

A community working together to  
address harmful cultural practices


COWLHA

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JULY - DECEMBER 2013

NEWS UPDATE

Coalition of Women Living With HIV and AIDS



UNITED NATIONS  
TRUST FUND TO  
END VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN

Promoting Peace  
in the Home: Openness  
key to GBV reduction



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Foreword	3
COWLHA community paralegals rescue Karonga Woman	4
Any link between Stepping Stones and CHURCH TEACHINGS?	6
Blantyre couples living with HIV embrace condom use	7
Stepping Stones joins Balaka families	8
Arresting Archaic Traditional Practices	10
Through the lens (Pictorial focus)	12
Uprooting domestic violence from the core via Stepping Stones	14
COWLHA enlightens Nsanje to open up	15
Openness strengthens Thyolo marriages	16
Thyolo Woman finds solace in Stepping Stones	17
Dedza families say no to gender based violence	18
No more arson cases in Mayani	19
Chikafas cherishes Stepping Stone	20
Stepping stones reduce domestic violence cases in Thyolo	21
The Power of Film to Bring Us Together!	22
Marriage counsellors hone skills from Stepping Stones	23
Nkhatabay Village Headman leads by example	23



## 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 July and December 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/ impacts of the project this far.

It is a fact that gender-based violence or the threat of such violence hinders women's ability to negotiate risk reduction or to engage in safer sexual practices. It limits women's abilities to seek HIV testing, treatment, care, or support, and can hinder them from disclosing their HIV status.

In this edition, we would like to highlight some of the success stories that have resulted from the activities that were implemented under the project in the period under review that show a reduction of the vulnerability of women living with HIV and

women in general to gender based violence/ intimate partner violence.

We are also looking into how communities have used Stepping Stones to arrest some of the archaic traditions that are fueling the spread of HIV.

In this same edition, we are also looking into issues of community paralegals and how they have been helping fellow women to seek redress for the violation of their rights.

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

**Annie Banda**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# Thin line between love and hate

## ...as community paralegals rescue Karonga Woman

**In Chichewa there is a saying which goes "Chakudza sichiyimba ng'oma" which literally means "What comes does not beat a drum!"**

**I**n the first place, they were a loving couple and a happy family. The woman was cherished and loved by her in-laws who could visit her home and shower her with gifts and whatever resources available.

In difficult times, they could help each other out. But nobody knew what lied beyond the in-laws loving and caring heart.

As soon as death took away Catherine's husband in 2012, the in-laws could not even wait for their relation's burial, before they took possession of every property ranging from the dwelling house to flower pots acquired over their five year marriage.

Catherin Nyasulu from Karonga district is a victim of property grabbing after her husband died in 2012.

"Our marriage was a good one. But I had problems with my in-laws. My late husband and I used to love each other a lot. But when my husband died, my in-laws went to my house and collected all the property without my consent while



Catherine: Our marriage was a good one

I was still at my late husband's village, where we buried him," she narrates.

"I did not react in any way. I was hurt losing both my husband and property," she says.

But thanks to COWLHA's community paralegal programme,

the property returned it under the law enforcement.

Later, said Catherine, her friends advised her to contact COWLHA women in the area for help on how she could go about with the issue and have her property returned.

"We found the women

number and assured me to deliver my ordeal and phone number to their leaders. Then I was indeed called by their leaders to whom I gave the list of the property that was seized from me," she said.

She was later assisted, when COWLHA women took the matter to court on her behalf.

Court ruling went in Catherine's favour as those that grabbed her property were ordered to return it.

"They brought back all that they took from me including a dining set, a refrigerator, home

**"I did not react in any way. I was hurt losing both my husband and property"**

Catherine can now manage to put up a smile after those that grabbed

of COWLHA where I narrated my story. Those women took my phone

theatre, television screen, satellite dish, two plastic chairs, six, trolley, basket, plates, cutlery among other items," she said.

However, Catherine said, she has since made peace with her in-laws and they are now in good terms.

Before they grabbed property and even before the burial, the in-laws, said Catherine said hurtful things at the funeral.

"They were saying I will not remain with anything that I accumulated with my husband," she said

Catherine advises all women whose rights have been violated, to contact COWLHA for assistance.

"I had no clue as to where I had to go for assistance when my property was grabbed. It is these women (COWLHA) who facilitated the matter before the court where it went well for me," she says.

At the moment Catherine sells drinking water at a nearby market as an income generating activity, apart from engaging in subsistence farming.

Queen Gondwe is COWLHA Coordinator for Karonga. She is also one of the 51 women that underwent community paralegal training that COWLHA organized in 2012.

"When Catherine approached us with her issue we were touched," says Gondwe adding, "We do handle some

issues on our own but there are other issues like Catherine's which we cannot handle on our

"Another factor is that this area there are a lot of women compared to men, some of them are

**"I had no clue as to where I had to go for assistance when my property was grabbed. It is these women (COWLHA) who facilitated the matter before the court where it went well for me."**

own."

Gondwe said after hearing Catherine's story, the COWLHA women encouraged her to lodge a complaint with the court.

"With the good relationships we have established around us, the magistrate assisted us with the proceedings at the court. The court ruled in Catherine's favour," she says.

One major issue that fuel domestic violence in Karonga, says Gondwe, is the inability for couples to open up.

from Tanzania, *the taifas*, who come to do business here. So it is easier for men to leave their wives for other women even after having many kids with them," she observes.

