Matola of Milala Village in Traditional Authority Kambwiri in Salima district, who was subjected to violence by her intimate partner the moment she disclosed her status to her husband.

A member of COWLHA, Loveness was forced out of her matrimonial home in 2002 after disclosing to her husband that she had been found HIV positive after taking an HIV test at Salima AIDS Support Organisation.

Loveness had been in this marriage for a good 12 years bearing five children in the process. Only two of her children live today. The other three died of illnesses related to HIV and AIDS.

Ironically, Loveness' husband, who vehemently had refused to go for HIV testing died in 2003 after suffering from multiple illnesses related to HIV and AIDS.

Explaining her ordeal, Loveness said she was forced

into this marriage at the age of 16 to a man identified by her parents, a man almost twice her age.

She had her first child in 1991, before giving birth again in 1993. The same year her husband married a second wife, without Loveness' consent.

By the time Loveness was giving birth to the third born child, her husband had married a third wife.

By 1995, she had given birth five times. But it was the persistent sickness of the fifth born child that she thought of going for HIV testing.

But today, all is history, thanks to COWLHA, as now Loveness is bubbling in good health and she is an advocate for HIV and AIDS and women rights in Salima.

"I work with chiefs, including the T/A to fight for women who have at one point in time experienced domestic violence. If some issues get beyond our jurisdiction, we refer matters to appropriate authorities

like courts and police to intervene," she said.

Currently Martin, Beatrice and Loveness are among 288 Trainer of Trainers (TOT) COWLHA has just trained countrywide on how to use a methodology called Stepping Stones in order to deal with intimate partner violence women living with HIV are being subjected to in various communities countrywide.

Stepping Stones is a training method that allows communities to gather and share problems they face in their daily life.

Martin confessed that before the Stepping Stones training, he used to argue with his wife over the use of condoms within their marriage because he did not see the need while Beatrice always insisted on condom use. This was always a bone of contention in that they often disagreed on condom use but the Stepping Stones training has helped Martin to realize the importance of using condoms and he acknowledges that he never realised that he was violating



But Martin demonstrated extraordinary support for his wife.



the rights of his wife by insisting on not using condoms against her wish.

"Since the training was concluded, we have always used condoms and arguments arising from the use of condoms no longer happen," he said.

The trainings COWLHA is conducting follow a baseline study on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) amongst people living with HIV conducted in Ntchisi, Salima, Thyolo, Nsanje, Rumphi and Karonga districts.

The study conducted early this year, confirmed the occurrence of HIV related IPV in all the six study districts.

Psychological and sexual violence, the study revealed, are more common than physical violence. While there is a lot of comfort in reporting physical violence, there is a lot of lacuna in reporting psychological and sexual violence because psychological violence doesn't get much attention in our evidence based resolution mechanisms.

The study also recorded low levels of male involvement and willingness to undergo HIV testing and counseling with their female intimate partners, another major factor that trigger violence amongst intimate partners with HIV.

"Men remain the major perpetrators of all types of violence and abuse while women remain by far the major victims. Women remain key perpetrators when it comes to verbal abuse, applying sexual sanctions and withholding food from a partner," reads the report in part

This shows the levels of control women have over food and to some extent, some control over sexual activity in a relationship for short periods of times.

However, assertions of this control further triggers marital rape or being forced to have unprotected sex.

There is also evidence that someone's HIV positive status seems to increase their likelihood of committing or suffering from IPV, reads the



Loveness (in blue, far right) was forced out of her matrimonial home in 2002 after disclosing to her husband that she had been found HIV positive

study report adding "This is due to an increase in trigger factors such as improper communication of results and counselling tips to non tested partner, discovery that partner is HIV positive or is on ARV, intimacy behavioural changes such as usage of condoms and its ensuing resistance, denial of undesirable HIV status, squabbles on child bearing and its frequency, cultural pressures and pressure from other family members.

"That is why there seems to be an increase in violence when someone has just undergone an HIV test or has disclosed his or her HIV status to the community. Therefore, it can be said that there is a strong link between HIV status and IPV, said National Coordinator for COWLHA Annie Banda.

