

Stepping Stones Training and Adaptation Project

Initial Feedback from Stepping Stones Users - November 1997

'It is clear from the results of this survey that Stepping Stones materials have been enthusiastically received and put to good use....Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Real change has been reported, particularly in the kinds of areas in which conventional HIV/AIDS prevention strategies have been notoriously weak....The changes noted by respondents...indicate that SS serves a more profound function in promoting behaviour change: addressing the less tangible and deeper aspects of interpersonal communication.'

These were the conclusions of a recent survey of users of Stepping Stones, a training package on HIV/AIDS, gender issues, communication and relationship skills. In this feedback we first discuss the process of change which seems to be emerging, and then summarise the results of the survey.

Background

The aim of Stepping Stones (SS) is to enable women and men to describe and analyse their experiences, and to develop their own solutions to the sexual health dilemmas which they face. It aims to address the vulnerability of women and young people in decision-making about sexual behaviour. The training package consists of a manual and a video, which describe how to run 18 workshop sessions over several weeks. The approach is participatory, working with four different peer groups based on age and gender. SS was designed primarily for use with non-literate communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Stepping Stones Training and Adaptation Project aims to support the effective use and adaptation of the training package in different cultural contexts. Learning about how the package is being used, and with what effect, is an important and on-going task. As a first step, we sent a questionnaire¹ to all of those who had received SS by the end of November 1996. The results give some exciting insights into how SS is being used, and the way in which SS can help people change. In future we will use qualitative and participatory methodologies to learn more.

The Process of Change

'The SS package is excellent! It opens the minds of people...gives them opportunities to explore their needs, to become more critical in finding solutions...' - Dominic Dinko, ACTIONAID, Ghana

We see the changes which users reported as belonging to four stages of change:

Learning about our sexual health, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections;

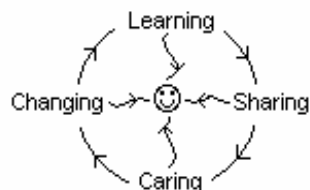
Sharing and discussing problems and ideas by talking with our peers, partners and children;

Caring by accepting responsibility for the way in which our behaviour affects others, including those who are affected by AIDS;

Changing Behaviour in ways which we want, in order to improve our sexual health.

Many conventional education programmes are based on the idea that the first change, learning facts, leads directly to the last one, changing behaviour. Giving people education about AIDS may, therefore, be seen as a one-off event. For example, it is often assumed that teaching someone about condoms will lead to them using condoms.

However, experience shows that there are many reasons why people don't simply start to use condoms, and why they might start using them, but not keep doing so. We think that important changes in sharing and caring are also needed for people to be able to change their behaviour. Furthermore, if those changes are to be sustained - in order to improve sexual health and quality of life - then the process needs to be on-going.



If we think of this as a wheel on a moving bicycle, we can imagine how the process of learning, sharing, caring and changing needs to keep turning as we travel over time.

'Stepping Stones is much desired...it is the book that solves community problems by themselves since it encompasses everything.' - Waibi Leo Mmerewoma, AIDS Education Group for Youth, Uganda

¹ We commissioned Dr Andrea Cornwall, a trainer who has used SS, to conduct the survey. In April 1997, she sent a 691 questionnaires to everyone in the South who had received SS materials by November 1996. At the time of analysis, the rate of return was 16% (108 respondents) which is reasonable for this kind of survey. Her full report is available on request.

Changes Wanted

Discussing and articulating what changes are *wanted* is often an important first step towards actually changing behaviour. At the end of SS workshops, each peer group publicly makes a 'special request' to their community. Respondents to our questionnaire reported requests which cover all four stages of change:

Learning

- older women asked everyone to share information with those who didn't attend
- young men asked that children from 12 years old should be included next time

Sharing

- young women asked men to listen when they say 'no'
- young women and men asked others to be open with their children in talking about sex

Caring

- women asked men to share responsibilities and income with them
- older men asked everyone to accept and care for those who are affected

Changing Behaviour

- young men asked women to accept condoms
- young women asked men to stick to one partner
- young women and men wanted forced marriage to end
- older women asked men to make their wills early

'The approach is very practical and down-to-earth. It deviates from the conventional methods....We are very satisfied with this indispensable tool...' - Nembo Nkwentie, Franklink, Cameroon

Changes Reported

Next, in the questionnaire we asked users about what changes community members had actually noticed, or they themselves had witnessed, following their SS workshops. These also covered all four stages of change:

