

STEPPING STONES EVALUATION- District of MANDIMBA

An evaluation was carried out by ESTAMOS in June 2002, with the participants of the Stepping Stones (SS) program in the villages of Muita, Nselema, and Mandimba-sede. The evaluation was participatory, speaking with the participants in focus groups to discuss the positive and negative impacts of the program, impact of the program on the wider community, information learned and what the participants felt about the SS activities and the facilitation. The evaluation was carried out with 24 youth, male and female, 20 adult women and 10 adult men. Below are the details of the comments participants made about the program.

Group of youth: male and female: Villages of Muita and Mandimba-Sede)

POSITIVE IMPACT/POSITIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGES IN THE LIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS:

- Using condoms when in the past they did not. Since using condoms they no longer experience symptoms of sexually transmitted infections (STI's).
- Having fewer girlfriends which had the positive impact of having money to spend on other things.
- One youth opted to practice abstinence to dedicate more time to school work.
- Refusing older men and analyzing their behavior when they promise money and clothes in exchange for sex.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON THE LIVES OF PARTICIPANTS:

- Some participants had difficulties at school when they tried to tell others what they were learning in the Stepping Stones program. Friends didn't want to hear and participants were then excluded from activities with these friends.
- Some of the participant's sexual partners refused to use condoms because they said that the condom carried the virus.
- Participants also said that they wouldn't be able to have children if they always had sex with a condom.

POSITIVE IMPACT/CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY:

- Participants spoke with their parents about what they had been learning in the program and their parents were satisfied with the course and felt it was reducing the "sexual corruption" of the youths and lowering the prevalence of STI's.

- People with symptoms of STI's are coming forward to the community activists to get help to receive treatment at the District hospital.

DIFFICULTIES IN PARTICIPATING IN THE STEPPING STONES PROGRAM

- The Stepping Stones program is long.
- Without anything to write with it was difficult to memorize all the terms and information.
- The meetings took place at a difficult time of day, so the participation was not always high.

STEPPING STONES ACTIVITIES

- The rhythm of the activities went well and all of the games and activities were explained well as well as the significance of each activity.
- Participants liked the activities because it has helped them prevent getting AIDS, but have forgotten a lot of things because they couldn't write them down.

INFORMATION LEARNED

- You cannot get AIDS only from sexual relations but through unsterilized razor blades and syringes, through blood transfusion with infected blood, an infected mother can infect her child during birth. They also learned that the use of alcohol can promote uncontrolled sexual acts that can increase the number of infection of both STI's and HIV .
- The participants learned that HIV/AIDS can be prevented not only through the use of condoms but also through abstinence and mutual trust with the appropriate person.
- The participants said that they also learned that they cannot contract AIDS by sharing a meal with a person with AIDS and that they must respect and live with a person with AIDS as they would live with any other person.
- The participants stated that to avoid AIDS they needed to learn how to "say no" assertively. As an example they said the women at the bars have the objective of getting money and the only path is to know how to say no".

Group of Adult Women (Villages of Muita and Nselema)

POSITIVE IMPACT/POSITIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN PARTICIPANTS LIVES

- Using condoms to avoid STI's and pregnancy
- One woman spoke of how she felt forced to have sex but after SS she learned how to say she doesn't want to have sex if she is not in the mood.
- One participant stated that she used to laugh at people with HIV/AIDS but now she no longer laughs
- Some women learned to be faithful to their husbands where as before participating in the course they were not faithful to their husbands.

- Respect people with HIV/AIDS and understand that they cannot infect you through casual contact
- Participants succeeded in spreading the information they learned during the Stepping Stones program to other villagers

NEGATIVE IMPACTS/NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGES IN PARTICIPANTS LIVES

- Some of the participants stated that their husbands did not accept using condoms and this created conflicts in the house
- Many people in the village still haven't changed their sexual behavior and state that condoms carry the HIV virus in them.
- Condoms prevent pregnancy and when a woman doesn't have children, the marriage ends

DIFFICULTIES IN PARTICIPATING IN THE STEPPING STONES PROGRAM

- They did not experience any difficulties

STEPPING STONES ACTIVITIES

- The participants liked all of the Stepping Stones activities because they said that they learned many things. One woman stated that she would like to such do some plays and give some talks about all the information she has learned to other people in other villages who do not have any information about HIV/AIDS.

INFORMATION LEARNED

- Learned to speak directly,
- How to prevent STI's and AIDS
- How to use a condom
- Not to isolate a person sick with AIDS.
- Not to speak aggressively, but calmly to reach a consensus with her husband
- Using the same razor blades can spread HIV
- To refuse men who want casual sex
- HIV is not spread through sharing the same plate or drinking out of the same cup
- Using a condom prevents STIs and pregnancy

FACILITATION: In the village of Muita, the women stated that they felt the facilitator needs to change her manner of communication, and not surprise them with unplanned meetings or sessions. In addition, she needs to treat them as equals because they are mothers and heads of the household and do not want to be treated like children.

