

# *Operational Guidelines for Implementing Stepping Stones with Women in Sex Work*



Karnataka Health Promotion Trust

**Developed in the Context of Projects Sankalp and Samastha**

## What is Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones is a training package on HIV / AIDS, gender, communication and relationship skills designed both for use in existing HIV / AIDS projects and in general development projects which plan to introduce an ongoing AIDS component. This training package has been very successfully used in sub-Saharan African countries and has been successfully adapted for use in Asia, North and South America and Europe.

## Stepping Stones for Women in Sex Work

Stepping Stones has been adapted for women in sex work in response to a need to address the vulnerability of women in sex work, and girls in the communities where women practice sex work, when it comes to decision-making about sexual behaviour. The ABC of AIDS (Abstain! Be faithful! Use condoms!) may not be appropriate in the context of sex work and lectures on AIDS are too simplistic. The training package is designed to enable people in communities where women practice sex work to explore the huge range of issues which affect their sexual health and lives – including gender roles, money, power, violence, alcohol use, traditional practices, legal issues, attitudes to sex and sex work, attitudes to death, and their own personalities. Addressing behaviour issues, particularly in the area of STI and HIV/AIDS, calls for great sensitivity. Stepping Stones is a participatory tool aiming at behavioural change for prevention and control of STI / HIV/ AIDS.

Basic Principles	Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The best prevention strategies are those developed by community members themselves</li> <li>• Peer groups need their own time and space to identify and explore their own needs</li> <li>• Behavior change will be more effective and sustained when members of the community are involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All work is based on people's own experiences</li> <li>• Emphasis is on we and us, not they and them.</li> <li>• No formal education needed,</li> <li>• Discouragement of note taking</li> <li>• Sitting together in a circle</li> <li>• Working with groups, usually based on gender and age</li> <li>• Role-play, drawing, song and dance mean that everyone can take part,</li> </ul>

## The Workshop Sessions

The manual for women in sex work is adapted from the Indian Adaptation of Stepping Stones. The original Stepping Stones training package is authored by Alice Welbourn, researcher and trainer in participatory approaches to development, based in UK. The manual adapted for women in sex work contains closely guided instructions on how to run workshop sessions divided into 16 sessions over 12 – 16 weeks.

Spreading the sessions over several weeks like this enables community members who want to join the workshop, to put what they have learnt into practice between sessions, turning rehearsal into reality. All the sessions are based on exercises using creative skills such as drawing, acting, games, song and dance, none of which need any formal educational background for participants to take part. The drawing work is based on the PRA ideas of general development workers.

Stepping Stones offers a unique opportunity of peer group discussions and sharing on the issues that concern women in sex work. It also provides opportunity for the participants to practice the skills learnt during sessions.

Adapted to the community of women in sex work in India, the Stepping Stones manual is available with KHPT in English and Kannada. It can be translated in to other local Indian languages.

### Themes

There are four themes in Stepping Stones

- **Group Cooperation Skills** - The first theme, covering the first few sessions, establishes the identity of each group which has been formed and enables them to develop group cooperation skills. It helps participants to explore the risks that we take in our lives, helps people think about self esteem and how we judge ourselves and others, starts to look at the gender roles in our lives and addresses the good feelings and concerns that we have about our sexual health.
- **STI, HIV and Safer Sex** - The second theme covers STI and HIV transmission, protection, testing and treatment. Workshop participants are given information about different possible options presently available for them to practice safer sex. Each and every workshop participant has the individual opportunity to touch and feel a condom and learn how to use one effectively. STI symptoms and treatment services are discussed, as is positive living. However, no workshop member is told that they must do one thing or another. Instead they have the opportunity to ask questions of their workshop facilitator (who is of similar gender and age to themselves), to share their thoughts and experiences, and to work out for themselves, what is best for them.
- **Why we Behave in the Ways we Do** – This is where there is the big departure from more conventional health education approaches and where workshop participants really begin to start exploring for themselves, the complexities of our lives. One session looks, for instance, at the role of money in our lives – who takes responsibility for earning it and who controls its expenditure. Another looks at alcohol- its pleasures, its dangers and how we might learn to control it rather than it control us (unsafe sex often takes place under the influence of alcohol or drugs). Other sessions look at violence, power dynamics, the legal environment and their impact on lives of women in sex work. Another session looks at traditional practices. All societies have time-honoured practices, some of which may be good; others may have problems now attached to them. The sessions explore the fairness of existing systems.
- **Ways in Which we can Change** – Explores assertive skills and “I” statements, looks at river of life, coping with death and planning for the future. It also explores the importance of community support in overcoming problems, confronting oppression and fighting discrimination. This is a special theme as it helps the participants to plan for behaviour change and practice skills needed to change behaviour.