Learning

- *'Many people have realised that AIDS is really here...'*
- *'There is more awareness of AIDS, and acceptance of the AIDS situation in the area.'*
- *'People are eager to learn more.'*

Sharing

- *'The peer groups became more open to discuss sexuality, a topic which the older regarded as taboo...'*
- *'The people that participated in Stepping Stones continue to talk and discuss it with their community.'*
- *'Straight talk to youth by parents.'*
- *'Girls talking with boys on condom use.'*
- *'Less boasting by boys.'*

Caring

- *'People never wished to hold anybody suffering from AIDS...but these days they take care of them...'*
- *'There is sympathy for AIDS patients.'*

Changing Behaviour

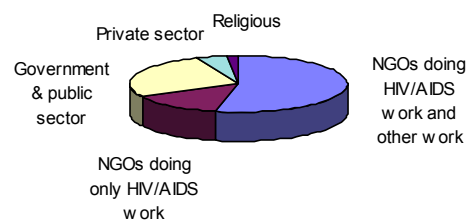
- *'The use of condoms which was strongly rejected especially by the older peers is now accepted as a good alternative to fight the disease/infection.'*
- *'Higher demands for condoms.'*
- *'...less wife beating.'*
- *'...culture beliefs are being discarded such as wife inheritance which was very rampant before.'*
- *'Most people who are dying are leaving wills.'*
- *'...girls no longer worry about the accessibility of money from boys.'*
- *'Less unwanted pregnancies.'*
- *'The peer groups are still working together...'*

We feel that the **breadth** of the reported changes, and particularly of those in the last group, is particularly exciting. They suggest that **more than promoting safer sex alone, Stepping Stones has initiated a process of wider changes concerning intimate relationships and social norms, as well as human rights and gender issues.**

The Respondents

85% of respondents were from Africa, mostly from Anglophone countries, and in particular Uganda where the SS video was filmed. The remainder of the respondents were from Asia. This spread closely reflects the geographical distribution of recipients of SS materials.

Most respondents worked for NGOs which are doing HIV/AIDS work among other activities



Three quarters of respondents were from local organisations; the remainder were equally split between regional and international organisations.

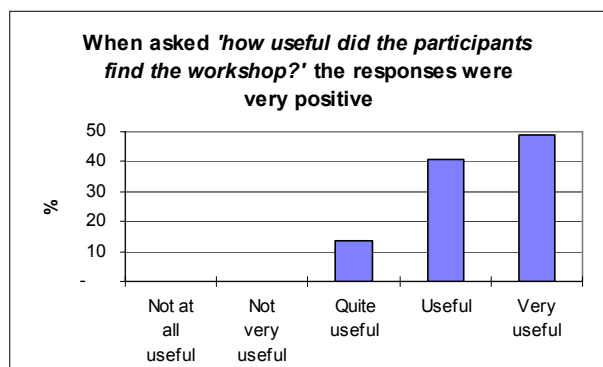
81% of the organisations have been involved in HIV/AIDS-related work for more than 2 years, and over a third for more than 5 years. The most common areas were information, education and communication activities, followed by training, providing support to people with HIV/AIDS and their families, and providing health services.

Use of SS

'Almost all the ice breakers were enjoyed, and using no pens and writing made it easier and more enjoyable for all.'
- Sr Nellie Carvalto, Catholic Church Integrated Development Project, Ethiopia

Nearly all (93%) of those who had used SS were Southern nationals. People from the North were less likely to have used the package in its entirety, but instead adapted and incorporated elements of SS in their existing work.

64% of respondents had used SS materials to run Stepping Stones workshops. This was more so among respondents from Africa, and particularly Uganda where 74% of respondents had run a workshop.



22,400 adults have been through the SS workshop process according to the numbers reported by respondents. Almost half of these people were in Uganda, where twice as many women as men were reported to have participated in SS workshops. Some users have also involved children.

83% of respondents had used the SS materials in some way, and all who had received free copies were putting them to good use. Many have used elements of SS, for example, using role plays and icebreakers in health activities, in training community health workers, or in school AIDS programmes. Feedback about these specific aspects of SS was without exception positive.

'role plays play a major role in making people understand...Action speaks louder than words.' Enock Masamu, Mbatia Anti-AIDS Club, Zambia

Just over half of those who had not run a SS workshop felt that it was likely or very likely that they would do so in the future. This was despite constraints of limited resources, particularly the time, money and trained facilitators required.

