

People with HIV can now live long, healthy and productive lives as long as they have timely access to medication when they need it, combined with care, love, respect and support. *Stepping Stones* and subsequently *Stepping Stones Plus* were manuals that grew out of a need to counter the prejudice and fear surrounding HIV, and to foster strong and mutually respectful relationships, free from violence and without sexually transmitted infections or unplanned pregnancies. *Stepping Stones* is recognized by WHO, UNAIDS, USAID and many others as one of the few global interventions to reduce intimate partner violence, now recognized as a key cause and consequence of HIV for women globally.

Now combined into a single manual and revised and updated, *Stepping Stones and Stepping Stones Plus* is a training package designed to help trainers and community members organize a workshop. The training is with young and older women and men, separately and together, to explore their social, sexual and psychological needs, to overcome their communication blocks, and to practise ways of enriching their relationships. The workshop sessions help individuals, peers and their communities move step by step to change behaviours and to build healthy relationships.

The manual and an optional DVD describe how to organize the workshop and run structured exercises involving role play and other participatory methods of group learning. Workshop sessions are held mostly in four separate peer groups, based on self-identified age and gender groupings, with some larger meetings. The optional DVD consists of 15 short clips designed to provide participants with a springboard for discussion during the different sessions of the workshop.

Stepping Stones and Stepping Stones Plus is essential reading for social workers, community workers, health workers, NGO staff and people living with HIV working on HIV-related community programmes; also researchers and academics teaching and advising in this field.

Alice Welbourn PhD is a researcher, trainer and global activist on gender, HIV and rights. She has worked in international health and gender issues for over 30 years.

'This manual has been of tremendous benefit and help to stakeholders, middle-level managers and entire health workers in the district.'

Frederick Ofosu, Ministry of Health, Odumase-Krobo, Ghana.

'For every worn, rain-splattered copy of *Stepping Stones* that is in circulation, there are thousands of people that have benefited from it.'

Laura van Vuuren, Medical Teams International, Seattle, USA

'As no other guide, *Stepping Stones and Stepping Stones Plus* promotes dialogues and understanding between men and women and the different generations: it shows the route to equality. If we can just get this approach fully implemented around the globe, the world would be a better place!'

Doortje Braeken, Senior Adviser Adolescents, Gender and Rights, International Planned Parenthood Federation

STEPPING STONES & STEPPING STONES PLUS



STEPPING STONES and STEPPING STONES PLUS

Alice Welbourn



PRACTICAL ACTION
Publishing



Salamander Trust
TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT HIV

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A training package on gender, generation,
HIV, communication and relationship skills

Alice Welbourn

Praise for the book

‘Stepping Stones is a programme that truly transforms relationships between women and men, older and younger people in communities. As no other guide, it promotes dialogues and understanding between men and women and the different generations: it shows the route to equality. If we can just get this approach fully implemented around the globe, the world would be a better place!’

*Doortje Braeken,
Senior Adviser Adolescents,
Gender and Rights,
International Planned Parenthood Federation*

‘I observed the profound impact of Stepping Stones in a small village in The Gambia. The village consisted of over 30 families, and all but one woman reported spousal violence in the year before Stepping Stones began. In the nine months after the fourteen-week peer-led programme ended, there had been only one incidence of intimate partner violence. The men reported that now they were glad to understand the use of condoms and that they could use them with their wives.’

*Susan Paxton, Public health consultant,
author of International Community of Women living with HIV Speakers’ Guide*

‘This manual has been of tremendous benefit and help to stakeholders, middle-level managers and entire health workers in the district. It has increased the knowledge and proficiency of those health workers dedicated to home-based care and counselling of HIV/AIDS patients.’

*Frederick Oforu, Ministry of Health,
Odumase-Krobo, Ghana*

‘The process was emotionally charged — we were talking about very deep issues. This wouldn’t have happened without the Stepping Stones methods. There were young women, widows, mothers with sick children, all taking part. People shared some deep experiences they had never told anyone before.’

*Rudo Chikukwa,
Network of Zimbabwean Positive Women*

‘The girls really love doing the games and drama. Many of them are already involved in unsafe sex; now they’re gaining the confidence to say no, or let’s use a condom.’

*Sarah Tweats, VSO teacher,
Solwesi Technical Secondary School,
Zambia*

‘I was always scared and ashamed to talk about these things with my husband. He didn’t want me to attend these meetings; he used to say that after these meetings, women would rebel against their husbands ... It has been different... I used to live in the darkness...now I am in the light.’

A woman from an indigenous community, Ecuador

‘For every worn, rain-splattered copy of Stepping Stones that is in circulation, there are thousands of people that have benefited from it. Communities have been mobilized, lives saved and hope restored.’

*Laura van Vuuren,
Medical Teams International,
Seattle, USA*

‘UNAIDS has included this resource package among the “key documents” recommended for use in innovative community mobilization programmes.’