Of course, people cannot be expected to change their approach to life on the basis of twelve weeks' work. This workshop can only be seen as the starting point for changes within a community. So workshop participants are encouraged to make action plans and continue meeting to follow up on these plans after the last session is completed. We consider that these continued meetings enable participants to sustain the changes that they have decided to make in their lives and to also act as a community support group.

### **Fission and Fusion Structure of the Workshops**

Groups are encouraged to meet alone and then to come together for large group exchanges. This principle of "fission and fusion" allows two important things. It creates the private time and space for discussion of personal issues, which many individuals might find far too embarrassing or painful for wider group discussion. It also creates the public space where the less powerful groups in a community have an equal platform with the more powerful groups and everyone present can then discuss the issues raised.

The intimate details of the small group discussions can get ironed out in this public presentation. It enables the young women, for instance, to present the dilemmas, which they face because of certain traditions; or for older women to present the neglect they face because they can no longer earn money through sex work. This sharing between groups enables everyone in the community to develop more awareness of their needs, and difficulties of others around them, while increasing their own self-esteem and self-respect through having their own needs appreciated more clearly. Such meetings produce many comments such as "I never realised that..." and "now I understand why..." As the community members begin to understand themselves and one another more, simultaneously at the individual level, with peer support and also with wider community understanding, so the foundation stones for change are laid.

### **How we Implement Stepping Stones in Sex Work Communities**

Stepping Stones is designed for use with people in small groups, not for open meetings. This is because it has been shown repeatedly that people share and learn best from talking first with those who are most similar to themselves. If I am a young woman, I am most likely to talk openly with other young women. They are my "peer group". Similarly if I am an old woman, my "peer group" will be other old women.

Therefore when we are implementing Stepping Stones in sex work communities, it is recommended that we form small peer groups and facilitate the sessions in these peer groups. In this way, the discussions will have maximum value for the participants.

There will be times during the sessions when workshop meetings of larger, mixed groups are recommended (refer to fission and fusion structure of the workshop). For the most part, the sessions are designed for peer groups only.



### • Selection of participants

So how should these peer groups be selected in the community of women in sex work?

Each community will be different and the relative importance of different divisions in that community will depend upon the issue to be discussed. However, we feel the most important divisions influencing open discussions about sex and sexuality are gender, age and marital status. Each community should really decide for themselves how they would like to split up for the sessions. Particular lines of division which you may find are relevant to women in a sex work community include:

- age (older/younger adult)
- marital status (married/unmarried/widowed/divorced/separated)
- parental status (parent/non-parent)
- rural or urban background
- typology of sex work (street based/ brothel based/home based/devadasi etc., )
- and so on.

Note: With women in sex work, typology may play an important role in forming peer groups. Home based sex workers for instance, may not want to form a group with street based women and devadasis may like to form one peer group. You may also need to re-think on the lines of gender while selecting a facilitator. Although the facilitators should ideally be from the same gender and age group as the participants, field testing shows that female sex workers are sometimes just as comfortable with male facilitators as with female facilitators. This is particularly true in projects with women in sex work where male outreach staff have built good rapport with the community and have been supporting their capacity building needs. Once trained on Stepping Stones, male outreach workers may also become facilitators, along with the female outreach workers and peer workers

In the Sankalp and Samastha projects, the plan is to conduct Stepping Stones with women in sex work who are above the age of 18 years. As part of the community mobilization and institution building processes adopted by the projects, peer groups of 10 – 15 women in sex work have been formed in different sex work sites. Stepping Stones will be implemented in those site level groups as a strategy to engage the groups in a process of reflection and sustained behaviour change. It is also presumed that such a process would help build the collective feeling of affinity and identity of the group, which would further help the institution building process. The projects prioritise this training in those site groups which have evidence of higher risk or vulnerability (those with members having repeated STI symptoms, higher number of clients, young or new sex workers). If willing, male participant peer groups like spouses and partners of sex workers or even clients could be part of the process as a separate peer group.