For this reason, said Banda, COWLHA with financial assistance from UN Trust Fund, hopes the TOTs when they go back to their respective

communities they would be able to facilitate dialogue on IPV eradication.

COWLHA's earlier approaches for addressing women's rights violations either sidelined men or simply taken them as perpetrators and as a result, the impact of such approaches did not produce the best of results

"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," said Banda.

Among others, the Stepping Stones training seeks to increase knowledge levels of harmful practices and women's rights, enhance the capacity of COWLHA in the Gender and HIV and AIDS programming and enhance partnerships and networking on the elimination

of violence against women.

COWLHA, which seeks to ensure members lead productive lives by promoting sustainable livelihood programmes and strengthening their capacity to effectively lobby and advocate for issues affecting their lives, was formed in 2006 to address the gender specific implications of HIV and AIDS on women.

The coalition, which among other things strives to create a society where women and girls living with HIV lead a healthy life, are empowered, self reliant and their rights fully respected, protected and fulfilled, currently has a membership of 15,000.

Martin has demonstrated that he is a true champion of women's rights by sticking to his wife and not taking advantage of their situation to perpetrate violence against Beatrice his wife. He is a true gentleman that many men need to emulate!!!

Training stops various forms of intimate partner violence

For 29 years Mac Bean Banda and his wife Oness Nyirenda from Mtisunge Support group in T/A Timbiri's area in Nkhatabay have been subjecting each other to intimate partner violence unknowingly.

Banda who was one of the men that accompanied their wives to a Stepping Stones training in Mzuzu confessed that coming home late has been the order of the day since he married his wife.

"But I have been doing all these out of ignorance that I was infringing upon my wife's rights. For example I used to go out late at night to chat with friends at entertainment joints, leaving my wife home. When returning home in the early hours of the following, I used to wake her up. She had to wait for me until I eat my food. I didn't know that that was part of domestic violence.

"Even at my house, sometimes I used to hide my monetary earning from my wife, sometimes even not giving my wife money for domestic use. But now after the training in Stepping Stones, I have realized that what I have been doing to my wife is not right. I am going to change.

On the other hand, Mac Bean's wife, Oness Nyirenda, said the Stepping Stones training has enabled her realize that sometimes she has been ill-treating her husband.

Nyirenda who has been a COWLHA member from inception in 2006, has been ill-treating Mac Bain by denying him sex whenever she feels like doing so without a concrete reason.

"But I have been enlightened through this training and I have realized that I have been ill-treating my man. Now we are opening a new chapter in our marriage life and when we go back home, we will make



Banda and his wife: We have been enlightened

sure we lead an exemplary life," she said.

Titi Zghambo from Vongo Support Group, Ngoka Village in the area of T/A Mtwalo, in Mzimba has been hiding his earnings from his wife without realizing that by doing so, he was subjecting his wife to intimate partner violence.

After the training, he said now he was a changed person.

"I have even been shunning being seen in public with my wife. But from now on, we will be walking to church together, or even

going to the market because I want to lead an exemplary life. My actions should match what I am going to be teaching my community when I go back home," said Zghambo.

His wife on the other hand, just like Oness Nyirenda said the training has made her realize that by denying her husband sex, she was subjecting him to intimate partner violence.

"It is good that both of us were called for the training. We will be able to remind each other of what we have learnt," said Anne Chipofya,

Titi's wife.

The couple has been married for 13 years.

Matipa Longwe, from Malemba Support Group in Nkhatabay is a fisherman. But since he married Rose Manda four years ago, Matipa has never been open to his wife in terms of how much he earns from his business for proper household planning.

Matipa has not even been taking care of his home, as far as provision of food and other basic necessities are concerned.

In his life, he has never even bought his wife clothes.

"My wife doesn't know how much I make from my business. But now after learning that such act is tantamount to intimate partner violence, I am a changed man. I will have to be declaring my earnings for proper use at household level," he said

His wife Rose Manda said Matipa has been acting irresponsibly as a family man.

"He has been living a task of sourcing food and groceries while he spends his money on his private affairs," she bemoaned.