As one way of bringing awareness on women rights, COWLHA women in Karonga conduct meetings where they encourage abused women to go to organizations that can support them when their rights are violated.

"We also tell the women here that they

can also go to police Victim Support Unit (VSU) when their rights have been violated where they offer help or else go to social welfare," said Gondwe.

Most women stay idle when they are being victimized because they don't know where they can seek advice or help, Gondwe observed.

Last year COWLHA trained 51 women drawn from various districts across the country as community paralegals so that they could help in redressing gender based violence on the legal point of view within the communities they live.

The training was organized after a research had revealed that a lot of women, in particular those living with HIV, are being subjected to various types of gender based violence.

The findings among others revealed that a lot of married women are

>>>



Gondwe and Catherine share notes



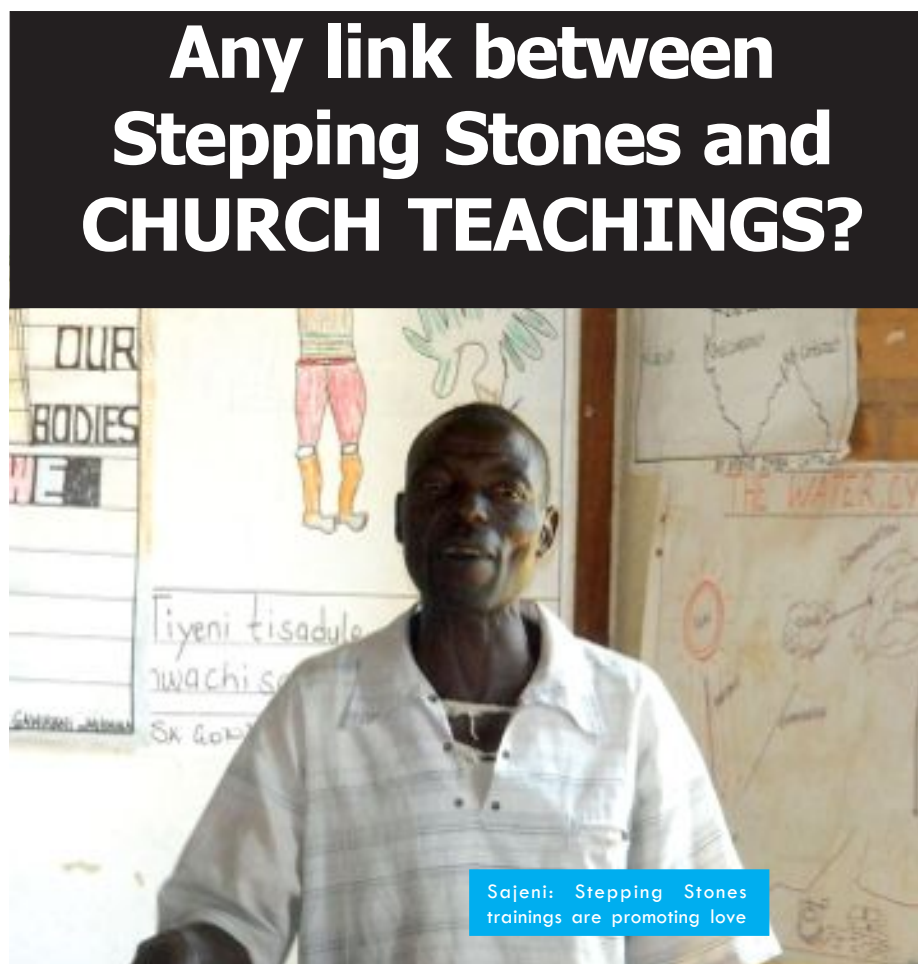
**A church elder at Chibweya CCAP in Traditional Authority (T/A) Chikho in Ntchisi district Joseph Sajeni has applauded the Stepping Stones trainings that they are complimenting the work of the church.**

**I**n a recent interview Sajeni said according to the bible a married couple should live as one and do things together at all times.

The church elder who doubles as marriage counselor says they emphasise to the newly wed to be open to each other and respond positively to each other's desires.

"For instance a married couple is advised to undress before going to bed so that they can access each other bodies without difficulty," says Sajeni.

He added that after



marriage husband and wife are no longer two people but one body united in Christ and there

is no need to keep secrets between them.

"Stepping Stones trainings are helping the

church to promote love in marriages which is commendable," says Sajeni

## <<< COWLHA community paralegals rescue Karonga Woman

finding it hard to negotiate for safer sex like use of condoms in marriage set up when they are HIV positive. Others are being chased out of their matrimonial homes just because they are HIV positive.

After being equipped with knowledge and skills on legal matters, the women are able to stand up and fight against abuse and human rights violations, just like in the

case of Catherine where COWLHA women spearheaded by Gondwe fought the property grabbing case.

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

The training covered

topics like, Gender Based Violence, Malawi Constitution, Wills and Inheritance Act, The Penal Code, Aspects of Land Law, Advocacy and Lobbying.

The community paralegal training is complementary to reducing intimate partner based violence in relation to culture and HIV and AIDS in 12 districts across Malawi.

The programme on

reducing intimate partner based violence follow results of a baseline study on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) amongst people living with HIV conducted in 2012 which confirmed the occurrence of HIV related IPV in all the six study districts.