Since the site groups have only 10 – 15 women, it may be difficult to further divide them into peer groups and facilitate separate sessions. However during the training, in some of the sessions, the group may be asked to form separate peer groups along the lines of age or marital status or anything else relevant, to provide space to all to share their ideas.

Aim for a maximum number of twenty and minimum of ten in each peer group at any one time. This is large enough to work with quite a few at a time; and small enough to encourage everyone's individual involvement in the peer groups.

• **Why are peer groups so important?**

Why is dividing up participants into peer groups so important for this work? Good communication is about good listening and about respecting the views of others. If we want to do this effectively, we need to give everyone the privacy, time, space and confidence to voice their own views and beliefs in a secure atmosphere.

If you were to run the workshop as an open meeting, the views of young women would rarely be voiced. And if they dared to overcome their shyness and speak up, their views may be contradicted or laughed at by the older women present. Then they would have lost the confidence to voice their thoughts in public another time. Think of your own experiences of public meetings. Which people talk most? Which people say nothing? Which people never come to the meetings in the first place? Which people make the decisions for the whole community? Are the decisions made really representative of everyone's views and needs?

Finally, saying anything in public can be hard enough for a young woman. But talking about her sexuality in a mixed group would usually be impossible. Trust and confidentiality are issues, which are extremely important when talking about such private matters. They are much more manageable in a peer group of people of similar gender and age or marital status than they are in a large group.

**Implications for you, the facilitator**

This emphasis on peer groups means that it would be best for you the facilitator, to work in a team of two. Then each of you can run two separate peer group sessions in the community: i.e., with the older women's group and with the younger women's group.

During planning in the Sankalp programme, it was decided that if the sex workers are willing, male outreach workers can also help facilitate the sessions with the sex worker peer groups. This is because field testing showed that with existing rapport and trust, sex workers can often be just as comfortable with male outreach workers as with female outreach workers and peer facilitators. It is envisaged that the trained Stepping Stones facilitators will facilitate peer groups of 10 – 20 people each.

## • Ideal context for the workshop

### Community ownership

If community members feel involved in considering and deciding where the workshop should be held, they are more likely to be ready to join in with the project. Therefore we recommend that you discuss locations with your site groups first. Seek their opinions on the best locations. Below are some hints to guide the choice.

### Venues: privacy

It is a good idea to find quite a private place to conduct the workshop, since adults are not likely to want to have children around them during the workshop sessions. Adults often feel inhibited in their discussions if children are around. Drop-in-center's could be used as venues for this workshop. Otherwise you can explore other options in the community like a community hall or a school etc.

### Size of groups

You also need to choose a location where there will be a small enough group of people for everyone to know one another reasonably well and where people feel comfortable. This involves a certain measure of thought about the size of your location. For instance, having a small meeting of ten people in a huge echoing hall is very difficult. Equally, two hundred people squashed into a class-room designed for thirty is hopeless.

### Time of year

The timing of the workshop should bear the seasons in mind. Many development projects or workshops fail because we just think about the NGO's own planning year and not the local community's. If a workshop clashes with local festivals/Jathras, migration periods or children's school holidays, attendance is likely to be very low.

There are also always unexpected happenings, like epidemics, funerals, or transport breakdown, which can interrupt your schedule. So it is always a good idea to allow extra time in your schedule for such possibilities, so that you don't find that you have run out of time.

### Time of day

At what time of day you train can be just as important as where you train. Different people in a community have different things to do at different times of the day or night. Sex workers can be very busy during the evening or nights and may need to sleep until late in the morning. The best idea is to ask different peer groups what would be the best times for them to meet with you. You can then arrange a number of different session times, to fit in with each peer group accordingly.