"But since he has promised to change, I am glad," she said.



Matipa and Rose see happy times ahead



Titi and Anne: It is good that both of us were called

The magic of HIV, medical advice

For seventeen years now, Lilian Dindi Kumwenda has lived with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

But you would never tell or recognize that by merely looking at her. She looks like any other member of the community and has not experienced many health problems because she has had access to good advice. Kumwenda remains the beauty she was born and only she insists she is living with HIV.

"Some people actually speculate that I have not been honest on my HIV status. They think I am HIV negative and only making a claim in order to access HIV and AIDS resources!" said Kumwenda.

Kumwenda, a resident of Kaning'ina in Mzuzu, is a board member for COWLHA and a shining example of people living positively with the virus.

But what has been her secret to positive living?

Kumwenda emphasized that from the time she tested

HIV positive to date, she has managed to stay healthy because she has been following advice from health personnel, on what she is supposed to eat and also her adherence to taking ARVs.

"If you follow properly what doctors and counselors advise you, you can live longer. I have lived 17 years with HIV," says Kumwenda with a smile.

"Since my husband died in 1995, I have never slept with any man. When I feel sick, I rush to the hospital for medical attention," she said.

A mother of five, and an established business woman, Kumwenda made sure her HIV status and the death of her husband in 1995, did not negatively affect the upbringing of her children as she has managed to

see all of them but one go through university education.

"I have managed to educate my children, some of them are university graduates now. The last born is still in a university," she said.

What actually prompted Kumwenda to go for HIV test?

In 1995 her husband fell critically ill. This prompted the couple to go for HIV tests at a hospital in Blantyre. But Kumwenda's husband CD4 count was too low so much so that it was too late to respond to medication and unfortunately he died the same year.

After the HIV test, she broke the news to her children, who received it with mixed reactions. But later, they all accepted the reality that came to live amongst them.

"I have told my children that whenever you hear me speak on the radio or television and other places {my experience with HIV}, do not be worried because it is me not you, just accept it," she said.

Being an advocate for HIV and AIDS issues, Kumwenda encourages people to go for HIV test in order to know their status and get medical assistance in order to pro long their lives.

"We are lucky here in Malawi that when we have tested HIV positive and our CD4 count is down, we can start taking ARVs. And we are lucky in our country that these ARVs are free of charge, we don't need to pay anything because government is providing for us.

On COWLHA

"I am happy with the way the secretariat is running the office. We have professionals running the day to day activities of COWLHA," she said.

It is her wish to see to it that as many people as possible join COWLHA so that the injustices



Addressing participants to the Stepping Stone training in Rumphi: K Madere and COWLHA Capacity Building Officer Steven Iphani

No more wife battering

women living with HIV are facing are completely rooted out.

"I want to see many women joining. We also work with men. We can't fight violence against women by excluding men. Men are also very important to COWLHA issues," she said.

Currently, as a business lady, she has just opened a six roomed self contained lodge at Kaning'ina township. The proceeds go towards supporting her last born child at a university, and some orphaned children she cares for at her house. She moves around globally giving testimony on HIV and AIDS and encouraging people that they should not live in denial and fear but go and have their blood tested and live positively like her.

Recently Kumwenda was guest of honour at Stepping Stones trainer of trainers workshop in Mzuzu. She also presided over the Rumph training of trainers workshop alongside Rumph District Commissioner.

"We want these Stepping Stones trainers to be role models and good teachers in their communities after completing this training," she said.



Kumwenda flanked by Rumph DC Bester

Adam Chimela of M'coka in area of T/A Ndindi in Salima is another graduate of Stepping Stones Training of Trainers workshop.

A member of Alinafe Support Group, Chimela said he has been equipped with skills and knowledge ready to impart to the community he lives.

Apart from that, Chimela confessed that the training has transformed his life in a way that in the past he used to insult, and beat up his wife whenever there is a disagreement on various issues.

"I also used to chase my wife away from home if she has done anything wrong to me. There was no room for discussion. But now I am a changed man. I will make sure I and my wife live by example," he said.