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



Kennedy and Elizabeth are condomising now

## Blantyre couples living with HIV embrace condom use

**Thirty six year old Chrissy Kudu from T/A Nsomba in Blantyre was deserted by her beloved husband Amin in 2006 immediately after testing HIV positive.**

She recalls that it was a difficult time in her life as someone she considered a confidant walked away when she needed his material and moral support most.

"My husband left me and went to his village when I informed him that I have been found HIV positive," Kudu said.

Amin returned three years later to start all over with Chrissy who accepted him back on condition that he too go for an HIV test which he accepted and consequently was also found HIV positive.

Kudu said the husband showed great resistance to condom use despite several attempts to enlighten him that the viruses will be multiplying every time

they have unprotected sex.

"It was a risky move that my husband was taking and his arrogance could have led to our early grave," said Kudu.

According to Kudu the turning point was when Stepping Stones training was introduced in the area which imparted skills that helped to convince the husband that it was important to use condoms when having sex.

"Disagreements on condom use are a thing of the past as we are a happy couple that consistently use condoms considering our HIV status," said Kudu.

For one Eda Kakhome it was the same scenario of Kudu as her husband said no to condom use in the home against her wish.

"By forcing me to have unprotected sex against my will was an act of domestic violence which led to unhappiness in the home," said Kakhome.

The husband accepts

that his actions were out of ignorance and later changed after undergoing Stepping Stones training.

He said it was difficult to use condoms having been in marriage for many years where unprotected sex was the order of the day.

The Kakhomes, parents of five children observe that life has taken a new twist after embracing condom use as their health has improved tremendously.

"Our body immunity has improved and we are able to go farming which was a problem in the past all courtesy of Stepping Stones training," said Kakhome.

Kennedy and Elizabeth Kudu from Kalitsiro Village T/A Nsomba in the same district said fights ensued whenever they wanted to have sex as the wife preferred using a condom while the husband wanted unprotected sex.

"My husband used to beat me up when I refused to have unprotected sex yet I was

doing it for our common good. Stepping Stones has helped us to come to a consensus and we are all happy now," said Elizabeth.

Nelia Enock says her husband used to spend nights outside the matrimonial home which brought fears in her that the husband could be involved in extra marital affairs.

Nelia was vindicated months later when the husband was tested HIV positive after some regular sicknesses.

Despite this situation, Nellia's husband refused to use condoms insisting that a sweet cannot be eaten while in plastic but COWLHA funded Stepping Stones training helped to bring sanity and now they are able to make love while using condoms.

Hilda Ligomeka from Kapuchi village says training that is offered by COWLHA is effective because it touches critical areas that are at the heart of everyday life.

"Whether to use a condom or not it is no longer an issue as we all realised the importance of using condoms at home," said Ligomeka.

Another Blantyre Stepping Stones training recipient is Georgina Lucius whose husband vehemently refused to use condoms despite recommendation from medical personnel.

"Through the training we have been assisted and we no longer do sex without a condom," said Lucius.

Lucius said he lived in denial after testing HIV positive in 2009 as he lacked knowledge regarding positive living until 2012 when COWLHA provided training on the same.

**Four years in marriage for Agnes Bwetule's from Mpata Village in the area of T/A Kalembo in Balaka have been a mixed bag characterised by laughter and tears due to agreements and disagreements with the husband in the process creating a conducive environment for domestic violence.**

She explains that every time the husband annoyed her the issue was taken into the bedroom where she could ensure that the husband felt the pinch.

"When he returned home after disagreements earlier in the day I could not keep food or I could lock him outside the matrimonial home" said Bwetule.

Bwetule, a mother of one says it was until two years ago that she realised that her conduct is an example of domestic violence and not a best option to deal with challenges at home.

She said the turning



Agness: No more tears

## Stepping Stones joins Balaka families

point was when she joined a support group that later received Stepping Stones training that emphasised the need to discuss issues in marriage.

Amos Stewart from Michesi Village in T/A Kalembo's area is another beneficiary of Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) funded programme that has brought a new lease of life.

"There was lack of openness in the home with my wife as we could not express our feelings and expectations to each other which led to disagreements," said Stewart.

He said by understanding the needs of your spouse you are likely to make her happy thereby reducing conflicts.

Stewart disclosed that

sex is now done anytime of the day in an open manner unlike in the past when it was only done at night afraid of seeing each other's privacy.

"Sex life has become more exciting as we are putting into practice what we learnt in groups facilitated by COWLHA," says Stewart.

Stewart's wife Patricia acknowledged that in the absence of knowledge it is hard to distinguish punishment from gender based violence.

"After undergoing Stepping Stones training have realised that issues can be discussed and come to an amicable end as failure to open up to



Stewart and his wife Patricia are now open to each other





Iphani (left) sharing notes with traditional leaders in Balaka

each other can lead to unfaithfulness," she advised.

Christina Moyenda said information shared during Stepping Stones meetings has helped to revive valuable moments in marriages.

"We now act like a newly wed couple. We have a lot of fun as a family. We are thankful to COWLHA for initiating the programme that is helping to promote love," said Moyenda.

Elizabeth Njeula, Balaka District COWLHA coordinator observes that a lot of people that have been reached have received the messages with open arms.

"Despite few people shunning the messages in public as they are considered a taboo, a lot of people appreciate that the information is of great importance in their homes," said Njeula.

