

Politics or evidence: whose perspectives count?

Key challenges experienced in scaling-up *Stepping Stones* programmes

Ellen Bajenja, Salamander Trust & CFAR^{1,5}

with Flavia Birungi^{1,2}, Nelson Chizizia³, Jennifer Gatsi⁴, Gill Gordon⁵, Sue Holden⁵, Maureen Kemunto⁶, Pfiriaeli Kiwia⁷, Sonia Kusiima^{1,2}, Willbrord Manyama⁷, Barnabas Muhoma⁸, Alfred Okajje¹, Martin Opondo^{6,9}, Baron Oron^{1,10}, Beatrice Oyugi^{6,11}, Germina Sebuwufu^{1,10,12}, Martha Tholanah¹² and Alice Welbourn⁵

- 1 Communicating For Action & Results (CFAR), Uganda
- 2 American Refugee Committee, Uganda
- 3 PASADA, Tanzania
- 4 Namibia Women's Health Network
- 5 Salamander Trust, UK
- 6 Stepping Stones Kenya Network
- 7 Kimara Peer Counsellors and Educators, Tanzania
- 8 Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe
- 9 Love and Hope Centre
- 10 Network of Stepping Stones Approaches (NESSA)
- 11 IPH, Kenya
- 12 Independent consultant



www.salamandertrust.net

In this PDF, the odd pages are the original PowerPoint presentation and the even pages show the commentary that accompanied each slide.

If you can only see single pages please:

- go to the View menu (top left)*
- choose Page Display*
- and then Two Page View.*

Then the related slides should appear alongside each other.

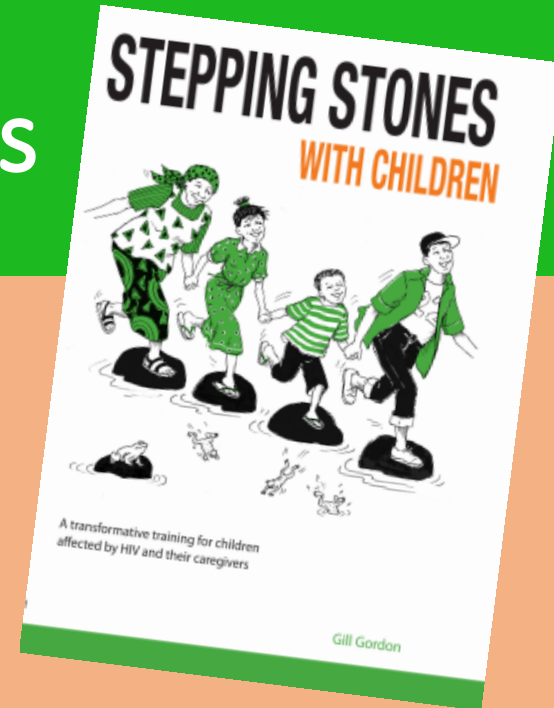
Background: proven effectiveness

Two holistic, gender-transformative programmes:



***Stepping Stones* (1995, 2016)**

- ✓ Working with older adolescents and adults
- ✓ Recognised to reduce IPV and HSV-2 (Jewkes 2008)
- ✓ Recommended by many organisations eg WHO, USAID
- ✓ Widely used around the world