Mzuza Phiri of Milala Village in T/A Kambwiri's area in Salima is another graduate of Stepping Stones training.

A member of Nkhawazatha Support Group, Phiri said in the past he used to starve his home by denying his family money for relish whenever his wife had asked for it.

"I did not even know that by not buying my wife clothes I was in one way or another subjecting her to partner violence," he said.

Due to the training Phiri said he is now geared to have more time to chat with my wife, help with household chores and satisfy the spouse sexually in bed



I also used to chase my wife away from home



Phiri: Now I am geared to have more time with my wife

Pictorial focus on Stepping Stones Training of Trainer



Participants from Dedza and Ntchisi districts pose for a group photograph at the start of a training workshop that took place in Salima. Among the group are COWLHA Vice Board Chairman Rev MacDonald Sembereka and National Coordinator Annie Banda



The Dedza and Ntchisi group



Participants from Dedza and Ntchisi districts engage in a tag of war as part of the training



Participants from Lilongwe and Salima districts lift one of their colleagues up using fingers during a training workshop in Salima. This was part of the Stepping Stones training



Participants from Rumphi and Karonga districts pose for a group photograph with facilitators and COWLHA officers.

s Workshops



Participants from Lilongwe and Salima in a group photograph with Salima District Commissioner Ali Phiri, COWLHA National Coordinator Annie Banda and facilitators.



Participants from Mzimba and Nkhatabay show their certificates after the training in Mzuzu. Amongst them are facilitators and COWLHA officers



Training for Rumphi and Karonga in session



Participants from Rumphi and Karonga districts take to the stage as part of the training



COWLHA Capacity Building Officer Steven Iphani presents certificates to a couple from Nkhatabay at one of the trainings that took place in Mzuzu



Principal Group Village Headman Chikalamba Gondwe listen attentively to a presentation in a training session

Senior village head in Stepping Stones

A senior traditional leader in Rumphi district has blamed lack of openness on sexual matters between married couples for increased cases of intimate partner violence.

But the leader, Principal Group Village Headman Chikalamba Gondwe, is upbeat that now that he is equipped with skills and knowledge in the Stepping Stones, he would be able to handle such matters with expertise amongst his subject.

"A lot of couples are not open to each other when it comes to bedroom issues. They don't know how to sexually satisfy each other. If one is not sexually satisfied in bed, chances that he/she may seek sexual satisfaction outside his matrimonial home are high," says Gondwe who

has just graduated as a trainer in Stepping Stones.

Chikalamba said as a traditional leader, he has been involved in mediation of domestic violence related issues among his subjects.

"Marriages have broken up because of one's HIV status. I have been involved in addressing matters where a wife has been diagnosed HIV positive and the husband is HIV negative. You find the man chasing the wife out of the house," he observed.

The chief attributed various degrees of domestic violence in homes to lack of knowledge and awareness.

"When one is found HIV positive and the other one is negative, it should not lead us to breaking the marriage. We can leave as discordant couple, that's what we have learnt" he said.

Among other forms of domestic violence, Chikalamba said a lot of people in Rumphi are in tobacco farming business. But what happens after they sell the tobacco at auction floors, they go in town, squander the money with prostitutes and by the time they return to their families, they are empty

handed.

"In most cases, women are victims to such kind of domestic violence," he said.

Chikalamba is hopeful that the training he has gone through, is going to bring significant change amongst his subjects when it comes to various forms of domestic violence.

"If one is not sexually satisfied in bed, chances that he/she may seek sexual satisfaction outside his matrimonial home are high"

Her husband has been forcing her to have sex without a condom despite the fact that both of them are HIV positive.

During counseling, after undergoing HIV testing, the couple was advised to use condoms every time they want to have sex, if they were to live a healthy and long life, despite the ARVs they were prescribed to.

"Whenever we want to have sex my husband has always been refusing to use a condom," complained Esnath Nyambalo from Chintheche in Nkhatabay.

Nyambalo, who together with her husband were some of the participants to the Stepping Stones training of trainers workshop that took place in Mzuzu, was however glad that COWLHA had decided to invite both of them as a couple to the training so that her man could learn that by refusing to use a condom the couple was endangering their lives.