The coordinator said Stepping Stones activities need to be extended in all the nine Traditional Authorities (TAs) in the district as it is only in the areas of Nsamala and Kalembo.

She said cases of early marriages were very common before the introduction of Stepping Stones training as most villagers did not know that it is wrong to marry young children with an aim of gaining materially.

"Most girls got married from Malawians that were just returning from South Africa yet the parents did not know the kind of life these people were leading abroad," said Njeula.

She added that the norm exposed the young girls to sexually transmitted infections including HIV at the same

**"Despite few people shunning the messages in public as they are considered a taboo, a lot of people appreciate that the information is of great importance in their homes,"**

time increased drop-out rate in schools.

Njeula said husbands are now able to spend their proceeds from farming and small scale businesses at home while



Valaliano: Sex is a mind game

in the past they could spend it with concubines.

Despite facing transport problems to reach out to some distant places the district coordinator said life styles have changed for the better among those that have been reached.

For Emmanuel Valaliano he has learnt that sex starts in the mind and there is need to make plans before meeting a wife.

"Visualising what you want to do in advance helps to prepare psychologically and enjoy the act when you meet," he said.



Moyenda: We now act like a newly wed couple

Stones programme to appreciate impact made.

"Our organisation believes in imparting knowledge that will benefit the recipients and we interact with Stepping Stones group members to get feedback," said Iphani.

According to Iphani, COWLHA's objective is to encourage openness in marriage so that couples can discuss issues and in the process reduce gender based violence.

"There is need to have a discussion and an agreement before having sex as at times a spouse can be refusing sex with a valid reason," said Iphani.

He said it is through the discussion that do's and don'ts can be agreed thereby promoting peace in the home and the world at large.

To ensure that a lot of people are reached out, COWLHA has deliberately included men in its activities as it will help to root out gender based violence which is the ultimate goal of the project.

COWLHA Program Manager Officer Stephen Iphani said there is need to make a follow up on those that have attained training through Stepping

**Fisi (hyena) is one of the traditional practices that is commonly practiced in most parts of the country. The practice is conducted to help couples that have difficulties in giving birth to children of their own.**

**I**n most cases, particularly in rural areas, when people wed and a year or two pass without any sign of pregnancy, they are subjected to all sorts of insults. They are ridiculed. Most insults are directed towards the man as he is subjected to names like *Gojo*, *Sakwata*, *Wogwa mu Mpapaya* (he fell from a pawpaw tree) among others. All these names mean 'a man who cannot impregnate a woman.'

To run away from such ridicule, the couple arranges for another man, an outsider, in most cases, a friend to the husband, to be coming in the house and have sex with the woman until she falls pregnant. But this is always made secret. It is the couple and the outsider, who in this case is called *fisi*, that know of the arrangement.

Apart from such arrangement by couples, in some cases, newly-weds are always put under the watchful eye of elders and marriage counsellors.

As time passes, without any sign of pregnancy, the couple is called before the elders and marriage counsellors to find out if there is any

# Reducing Harmful Trad

## ...as Dedza man quits fisi



Manda (right) no longer practices fisi

biological problem within the family that is making it impossible for the couple to bear children.

If it is established that the man is impotent, the elders arrange for a *fisi*, to be coming in the matrimonial house and have sex with the woman until she falls pregnant. This arrangement is also secretive. Only the *fisi* himself, the couple and the elders know of such arrangements.

One Khembo Manda from Katsotso Village, Group Village Headman Kabulika One in T/A Kachindamoto in Dedza is one of the people, fellow villagers have been hiring to act as a *fisi*.

Manda has been to several households, hired to impregnate women whose husbands had difficulties to make children of their own.

Out of the several houses he has played the *fisi* act, Manda recalls having successfully managed to help one family have a boy child.

"I was one of the people entrusted to help couples to have children by having sex with their wives. I started this practice when I was 20 years old and that was before I got married. At that time it was fun and some people were applauding me for it," said Manda, now in his

early 40s.

But how was he being approached to indulge in the *fisi* act? Manda explains: "What happened was that the man would discuss with his wife of their difficulties in having a child and they would come up with a name of a close friend who would accept their proposal and keep a secret. That's how I was being approached to sleep with their wives."

When indulging in the *fisi* act, Manda could think of sexually transmitted infections but on the other hand "think of how good lovemaking feels and in due course ignored the existence of



# ditional Practices

such infections.”

He continued the fisi practice even after he got married

“My wife had no knowledge of what I was doing. She was however cautioned by people of my involvement in this practice and she was even given advice on how to catch me in the act if she was doubting. But when she asked me, I used to deny” said Manda.

But today, Manda, who has four children, said he has since quit the practice after participating in Coalition of Women Living With HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) Stepping Stones Training.

Manda had learnt through Stepping Stones that by indulging in fisi traditional practice, he was putting himself and his wife at a high risk of contracting HIV.

“While I was practicing fisi, I felt good as I was enjoying myself moving from one house to another. But after the learning sessions with COWLHA on Stepping Stones, I decided to stop,” he said adding, “I saw that I could end up contracting HIV if I continued doing the practice.”

After quitting fisi, Manda confessed to his wife about the type of life he was leading, of helping others who had problems in having children.

Manda’s wife Dina said it was true that her

husband was practicing fisi and that now he has quit because of Stepping Stones training that COWLHA brought in the area of T/A Kachindamoto.