*Noerine Kaleeba,
Community Mobilization Adviser,
UNAIDS*

‘Stepping Stones has helped ActionAid India to deepen and strengthen our work in the area of HIV and AIDS. ActionAid India has been using Stepping Stones to break the silence about sexuality and HIV among development workers, NGO staff and communities; to create more acceptance of vulnerable groups such as people living with HIV and AIDS, men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users. The changes started by Stepping Stones have created ripples across the country, and the demand for Stepping Stones is growing.’

Christy Abraham, ActionAid India, Bangalore, India

‘Here in Latin America and the Caribbean, these materials are some of the most effective tools we have to link the African experience of the AIDS pandemic with the innovative work of local communities.’

*Mark Connolly, UNICEF,
Panama City, Panama*

Stepping Stones and Stepping Stones Plus

A training package on gender, generation,
HIV, communication, and relationship skills

Alice Welbourn with Florence Kilonzo,
T.J. Mboya and Shoba Mohamed Liban



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ENDNOTE

1. Modified by T.J. Mboya et al for exercises modified from Kidd and Clay (2003) on the following subjects: greater sensitivity of health staff, supporting wider uptake of voluntary counselling and testing, involving neighbours in support of people with HIV and their families, infant feeding, and orphans.

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PREFACE

The *Stepping Stones* training package has been in use since the first workshop was run in rural Uganda in 1995. It has been used by over 1,000 organisations in over 100 countries and in many different religious and cultural contexts worldwide. Its users find it as useful and relevant as ever in supporting individuals, their peers, and wider community members to prepare for and address the issues that we all face in relation to our sexual and reproductive health and well being, and our relationships.

Over the years, we have seen immense technological advances in the treatment of HIV. It is now possible to live a long, healthy and productive life with HIV, and also to have children born HIV-free, when the right medication is combined with the essential ingredients of care, love, respect, and support.

As the author of *Stepping Stones* I can testify to this. I was diagnosed with HIV in 1992 and I have been on ARV medication since 2000. At the time of writing (November 2015) I have a CD4 count of 970, an undetectable viral load, and I am fit and well.

But medication alone cannot end AIDS.

For those who already have HIV, there is the added possibility that they will experience gender-based violence for the first time, either from intimate partners, other family members, neighbours or work colleagues – or from health care and other institutions.

This is where *Stepping Stones* comes in: it's about timeless issues such as our relationships and the people who create them – amongst peers and across genders and generations. It's only by building long-term, mutually supportive, and respectful relationships that we can overcome the challenges we all face in our lives together. We can keep ourselves and one another safe from fear of violence of any kind (which can often increase vulnerability to HIV) and free of HIV, (other) sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies.

How *Stepping Stones* was created – and grew

When I wrote *Stepping Stones* shortly after my own HIV diagnosis, it was a way of trying to make sense of what had happened to me, and so I tried to create a training package for a workshop that might have protected *me* from acquiring HIV. I was supported by many extraordinary people who have helped to shape, produce, and disseminate this programme over the years. Because of the care and support of those around me, I have been able to continue to lead a life fully integrated into my community, and be fully involved in all decision-making about what happens to me. Yet this is very far from the reality for most people with HIV in the world; instead, they are shunned, ostracised, blamed, and excluded from life by their communities, and then die very scared and lonely deaths. Because I was supported so well, I was able to speak out about my experiences, and others have said this has helped them to understand what HIV is – and what it isn't.

Stepping Stones spread around the world largely by word of mouth. There are no big bucks behind it. People say that the best HIV prevention education is for people knowingly to meet someone like themselves who has HIV. However, for those of us with HIV, a supportive environment is critical in order for us to summon the energy to *continue* to speak out and share our experiences and to *keep taking* the daily medication that keeps us healthy. So we hope that this training package will enable us all to understand more clearly how important it is for us *all*

to question and challenge our ignorance about HIV, as well as our negative attitudes towards people with HIV, so that we can all learn from each other how very easily HIV can – and does – affect us all.

Stepping Stones Plus

This new edition of *Stepping Stones and Stepping Stones Plus* incorporates both the original *Stepping Stones* programme manual and the supplement, *Stepping Stones Plus*. We designed and published the supplement in response to new scientific advances in healthcare for women with HIV, so that whole communities would support women to have babies safely, when they want to, and to create a new, HIV-free generation. The original manual was designed in 1993–4, a little before antiretroviral therapy (ARVs) had been invented and a long time before it started to become available in most parts of the world. In those days HIV definitely looked as if it *always* meant AIDS and death. For many people with HIV it is still extremely difficult to get hold of ARVs. But this medication can and does make a huge difference to the lives of many people with HIV. WHO¹ now states that ARVs should be offered to an individual, if s/he wants to start them, as soon as they are diagnosed with HIV. So someone who has HIV now may no longer necessarily become sick with AIDS-related illnesses, and may well be able to live a long, healthy, and happy life.