"I am glad that my husband too is here and he has heard it for himself that what he has been doing to me is part of intimate partner violence and I am sure that from here, things are going to change," said Nyambalo.

Nyambalo also confessed that her husband hasn't been taking care of his home like providing basic necessities. He has been spending his money on beer and other personal issues outside his matrimonial home.

"Both of us work, but he hasn't been spending his money at home. I have been using my money to take care of the day to day home affairs," she said.

But Nyambalo too is not a saint on issues of intimate partner violence.

She confesses that she has been denying her husband sex for no particular reason, an act that warrants for intimate partner violence.



Nyambalo receives her certificate of attendance from COWLHA capacity Building Officer Steven Iphani

Men inclusion in Stepping Stones excites woman



Nyambalo: I am glad that my husband too is here

"I didn't know that bed is violence. From today, denying your husband sex in reason to do that, I will be a unless there is a genuine changed person," she said.



Mandere: IPV continues to wreck havoc



Iphani: Project seeks to reduce IPV



Phiri: Happy with project design

District Commissioners bemoan Sexual violence

Despite efforts by various stakeholders in combating issues of domestic violence, more women than men continue to suffer from sexual violence amongst married couples living with HIV.

In Rumphi district, for example, District Commissioner Bester Mandere observes that intimate partner violence amongst couples living with HIV and AIDS continues to wreck havoc because most stakeholders in the fight against HIV and AIDS have their priorities facing the wrong direction.

"Instead of addressing the root cause of sexual violence," said Mandere, "most stakeholders are busy addressing its side effects."

A baseline study conducted by Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) in six districts across the country has revealed among other things that HIV positive women are being forced by their HIV

infected husband to have sex without a condom and are also being forced to have sex when not feeling well.

In addition, some women when found HIV positive are chased out of their matrimonial homes by their husbands.

Speaking in July when he opened a week long Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop, COWLHA organized for 24 couples living with HIV and AIDS drawn from Rumphi and Karonga, Mandere asked stakeholders in the fight against HIV and AIDS to intensify their efforts in order to curb such malpractices that are endangering lives of women living with HIV and AIDS.

Mandere advised the TOTs to become role models and agents of change in the communities they live if the malpractices are to come to an end.

According to Steven Iphani, Capacity Building Officer for COWLHA, his organization is using a methodology called Stepping Stones to address gender based violence among people living with HIV as well as the general population.

He said COWLHA believes there is a strong linkage between gender based violence and HIV.

"HIV can bring gender based violence into a home. We have people who have experienced gender based violence as a result of their status and the training is trying to look into those two linkages in order to address them holistically," said Iphani.

He said the UN Trust Fund funded project seeks to reduce intimate partner based violence against women, increase knowledge levels of harmful practices and women's rights, enhance the capacity of COWLHA in the Gender and HIV and AIDS programming and enhance partnerships and networking in the elimination of violence against women.

"Let's go back to the drawing board and see what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. Time is gone when we can sort out issues through violence. Let's not perpetrate it. Dialogue is the way to go and not violence. Don't violate people's human rights," he advised.

In Salima, when he opened a similar workshop for 24 couples drawn from Lilongwe and Salima,

District Commissioner Ali Phiri expressed gratitude

over the way the training had been designed in terms of timing.

He pointed out that it was very rare to find couples being trained together on issues of intimate partner violence and HIV and AIDS.

"Most of the times men shun such kind of trainings because they are always busy looking for income. So after being briefed about this training programme, I found it ideal and I immediately gave COWLHA permission to go round the district and search for right people to attend this workshop," said Phiri.

Closing the workshop in Salima, Safari Mbewe, COWLHA Board Member and Manet+ Executive Director thanked participants for being dedicated throughout the seven day training.

"We bank our hopes on you so that when you go back to your respective communities you train others"

He advised the participants to become real agents of change as far as the issues of intimate partner violence are concerned.

"The change should start with you in your family. You have to be exemplary to the people you train. You need not to be perpetrators of intimate partner violence yourself," he advised.