“I have been hearing such stories about his involvement in the fisi practice. But when I confronted him, he would refuse any allegation. I knew that he was being dishonest as I was leading a miserable life, sleeping on an empty stomach. He would sleep elsewhere leaving me alone with kids,” she said.

“I had no evidence however of his cheating but I could tell from his actions that he had multiple sexual partners,” she said..

But when he started attending Stepping Stones lessons, Manda stopped his bad behaviour, she said.

“I concluded that this is a very good organization (COWLHA)

as it has unified our marriage. He is now able to provide me with anything and I am also able to give him whatever he wants from me. I trust his movements nowadays,” she said.

Among other things, through Stepping Stones lessons, Manda and his wife have been to Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) twice to have their blood tested for HIV.

“We have gone twice for the HIV test and fortunately we are both HIV negative,” he said adding, “My marriage has been a peaceful one since that time.”

Manda is now a pastor at his Church: “I was given a position at church after they saw how I have transformed over the years.”

Fisi is one of the harmful traditional practices which stakeholders in the fight against HIV have identified and condemned as being one of the catalysts for HIV spread.

COWLHA with

financial support from UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF) is 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, Rumphi, Blantyre, Balaka, Thyolo and Nsanje.

Project Coordinator Steven Iphani says 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 the use of the Stepping Stones approach that allows men and women to dialogue and communicate on issues of relevance to intimate partner violence,” he said.



Manda chats with his wife on the veranda of their home



## THROUGH THE LENS



Alick Mtima and his wife from Malingunde, T/A Masumbankhunda in Lilongwe have become more loving than before after going through Stepping Stones training



Women that had undergone Stepping Stones training in T/A Kalolo in Lilongwe sing a song



Young Couple: Memory Kachepea and her husband Inex from GVH Mgoni in the area of T/A Tengani in Nsanje have seen their love grow after Stepping Stones training



COWLHA Board Member Hilary Chilomba speaks to Stepping Stones groups in Nsanje district



Principal Group Village Headman Chikalamba of Rumphu speaks to his subjects on Stepping Stones



Hard to reach places!! COWLHA's Program Manager Stephen Iphani (2nd left) jumps into a boat on Lake Malawi on his way to Mlowe, from Hwe in Rumphu to conduct Stepping Stones Monitoring





Mavuto Nkhwaza from T/A Nsamala in Balaka testifies how he has benefitted from Stepping Stones training



Amos Stewart and his wife Patricia from Michesi Village in T/A Kalembo in Balaka say Stepping Stones has strengthened their love.



Stepping Stones beneficiaries in Nsanje displaying a play that depicts domestic violence



# Uprooting domestic violence from the core with Stepping Stones

**Benjamin Gondwe, 39 from Chikalamba Village in Rumphi district did not take the word sorry from his wife every time she made a mistake. His responses were a combination of unpalatable words and some punches.**

**“**The situation has completely changed after undergoing Stepping Stones training and we now do income generating activities together,” said Gondwe.

The Gondwe’s have been married for 13 years yet there was little joy. When food delayed to be put on the table or when Benjamin returned home late and drunk it was chaos.

Alice Kamanga said Stepping Stones training has helped to bring sanity in her home since the couple has established effective communication channels.

“The training has helped me to gather courage to inform my relatives that I am HIV positive which was difficult to do in the past,” said Kamanga.

Bettie Luhanga from Kwenje village in T/A Katumbi said cases of rape have reduced although they reached a critical stage in the recent past.

“It was free for all, young girls were getting



Gondwe (standing) and Jere (sitting)

married to elderly men while boys were getting married to elderly women that eventually led to domestic violence,” said Luhanga.

Geoffrey Jere, said the 45 years he has been in marriage did not know the importance of asking a wife what she wants.

“I used to have sex as a routine in marriage but now I have attached some value to it because I know what my wife wants which has brought a new lease of life,” said Jere.



Luhanga (right) says Young women were getting married to elderly men



**Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS has asked couples in Nsanje to open up to each other to reduce cases of extra marital affairs.**

**C**OWLA Program Manager Stephen Iphani said recently during discussions with Stepping Stones training members that openness is key in marriage.

"We believe that openness between couples is important as it promotes love at the same time reduces domestic violence. It is evident that a lot of domestic violence is centered around sex," said Iphani.

One of the beneficiaries of Stepping Stones training Batson Rapozo said a lot of couples are suffering in silence while outside they pretend that all is well to avoid ridicule from the public.

"The challenge is that our society has been closed for a long time and it is not easy to discuss domestic violence related issues since they are taken as a habit," said Rapozo.

He gave an example that men are expected to be on the fore front dictating affairs in the bedroom instead of making it a two way initiative.

According to Rapozo most couples do not open up to each other and express their expectations a situation that lead to unhappy sex life.



Rapozo (left): A lot of couples suffer in silence

## COWLHA enlightens Nsanje to open up

"Anyone who is feeling like having sex can initiate the act regardless of gender as is the case now in most homes," said Rapozo.

Sara Mumba another beneficiary of Stepping Stones in Nsanje said failure to satisfy each other at home lead to

bitter consequences like engaging in extra marital affairs by one of them.

"There is nothing one will be looking for outside matrimonial home if there is satisfaction in the bedroom," she said.

E s n a r t M b a n d a m b a n d a , COWLHA's Regional

Coordinator South, said differences in the home need to be solved as soon as possible to avoid creating loop holes.