The new exercises and sessions in *Stepping Stones Plus* were designed to supplement the original training package, to provide additional support to communities in understanding how HIV breeds and flourishes on the ongoing root inequities and injustices in our lives, and our collective reluctance to look at or challenge them. The new sessions were designed especially to support women's rights around perinatal care and breastfeeding, to enable us together to have the courage to stamp out many injustices women face in the context of motherhood – and, in doing so, also halt the spread of HIV. Key issues such as supportive health care, support from partners, families, faith leaders and neighbours, and support for other family members are covered. These are all topics that had been highlighted by previous *Stepping Stones* facilitators and trainers as needing more attention. Also, new research has shown² that it is from the very people who should be supporting them that women, once diagnosed with HIV, experience gender-based violence (GBV), often for the first time.

Meanwhile, men in many countries seem to fear being tested for HIV but often get sick before their wives or other sexual partners, which suggests that they are likely to have acquired HIV first, especially if their wives are younger. In fact various studies³ have backed up this observation. In many countries, men are older than their wives or other sexual partners, are expected by their peers to have had several sexual partners before they marry, and to continue to have other sexual partners after they marry. By contrast, women are generally younger than their husbands or other and sexual partners, are expected to be virgins when they first marry, and to be absolutely faithful to their husbands during their marriage. When men get sick, they are nursed and cared for by their wives or daughters. However, they often die prematurely because they haven't had access to the medication that could keep them well. So often men leave their widows and children in a very difficult financial and legal position. Often the man's parents expect the widow to marry the dead man's brother, or to leave the home. But this may not be what she wants to do.

This is why we designed new exercises and sessions for *Stepping Stones Plus* that have now been incorporated in this revised manual to help different sections of the community look more closely at how they feel about people living with HIV, how those of us who have HIV are treated by others, and how the support we receive might be improved.

Ultimately, everyone in the community needs to feel more positive about being tested for HIV, more confident that if they test positive for HIV they will be fully supported by everyone, and more able to keep themselves, and their families, happy, healthy, safe, and alive.

Stepping Stones and Stepping Stones Plus

So, welcome to the 21st anniversary edition! Day by day, the river of life sustains and nurtures each of us in body, mind and spirit. Yet as we cross this great river, we also need to be aware of its strength and power – of its potential dangers and threats – and treat it with respect so that it can best help us to grow and thrive.

These dangers include gender-based violence, especially intimate partner violence, and a virus called HIV, which can bring illness, suffering, and even death and grief, to many.

In this training manual and the accompanying optional DVD, we offer you and your community some ‘stepping stones’ for overcoming these threats, which often lurk together under the surface as you navigate your way across this river of life. We do not offer any simple solutions, because we believe strongly that communities are capable of developing their own solutions to the particular issues we all face.

We therefore suggest that you each use this training package to help you steer your own way across your own river of life.

HAVE A GREAT JOURNEY!
Alice Welbourn

ENDNOTES

1. WHO (2015a)
2. Orza et al (2015)
3. For instance, one study in Uganda concluded that ‘men are the predominant source of new infections in rural villages. Risk factors and preventive behaviors vary with the sex of the infected partner, and seroconversion rates are similar in both sexes.’ (Serwadda et al., 1995). See also Abdool Karim (2014).

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STEPPING STONES COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This 1,200-strong database, which is free to join, links individuals and organisations, large and small, around the world who have used or are using *Stepping Stones* in different contexts and cultures. We have a regular newsletter and you all have so much to share! We are especially keen for you to share with us any evaluations you have undertaken of your work with *Stepping Stones* – you can see others' evaluations on our website. We can also keep you up to date with new ideas and advice about how best to adapt *Stepping Stones* to your context whilst keeping true to the original 'foundation stones', to maximize your chances of using it well. **Do please join us – we ask you this so that we can all support one another to share in our learning journey together.**

Website

If you have internet access, you can learn more about the package and how it works on: **www.steppingstonesfeedback.org**

This site also has links to related gender-sensitive participatory approaches to, and articles about, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing and rights. We also provide information about participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation, in which community members themselves can be engaged, that complement more formal approaches.

Adaptations

The programme has also been adapted and translated widely across Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Pacific, where many similar results from diverse Muslim, Christian, Hindu and other communities have been reported. There may already be a local translation and/or adaptation of *Stepping Stones* **relevant to your needs, and we can help you find** out about these and how to get hold of them.

Vimeo

You can also watch films about *Stepping Stones* on our Vimeo page (<https://vimeo.com/salamandertrust>) or on your smartphone Vimeo app.

Contact us

You can also email us on: **enquiries@steppingstonesfeedback.org**

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