Arthur Sinkhala from Lupasyo Support Group in Karonga, T/A Kyungu, attended a Training of Trainers Stepping Workshop that took place in Rumphi.

“I have learnt quite a lot. The training itself is like we are in Church where a Pastor is preaching and people are repenting, abandoning bad ways of Satan and receiving Jesus as their Lord and savior,” said Sinkhala at the end of the training.

In his past life, before being ‘baptized’ through Stepping Stones, Sinkhala confessed to have been leading sinful ways.

“I have been squandering my money on beer and some fantasies of the world at the expense of my wife and children,” he said.

Sinkhala who has been married to Ivy Banda for 11 years and have three kids also admitted to have kept it a secret to his wife for six years about his HIV status.

He explained that he tested HIV positive in 2004, but only made it known to his wife in 2010.

His fear was that his wife would abandon the marriage if she came to know about his HIV status.

“But after this training it is like I have renewed my covenant with God as I am starting a new chapter in my life. I am going to be a responsible, loving and caring husband to my wife and a good father to my children,” he said.

Sinkhala’s wife Ivy said she nearly quit the marriage after her husband neglected his home leaving all responsibilities of taking care of the children to her.

“Since we got married, we were failing to develop ourselves because he spends his money on excessive beer drinking. He has not been caring at home.

“But I am glad Stepping



Sinkhala (left) participates in Stepping Stones training

Man likens Stepping Stones to evangelism

Stones has changed his life and I am sure he will put into practice what he has learnt in Stepping Stones as he is

saying,” said Ivy.

Ivy too said she has learnt a big deal of how to fully

satisfy his husband so that he doesn’t think of having any extra marital affairs



Sinkhala promises to be a responsible, loving and caring husband to his wife and a good father to the children



James (standing) making a contribution during the training while his wife Joice (back row, 2nd from right) and other participants listen

Stepping Stones training has strengthened my marriage

Joice Chikafa is a member Tidziwane Support Group at Msundwe Trading Centre in the area of T/A Kalolo in Lilongwe.

She is a victim of intimate partner violence. Joice, who was one of the participants during the Stepping Stones workshops in Salima admitted to have been chased out of her matrimonial home by her husband after a disagreement.

Out of frustration, and trying to seek love and comfort, Joice landed in the

hands of a stranger who she believes infected her with HIV.

"My husband chased me out of my matrimonial home and in the end I got infected with HIV after falling in love with a stranger and we had sex without protection, before I reunited with my husband" she said.

She thanked COWLHA for enabling her family participate in the workshop on Stepping Stones saying the training has helped the couple to be more open to each other on various issues including sexual matters

which mostly have been a breeding ground of intimate partner violence in their home.

"I was afraid to touch my husband's body but now I have learnt about some sensitive parts on my husband's body that I can touch and he can be sexually aroused and satisfied during love making.

"All along, it has been a taboo for me to mention private parts names of a man or women.. But through Stepping Stones, we have been taught to mention each part of the body by their names if people out there are

to understand what we are trying to teach them," said Joice.

The husband, James Chikafa concurred with his wife that before the training, the couple had problems in being open to each other particularly on sexual matters.

"We have also learnt how to spice up our sexual life with new styles of love making so that we don't seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere," he said.

James said Stepping Stones training has strengthened his marriage.

I have been denying my wife her conjugal rights

Maxwell Banda of Chinkhunda Village in Traditional Authority Kalolo in Lilongwe did not know that by denying his wife's sexual advances, he was subjecting her to intimate partner violence.

It was until when he had attended a workshop in Stepping Stones in Salima that he realized that he was infringing upon his wife's conjugal rights.

"I could stay the whole week without having sex with my wife. But through this training I have learnt that I have to give in, when my wife wants to have sex with me, it should not only happen when I want to have sex," said Maxwell, a member of Mwaiwathu Support Group in his area.

He also confessed that he has not been responsible enough as a 'man' on the welfare of his family.