She encouraged other women to choose the right time to discuss their differences with their husbands so that they understand.



Mbandambanda schools Nsanje women on how best to handle family disagreements



Jackson and his wife Meria

# Openness strengthens Thyolo couples marriages

**Jackson Khauliya from T/A Bvumbwe in Thyolo has said openness between him and his wife has helped strengthen the couple's 24 year old marriage.**

**L**ack of openness was the main problem in our family. Particularly in bedroom issues. When I tried to touch my wife, she used to resist particularly during daylight," he said.

As a result Jackson

resorted to finding sexual pleasure outside his matrimonial home.

"I used to go and have sex with other women who were opening up with me," he said.

Jackson also said that because his wife was

denying him his conjugal rights more often, he used to retaliate by leaving home little or no money at all, while he spent the rest of his moneys with sex workers.

His wife Meria Jackson said it was true she used

to refuse her husband access to her private parts "because he was stingy with his money"

But now, after Stepping Stones, Meria said the shyness is gone and the couple has learnt to be open to each other as well as engage in contact and dialogue on issues of sex and sexuality.

"We are very much open to each other. because of that, my husband no longer go around with other women because we are able to satisfy each other

**"Lack of openness was the main problem in our family. Particularly in bedroom issues"**



in our home," she said.

Meria also said Jackson provides all basic necessities for the household unlike in the past.

Another couple that has benefitted from Stepping Stones in T/A Bvumbwe is that of Weston Nazombe and his wife Suzan.

"My wife and I had a problem in bed. She could not open up every time we wanted to have sex and as a result I used to go to a beer hall, spend my money on beer and sex workers," he said.

Now that the couple has learnt to be open to each other, Weston has quit sex workers and excessive beer drinking and is using his savings



The Nazombes have learnt to be open to each other

to uplift his life and that of his family economically.

"Now I have bought iron sheets and I want to build a bigger and better

house. I have also bought two goats," he said.

His wife Suzan Nazombe said indeed, the couple was not open to each other in the past.

"When I try to touch him, he used to push me away saying he was just human and does not use electric power to have sex everytime," she said.

She said now, things have changed as the couple have learnt to be open to each other on issues of sex.

"Now we are able to send our six children to school unlike in the past when school fees was a problem as my husband used to spend his earnings on sex workers and beer," she said.

## Thyolo Woman finds solace in Stepping Stones



Mai Chazunda in red top attending Stepping Stones training

**Mai Chazunda from Gunde Village in T/A Bvumbwe said her husband used to refuse to use a condom despite medical personnel advised the couple to be using condoms after noting complications related to sexually transmitted infections.**

"He used to beat me up every time I refused to do it without a condom," she said.

But through her friends Mai Chazunda had learnt that there was a group of COWLHA women that were teaching Stepping Stones, a lesson to do with ending domestic violence.

"I joined the group and my husband followed me later where he learnt and appreciated condom use," she said.

Now, Mai Chazunda, who has been married for 23 years and has one child, is enjoying her marriage life.

# Dedza families say no to gender based violence

**Enock and Agness Taimu from Nkokoko Support Group in Mayani, T/A Tambala's area in Dedza have been married for a considerable period of time.**

Despite being together as husband and wife, Enock had been subjecting his wife to gender based violence.

Enock confessed that throughout his upbringing, he had been trained that all household chores are supposed to be handled by a woman. Even at the family farm, he used to leave the farming activities in the hands of his wife while he went about gallivanting, womanising and edrinking beer excessively.

But now, Enock says he has changed his ways after attending Stepping Stones training.

"I blame it all on ignorance. I didn't know that by burdening my wife with household chores and farming activities I was subjecting her to gender based violence," he said.

His wife Agness said it was indeed true that Enock had changed as the couple now do share household chores.

"He even cooks for the



Enock and his wife Agness are now enjoying the fruits of marriage



Happy couple: Jackson and his wife Agness

family, washes dishes and clothes among others, things he could never do in the past," said Agness.

Now that also Enock attends to farming activities, the couple is able to produce bumper yield.

"We are cultivating Irish potatoes and tomatoes and the harvests are meaningful. We eat some and sale the surplus. In short I can say, our household does not lack anything unlike in the past when I was doing most of the work alone," said Agness.

Also benefitting from Stepping Stones training is the family of Jackson Simion and his wife Agness.

Jackson Simion used to beat up his wife for no apparent reason. He also used to subject his wife to gender based violence by not helping in any household chores.

"But we learnt from Stepping Stones lessons that what I was doing was domestic violence and I have since stopped," he said.

On the other hand, Agness said now peace has returned in the house and love has strengthened.

"Now we share household chores, he helps wash clothes, cook food and we go to the farm together," she said.

"We even take a bath together, something that never happened before," she said.



**Village Headman Kanyama from Mayani, Dedza has said cases of arson, which were common in his area, have stopped since the introduction of Stepping Stones by COWLHA.**

**W**A lot of men here used to practice multiple concurrent partnerships. So when the wife hears of this, the remedy was that she would just go to the house of the other woman and set it ablaze,” said the traditional leader.

He attributed the change to the coming of Stepping Stones saying the men in his village have learnt that by having multiple sex partners, one increases chances of contracting HIV.

VH Kanyama attributed the problem of men seeking extra marital affairs to lack of openness between couples on sexual satisfaction.