Almost 90% of respondents had received the SS materials free of charge as Strategies for Hope gives materials to organisations in the South that cannot afford to buy them.

Running SS Workshops

A number of respondents noted how much the participants enjoyed the workshop despite initial reluctance and scepticism.

'The training touched their lives, it made them to be open to each other and they were able to share their experiences without fear.' - Fr Mathias Maufi, Sumbawanga Diocese, Tanzania

On average one to three workshops had been run. The majority had worked with community members in general, as the SS materials outline, but some had also run SS workshops for more specific groups. This was particularly so for work with young people in Uganda.

Three quarters of respondents reported that the participants in their SS workshops had worked within their peer groups.

'Many were happy that there were peer groups and could openly discuss their beliefs and problems.' Maria Johnson, DAPP, Mozambique

Many organisations do not, however, have sufficient numbers of facilitators to work with four peer groups at once. In Uganda it seems that almost half of the organisations do have the 2 male and 2 female facilitators that are required, but it may be that less than a third have this combination in the other African countries.

Lack of resources was the main constraint noted by respondents in running SS workshops. A quarter of respondents noted that a **lack of time** had led them to having to skip part of the SS process, for example, by missing out certain activities or having to cut some sessions short.

'...many sessions were left out because of the time factor...in the absence of funds it was impossible to cover everything.' Zimba Muunick, Lumezi Mission Hospital, Zambia

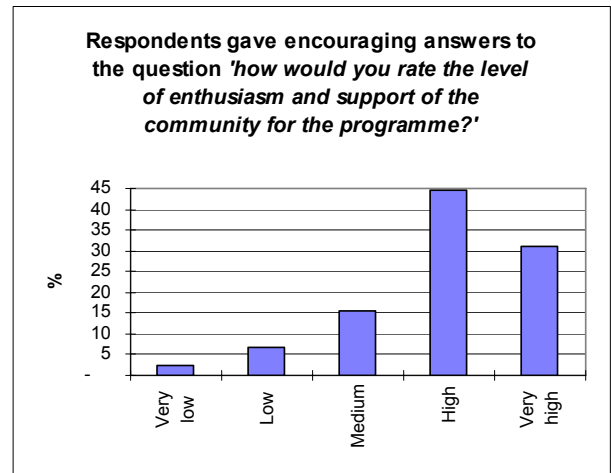
The majority of those who had run a SS workshop used the SS video; those that did not said that this was principally because of difficulties with access to video equipment and power.

The video had been used equally by respondents from East, West and Southern Africa, but cultural differences and the need for other language versions were noted. Some comments suggest that the video has been used inappropriately as a film, rather than as clips in the context of a SS workshop. Others appeared to have misunderstood the use of role play in the video. We now intend to develop guidelines on using the video, and on alternatives to using it.

'People used to shy off to discuss AIDS openly but after encouragement and use of the video, they are more free and participatory.' - Moses Bosire, Gesima, Kenya

activities. Others noted that groups are doing HIV/AIDS activities, including home-based care for people infected with HIV.

'The peers became so enthusiastic and concerned that one group has already formed an association...' Malambo C Nzala, Solwezi General Hospital, Zambia



WHAT NEXT?

The report of this survey includes a number of recommendations, and raises the following challenges for us:

- « **Training:** providing support to locally-run training courses, to increase the number of people who are able to facilitate SS workshops;
- « **Adaptation:** offering guidance and support for adaptation of the SS materials, including: translation; introducing new topics about other aspects of sexual health; using the manual without the video; and shortening the workshops without weakening the approach.
- « **Networking:** putting SS users in touch with each other, so that they can share experiences and give mutual support.
- « **Monitoring & Evaluation:** giving support to users' efforts to monitor and evaluate their work with community members, both during SS workshops and afterwards.

We will incorporate these important tasks as we develop our project and its contribution to the global search for effective responses to sexual health, human rights and gender issues.

After the Workshop

Among respondents from Uganda, about half had held a review session some time after the SS workshop. Slightly more had done other follow-up activities such as meeting with the peer groups, distributing condoms and supporting income-generating activities. In the other African countries, however, only 15% had held a review session, although a further 32% said that they intended to do this. Almost 40% had done other follow-up work with community members where they had held an SS workshop.

Many peer groups, especially the women's groups, continue to meet after the SS workshop. One respondent reported that an older women's group has started income generating

Thank you to all who returned their questionnaires! Please do send us feedback about your use of SS, and any queries that you may have. We will try and support your efforts to use and adapt SS.

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