"I have been running

away from responsibilities at my home. When my wife tells me there is no sugar, soap or relish at home, I used to pay a deaf ear and walk away from home, without considering the plight of my wife and children," Maxwell said.

He said what he has learnt in the Stepping Stones workshop, will help strengthen his love for his wife.

"We are opening a new chapter in our marriage life. It is like the day I had just met with my wife. Our marriage vows have been renewed," said Maxwell.

On her part, his wife Tamaida concurred with Maxwell saying "it is like we have just gotten married.

"In the past I used to get angry whenever my husband gets home midnight, without even trying to find out what had delayed him. But now through Stepping Stones I have learnt how best to approach my husband so



Banda: (2nd right - black t-shirt) during one of the tasks the training demands

that our love continues to grow," she said.

On another note, Tamaida said, she would from now on start wearing beads in the

waist after learning through Stepping Stones training that beads are one of the ingredients of love making.



Banda takes to the floor to contribute during the Stepping Stones training in Salima

Men too suffer intimate partner violence

When he was found HIV positive, Acid Masanga's wife, Nester, denied his husband sex for a good five months.

But Nester confesses that she did not know that by denying her husband sex, she was subjecting him to intimate partner violence until when she attended Stepping Stones Trainer of Trainers (TOT) workshop in Salima.

"I used to sleep with clothes on to prevent my husband from making any sexual advances, for no any genuine reason," said Nester a member of Limbikani Support Group in Ngweni Village in the area of T/A Ndindi in Salima.

She expressed gratitude to see to it that those invited to attend the training of trainers workshop were couples.

"It gives us chance to express ourselves freely to each other. Like in my case, I have never been so open with my husband and able to discuss sexual issues openly," she said.

Nester said she has learnt skills of preventing her husband from seeking sexual satisfaction elsewhere.

"We have among other things learnt how to satisfy each other in bed so that we do not seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere," she said.

On the other hand, Acid confessed to have been cheating on his wife by having multiple sexual partners

"In the past I used to have multiple sexual partners. But I have stopped now after learning through Stepping Stones the dangers that such acts can rein havoc to my family. I have learnt that the sexual satisfaction that I seek elsewhere can also be found in my wife provided we openly discuss how each one wants to be treated during sexual intercourse to reach orgasm," he emphasized.

The training, said Acid, has really changed his way of living saying "My life has completely changed for the better and I am going to love my wife more and more,"

In the picture: Masanga takes to the floor during the Stepping Stones training in Salima. To his immediate right is his wife Nester





Chikulupati receives his certificate from COWLHA National Coordinator Annie Banda after completing the Stepping Stones Training

Man learns how to care for his wife

Samuel Chikulupati is 46 years old and he comes from Laisi village, TA Malenga in Ntchisi district. Samuel was one of the men trained as Stepping Stones trainers of trainers who accompanied his wife to the said training and he had the following to say after completing the training:

"The Stepping Stones training has changed three key things in me. First, the training has helped me to appreciate and take care of my wife (Samuel bought hair chemicals immediately after one of the training sessions and asked some of the female participants to give her a good hairdo and confessed that he had never done such a thing before). Secondly, I learnt that it is important to discuss any issues concerning our family with my wife other than making unilateral decisions which was a standard practice prior to the training. Finally, I used to force my wife to have sex with me against her wish. Now I appreciate the importance of ensuring that both my wife and I consent to our sexual activities for the sake of mutual satisfaction and a violence-free relationship."

Stepping Stones excites Midwife Technician

"My name is Patricia Mwenyeheri. I am 40 years old, a Nurse/ Midwife Technician working at Mzandu Health Center in Ntchisi district. I was encouraged to hear that the founder of Stepping Stones is a woman living with HIV and is highly educated. In the community where I am working, people get surprised that I am living with HIV as a nurse because they do not expect someone like a nurse, doctor or medical assistant to have HIV. Sometimes people say discouraging things but I do not get embarrassed and I am a COWLHA member living positively with HIV. The Stepping Stones training has changed me completely especially the sessions on 'Self Assertiveness' and 'I Statements' because they have made me more strong".



The Stepping Stones training has changed me completely: Mwenyeheri

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