“Now my subjects have learnt how to satisfy each other in bed so that no one between them seeks satisfaction outside matrimonial home,” he said adding, “In short cases of domestic violence in general have minimised.

Ireen Kavala, COWLHA coordinator for Dedza concurred with V.H Kanyama that indeed cases of domestic violence have reduced in traditional courts due to the coming of Stepping Stones.



Kavala (middle) says Stepping Stones has arrested archaic traditions

## No more arson cases in Mayani

“Couples here used to fight, reasons ranging from one refusing sex for no apparent reason. Some issues to do with extra marital affairs. Main problem was that these people expressed ignorance that whatever they were subjecting each other to, was a form of domestic violence,” she said.

Kavala also said some traditional practices that people of Dedza were practicing, that were deemed as factor that contributed to HIV spread have been put to a halt.

She cited traditional practices like *kudika* where if there is a couple in the village with pregnancy, all surrounding homes were not supposed to indulge in sexual intercourse fearing she will deliver a dead baby.



VH Kanyama: No more arson cases

“If a chicken is laying eggs, the owners of the chicken were not supposed to have sex fearing the chicken would not hatch all the eggs,” she said.

Then there was *bulangete* la anfumu (Chiefs blanket), where if a traditional leader has

travelled to another clan, he was given a teenager to entertain him with sex during the night.

“People including traditional leaders themselves have learnt that such traditional practices need to be stopped because they fuel the spread of HIV,” she said.

# Chikafas cherishes Stepping Stones

**James Chikafa from T/A Kalolo, GVVH Chinkhundankhanira is 53 years old. He has been married for 30 years. Chikafa and his wife Joyce are one of the families that were trained as trainers (TOT) for Stepping Stones.**

**H**e said before being introduced to Stepping Stones, his family used to face a lot of domestic violence, him being the perpetrator.

He said lack of openness with his wife that led to refusing each other sex in bed, was a contributing factor to his contracting of HIV.

Chikafa said every time his wife had refused him sex, he would go and spend more time at the nearest trading centre, Nsundwe where he would flirt with sex workers.

"In so doing I contracted HIV and brought it to my house," he said.

Had it been that Stepping Stones was introduced to him some way back, Chikafa believes he would not have been HIV positive by now.

"When I came here at Nsundwe trading centre, I did not have HIV. I contracted HIV right here as you know at this trading centre, there are a lot of activities that take place and sex workers flock to this place for business," he said.



James and his wife Joyce

His wife Joyce Chikafa concurred with her husband that she played a part in bringing HIV into the house by refusing sex for no valid reason. By so doing she didn't know that she was driving her husband out of the house.

"As a result my husband used to seek sexual satisfaction at the

trading centre where he would have sex with sex workers," she said.

Joyce said that now she is enjoying her marriage and reaching out to others at the same time so that they do not face similar problems which she had gone through in her past life.

But now since the couple started

disseminating what they had learnt as a TOTs of Stepping Stones, the area has changed for the better in terms of the magnitude of domestic violence.

"It was difficult to make a break through as some believed in church doctrines and traditional practices," said Chikafa.

He said some people refused to go for HIV testing saying their church doctrines did not allow them to do so.

There were also some traditional practices like one called *kudika* where when a couple has given birth to a child, a man was supposed to wait for over six months before he could again have sex

**But now according to Chikafa, things have changed for the better and a lot of people are going for HIV testing.**



with his wife.

"So, men as a result used to go out and engage in sexual intercourse with sex workers," he said.

But now according to Chikafa, things have changed for the better and a lot of people are going for HIV testing.

People in the area, said Chikafa, have also realised that some of the traditional practices fuel HIV spread and they have since been modified or stopped.

"Even the Police have told us that cases of domestic violence which used to dominate the Police station here have

since been reduced," he said.

Group Village Headman Chinkhundankhanira thanked COWLHA for bringing Stepping Stones into his area which he said has helped in lessening issues of domestic violence at household level.

"Most cases of violence at my court were to do with couples refusing each other sex," he said.

But now, the GVH said such cases no longer frequent his court as people have learnt to desist from various forms of violence.



## Stepping stones reduce domestic violence cases in Thyolo



**Village Headman Kantsonyo, from Group Chinkwende area in T/A Bvumbwe, Thyolo says cases of domestic violence in his area no longer come before his court.**

He attributes the trend to introduction of Stepping Stones which has enlightened couples about domestic violence and how they can live a happy family through being open to one another.

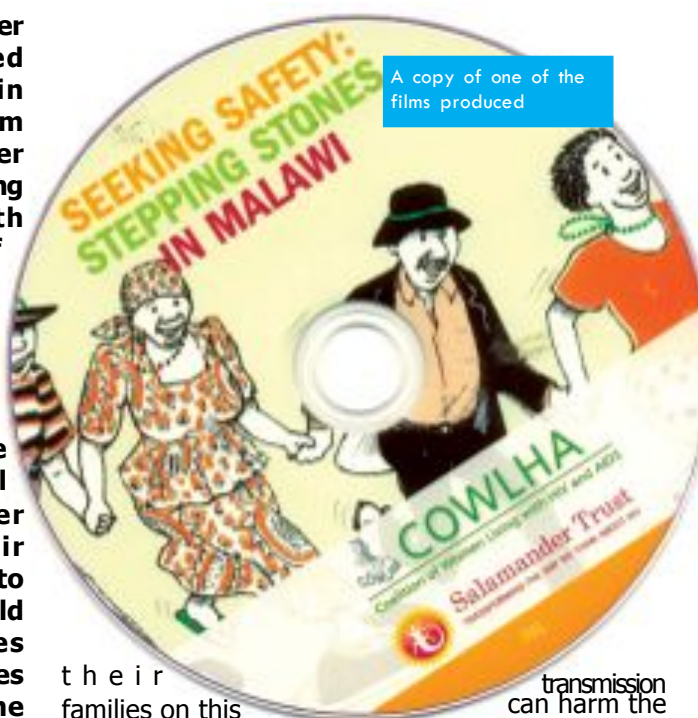
"At my court, I used to handle a lot of cases, of couples fighting. A lot of cases were to do with couples refusing each other sex, without reasoning. And as a result one of them would go out and seek sexual satisfaction outside marriage set up," he says.