### Workshop duration

We suggest that you run the workshop over the course of about three or four months, on a once or twice-weekly basis (a suggested timetable plan is attached.). We recommend that you do it over this length of time, rather than as an intensive course, so that people can make use of what they learn in their day-to-day lives between each session. This approach has often been seen to be more effective than a short and intensive course.

Please remember this is only a suggested timetable, based on the minimum time of 12 weeks. So do plan and write up your own timetable with your community, before you begin the workshop! Remember to add extra time for breaks, catch-up time, public holidays and so on. Remember also that you need at least six months for follow-up work after the workshop.

## A SUGGESTED TIMETABLE ...

THEME	SESSION	Wk No.
Introduction	First Open Community Meeting	1
Group	A: Let's Communicate	1
Cooperation	B: Our Perceptions	2
	C: What is Love?	2
First Full Workshop Meeting		3
	D: Body Mapping and Sex	3,4
Second Full Workshop Meeting		4
HIV and Safer Sex	E: STI, HIV and Condoms	5,6
Why We Behave in the Ways We do	F: Let's Look Deeper	7
Third Full Workshop Meeting		9
	G: Taking Responsibility	8
Ways in Which	H: Lets Support Ourselves	10
We can Change	I: Let's Assert Ourselves	10
	J: Lets Work Together	11
	K: Lets Prepare for the Future	11
Final Open Community Meeting		12
	L: Evaluation and Follow-up	12

Even after 12th week, we recommend that you keep meeting the peer groups' at least once in two months to understand their progress and challenges if any. The manual has extra sessions (endnotes), which will help you to facilitate extra sessions with these groups after the 12th week.

### Duration of each session

We suggest that you take between three or four hours for weekly sessions, depending on the availability of participants and the level of their interest in the discussions.

We have deliberately not put individual time recommendations on each exercise. This is because you may find that participants are keen to explore an issue at length. If they do, then it is a pity to break up such a discussion just because this manual says your time's up!



We also suggest that, if any of the peer groups feel they need more time, they should be allowed the flexibility to spend more than one meeting on each session. However, it is important that you allow all the peer groups to catch up with one another before each of the full workshop meetings, which take place during the course of the workshop, and the final open community meeting. Please discourage the peer groups from thinking of the completion of the sessions as a race! (If you do need to split up a session in this manual into two meetings, do that.)

### **Special Note for the facilitators of Stepping Stones**

(Outreach Workers and Peer Facilitators in Projects)

Some training manuals are like recipe books, which you can dip into, to pick and choose different exercises. Other manuals are like paths across a river, where you should begin at the beginning, and not attempt to jump in mid-way or you risk falling in.

Stepping Stones manual is of this second kind. It provides you with the details of a training workshop, which you could run together with your colleagues in the community where you want to work. The manual describes the sequence of ideas, which you can encourage community members to consider and discuss. It suggests appropriate exercises and session timetables for you.

It is important to follow the sequence of exercises in the sessions as described and not to jump in and out of exercises in different sessions. Otherwise, the experiences of the earlier exercises will not help participants to cope well with the harder, later exercises. Participants might feel that they have taken on too much and can't cope if they are not prepared enough by working through the earlier sessions first.

The whole workshop aims to enable individuals, their peers and their communities to change their behaviour, individually and together, through the Stepping Stones which the sessions provide. The manual is based on the assumption that community-wide change is best achieved through a personal commitment to change from each of its members. This demands some effort from each participant involved in the workshop and participants are strongly encouraged to make a commitment to attend all the sessions.

This manual is written for skilled people, who work with local groups in small-scale development settings. You may be professional staff or volunteers. You may be social workers, community leaders, health workers, counsellors, AIDS educators, members of AIDS support groups or other similar people.

On the whole, therefore, we suggest that in each session you spend around:

- 15 minutes on the introduction
- 15 minutes on each of the quick warm-up and wind-down exercises
- 20-40 minutes on the longer exercises
- 20-40 minutes on the role plays and their discussions.

There are a few major exercises, which may need as much as three hours. These are marked as long exercises in the text.

### Note on Training of Facilitators

Training of Facilitators (ToF) in sizable numbers is essential for effective implementation of Stepping Stones in the community. In districts of Karnataka, a majority of NGO outreach staff are male. They have been playing an important role in program implementation with women in sex work. Since community members and outreach workers share a good rapport and mutual trust, it was reasonable to assume that at least initially, both male and female outreach workers could support peer workers in facilitating Stepping Stones.