The women in Nselema stated that the facilitators were always well prepared and facilitated the sessions well.

Group of Adult Men (10 participants)

POSITIVE IMPACT/POSITIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGES IN THE LIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS:

- Have greater respect for other people and are friendlier towards them
- Succeeded in reducing the number of girlfriends and for this reason, is saving money that used to be spent on girlfriends.
- When having casual sexual encounters, they are now using condoms and they are no longer suffering from STI's
- They have learned that a condom can also be a family planning method. Previously the men were afraid to have sex with their wives because they were afraid she will fall pregnant again, while still having a young child breastfeeding. Men would then have sex with girlfriend instead. Now that they now use condoms, they no longer have sex with girlfriends outside the home. This has created better environment in the home.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON THE LIVES OF PARTICIPANTS:

- The men stated that there were no negative impacts from the program for them

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACT/CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY:

Positive

- Messages about the dangers of HIV/AIDS are being explained in the mosque (almost the whole community is Muslim)
- Many community members are asking for condoms
- Using condoms for family planning as well

Negative

- Other community members do not want to hear information about HIV/AIDS
- Other community members do not want to use condoms because they say that it kills children by having the sperm going into the condom, but the participants are trying to explain to others that this is not true.

DIFFICULTIES IN PARTICIPATING IN THE STEPPING STONES PROGRAM

- The program took place during the rainy season when people have a great deal of work in their fields.
- The program was also during the hungry season and because of hunger, they would have liked to have received a small subsidy for participating in the program.

INFORMATION LEARNED

- Have respect for a person infected with HIV

- Use a condom correctly
- AIDS can also be transmitted through razor blades, and through a blood transfusion with contaminated blood
- A drunk person can easily pick up or transmit AIDS easily because he is not practicing sex safely
- Traditions such as marrying a dead spouse's brother can spread AIDS
- A healthy looking person can be carrying the HIV virus
- Mosquitoes do not transmit HIV
- Saving money

STEPPING STONES ACTIVITIES

- They liked all of the activities because they were different. Some of the activities were difficult to understand but they always did a review of the previous session

FACILITATION

- The facilitation was good and the facilitators did each session well. When one facilitator had difficulties, the other facilitator was always there to assist
- The facilitators were always punctual and diligent

Comments:

The evaluation shows that the Stepping Stones program has shown that participants understood basic information about what HIV is, how HIV is transmitted, how to prevent being infected with HIV. Participants have tried to divulge this information in their communities with varying success. In terms of condom usage, there still seems to be some myths concerning condoms that need to be addressed by the facilitators. For example, if women are concerned that they will not fall pregnant because of using condoms, facilitators need to explain if women want to fall pregnant, they can stop using condoms for a period of time and once they fall pregnant, they can return to using condoms. Facilitators should also explain why it is important to use condoms during pregnancy because if a woman becomes infected with HIV during pregnancy, the risk of infecting her unborn child is greater.

The program also has helped reduce some of the stigma of people with AIDS and participants spoke of how they need to support a person with AIDS, not isolate them or laugh at them. Participants have an understanding that they can not contract HIV through casual contact with someone who has AIDS.

One of the main objectives of SS is to improve communication and relationship skills between couples. In some cases some female participants' spoke of being more assertive, not engaging in sex on demand, and analyzing men's motivations behind men offering them money and clothes. Other women however are experiencing conflicts in their homes when trying to introduce

condoms. None of the participants spoke about improved communication in the home or better relationships with their spouses. Improvement needs to be made in the activities that talk about communication and relationship skills and greater understanding of the gender differences and inequalities that exist in these villages. Facilitators also need to encourage couples to participate in the program at the same time to create discussion in the home about what is happening during the sessions. To improve these aspects the facilitators will receive training in gender issues and a retraining on the SS methodology to enhance the facilitation of certain activities, especially those activities involved in improving communication and relationship skills.

Difficulties with the program such as taking place during the rainy season could not be avoided because of the time of the reception of funds. The funding was for one year and ESTAMOS received the funds in September 2001. The first 4 months of the project were spent training the facilitators, so the first sessions of SS could only be started during the rainy season. The problem with the sessions being too long is one of the drawbacks of SS, but the participants were informed of the length of the sessions and participation was voluntary. In terms of the sessions being at the wrong time of day, the facilitators were to negotiate the best day and time to hold the session with the participants to avoid this type of problem.

Another evaluation will take place in 6 months to see how behavior changes and existing knowledge has been sustained and whether further changes have taken place at the community level.