GVH Kantsonyo says even traditional practices like *kulowa kufa* (*wife inheritance*) are a thing of the past because through Stepping Stones, people have learnt that such traditional practices are catalyst for HIV spread.

# The Power of Film to Bring Us Together!

**Last year, Salamander Trust collaborated with COWLHA in Malawi to create a film project. Salamander Trust held film-training workshops with members of COWLHA and with their male partners, who had been through Stepping Stones training programme. We trained them as well as some younger members of their community in how to make films that could share experiences from their own lives with others. By the end of the training participants had learnt how to set up a scene, direct actors, film with video cameras and edit the footage using editing software on computers!**

**S**alamander Trust also coordinates the International Community of Practice of Stepping Stones users worldwide. Salamander wanted to work with COWLHA to support its members to showcase their wonderful work using Stepping Stones and related approaches in their communities. Independent film trainer and maker, Dr Dominique Chadwick, travelled with Nell Osborne, the Stepping Stones Community of Practice Coordinator, to work with COWLHA members and



their families on this project.

The brilliant films that were made each told a different story to show the many ways that HIV can impact upon our lives, especially in relation to gender based violence. One film portrayed how negotiations around money in a household can sometimes lead to violence. Another

transmission can harm the

livelihoods of those

living with HIV. A short documentary film that we also made with the community showed how women can face gender based violence from their partners if they go to hospital to collect their medication. The film also described how COWLHA's work, using Stepping Stones and related programmes, has

**The brilliant films that were made each told a different story to show the many ways that HIV can impact upon our lives, especially in relation to gender based violence.**

showed how incorrect information about HIV

enabled all those concerned to resolve

their differences and support one another collaboratively.

So why did we use film to tell these stories?

We all know that starting a conversation about HIV is hard. Sometimes, it is so hard that we can't even talk to our partners and our best friends about it. We also know it is really

important that we talk openly about HIV to end stigma, support one another, improve communication in our relationships and advocate for the rights of women living with HIV. In addition to this, if women feel safe and secure in their homes, partners can also support their children to grow up safely, securely and happily – something, which the community members also highlighted.

Film can bring us together and make it easier to discuss our needs and challenges in relation to HIV. Even those of us who cannot read and write can understand films and are influenced by the messages that they carry. Have you heard of the phrase 'show, don't tell'? This is how the messages in films work too. Film allows people to "stand in the shoes of someone else" and to experience the world from their point of view.

The films made in Malawi each had their own messages. These

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# Marriage counsellors hone skills from Stepping Stones

**A marriage counsellor Village Headwoman Nkomba said Stepping Stones training has helped her to become a better counsellor as she is equipped with the right information than before to dispatch to marriage people.**

**W**Young couples need to go in marriage fully aware of what they should expect as most marriages fall apart due to poor communication among couples," he said.

Through COWLHA's funded Stepping Stones many people have known that openness is key in marriage and it begins with marriage counsellors



"This is a milestone in issues concerning sex as they are considered an abomination in most communities and societies," said Nkomba

Secrecy in sex has created problems in marriages as most couple that are left unsatisfied fail to inform their partners, she observed.

Another beneficially Mavuto Nkhwazi said lessons learnt from Stepping Stones have indeed helped to strengthen households as peace is reigning in the bedroom.

"It is wrong to deny each other sex as at the end the one that is unhappy will end up engaging in an extra marital affairs which is risky," said Nkhwazi.

she said vows that exchanged during marriage officiation should be adhered to at all times regardless of one's HIV status later in life.

In the past Nkhwazi used to take all proceeds from farming to a drinking spree depriving members of his family necessities although they could assist him to farm.

"We make budget as a family now something that was not happening in the past, all this has come with COWLHA's Stepping Stones programme," he said.

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## The Power of Film to Bring Us Together!

included messages such as the importance of getting tested for HIV, the need for partners to share household money fairly and the importance of working together as a community to overcome stigma. What's more powerful is that these messages came straight from people who had been through these things first-hand.

The world is getting smaller and smaller as we are able to share more information about

ourselves with people living thousands of miles away – the films made by COWLHA members from the community of Malingunde about their wonderful community work together have now been seen by people all over the world including Europe, Australia, Asia and North America. They are rightly feeling inspired by COWLHA's programme.

Even Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of

UNAIDS received a copy of the films made in Malingunde! He commented that the "material is very important and especially because it is locally generated."

Film can enable us to share local knowledge and experiences on a global level. And as members of COWLHA know, we are stronger when we can work together to overcome our challenges.

# 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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