During the facilitators training workshops in Bagalkot, gender, age and profession among participants played a part in peer group formation. Male outreach workers formed two peer groups based on age. Among women participants, two peer groups were initially formed on marital status. The male outreach workers participated in the sessions as men, the female outreach workers as women and the women in sex work as sex workers. During the sharing sessions, issues related to each group was shared. This helped the male outreach workers to understand the real issues concerning sex workers.

The ToFs helped outreach staff better understand the feelings, problems, needs and future hopes of women in sex work and how these influence sexual behaviour and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. This is particularly important for supporting their efforts at behaviour change through Stepping Stones.

In order to make best use of this manual, we expect you ideally to have the following knowledge, qualities, skills and experience. It's a tough quiz, but maybe it could help you to identify areas where you need training to do your work better. Alternatively, perhaps you could plan to team up with other facilitators who have skills in the areas where you don't. Together you could make a great team! Now have a go at the quiz and see how you score.

### A QUIZ FOR YOU

	YES	NO	
a			Experience in participatory adult learning techniques.
b			A sound knowledge and understanding of gender issues and sex work issues
c			A basic training in sexuality, including knowledge of your own feelings about sexuality and awareness of your own practices.
d			An ability to discuss sexual matters in public, with a frank, unembarrassed but sensitive approach.
e			Sound knowledge of basic facts of HIV transmission and prevalence in your work area.
f			An ability and willingness to be openly self-critical, to be able to say "I don't know" and "I'm sorry" and to acknowledge and learn from your mistakes.
g			An understanding of and full respect for confidentiality

Before starting we strongly recommend the following:

- Go through the Stepping Stones training.
- Read through the whole manual alone, or with two or three colleagues. You will need at least a full day for this.
- Then mock/practice workshops with other friends or colleagues with whom you plan to use the package for training others.

### **Key Points for Stepping Stones Users**

- This tool demands skilled facilitators. Hence the outreach workers/ peer facilitators need to be trained in this tool. The outreach workers need to read the manual and also do few mock sessions before they start implementing this tool. It is also important that the outreach workers/ peer facilitators are supported by supervisors specially in difficult sessions like "Lets look deeper".
- Attendance of the participants can fluctuate. Hence develop strategies and plans to ensure that almost all participants complete all the sessions. One suggestion would be to ask the participants to volunteer every week to mobilize the participants or selecting time of the day or season which is convenient for the participants.
- There would be demand for extra sessions. The supervisors should help the outreach workers/ peer facilitators to facilitate these extra sessions based on the need. The endnotes in the manual have suggestions.
- Follow up after the training is highly recommended. The groups need to have a role in HIV prevention after they complete the training. Based on the special requests, an action plan needs to be developed for the community and the groups. The outreach worker and peer workers should meet these groups at least once in 2 months to understand the changes in practices and behaviours, review the action plan and address the challenges that they have been facing. An additional exercise can be planned during these follow up sessions.
- Selection of participants has to be done carefully to ensure that those who need this training the most are included in the training.
- Again, it must be emphasized that to have an impact on behaviour, relationships and communication it is important to facilitate in the community, all the sessions as stated in the manual.
- Documenting and monitoring the process is very important. Hence the outreach workers should use the formats developed for process monitoring regularly.
- The outreach workers/ facilitators need periodic orientation and skill building to enhance their knowledge and skills. During the cluster meetings, time should be provided for sharing challenges in facilitating these groups.

### ...finally...

This training package is designed to challenge people's (including our own) attitudes and behaviour to themselves and to others. You are likely to find this rather frightening. You may also feel rather nervous about things going wrong, or not going according to plan.

Don't worry; there are many other people out there who will feel like you! We warmly encourage you to share your fears and successes with other facilitators in your area, so that you can learn from one another's experiences, suggest alternative options to one another, and so on. We do believe that your efforts to help people better identify their needs and express them to one another more openly will help all of us in our fight against AIDS. So please take courage in your skills and go ahead.

**GOOD LUCK!**



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