***Stepping Stones with Children* (2016)**

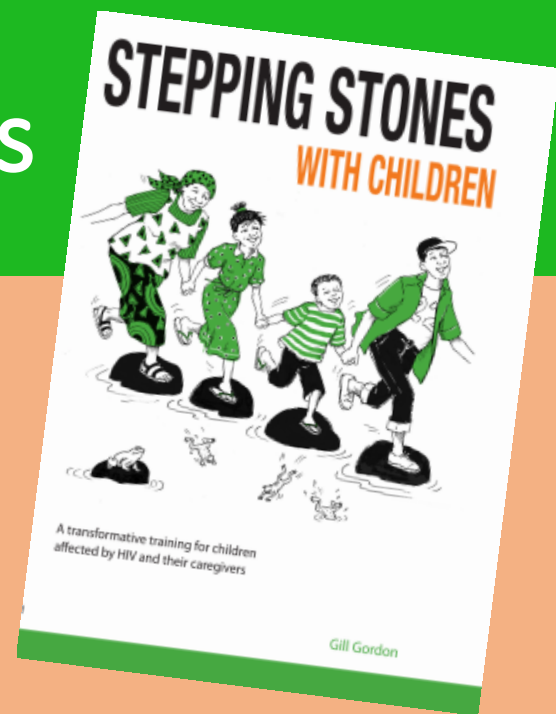
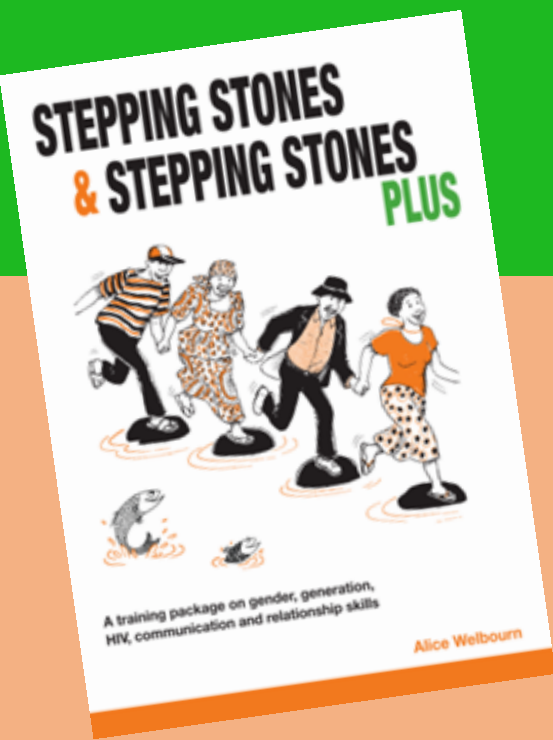
- ✓ Working with children and younger adolescents living with HIV and their caregivers
- ✓ Shown to increase body weights and CD4 counts (Holden et al 2018)
- ✓ Significant increase in caregivers choosing to tell children about their HIV status
- ✓ Children markedly happier

Salamander Trust is a UK charity working to achieve gender-transformative social norms change with partners around the world.

I want to share experiences from these two *Stepping Stones* programmes. They are highly interactive training processes that have been used widely. They address **gender**, inter-**generational** & human **rights** issues in the context of HIV, and facilitate community members to explore issues in **peer groups**, collectively share their views and arrive at important **changes**.

Background: proven effectiveness

Both programmes:



- ✓ Build relationships across genders & generations
- ✓ Work from a child- and gender-rights-based, inclusive perspective to build community-wide understanding, respect, trust and support
- ✓ Use assets-based, solution-focused, forward-thinking to build critical literacy, self-esteem, agency & resilience
- ✓ Use separate peer groups based on age and gender, which come together every few sessions, to share and develop mutual learning and build consensus

Both programmes address UNAIDS' Start-Free, Stay-Free, AIDS-Free strategy, and have multiple additional outcomes such as

- Reducing violence against women and children
- Addressing gendered power-imbalances
- And developing resilience.

However, we have encountered significant challenges in adaptation and scale-up of both methodologies.

Materials & Methods

- We reviewed and analysed our many years of experience supporting *Stepping Stones* practitioners around the world.
- We also surveyed our colleagues who are *Stepping Stones with Children* trainers, who live in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. 23 of them responded.
- Our results converged & show 3 main challenges:

Our *Stepping Stones* community of practice has around 1,000 members worldwide. They have produced many documents about their use of the programme over the years. Many of these are available on our website.

Results 1: Censorship

Stepping Stones with Children has comprehensive and age-appropriate content.

- Only 8% of respondents said they are able to cover all the topics.
- Whilst most topics are covered, certain issues are routinely left out.
- In some countries government approval requires edited versions of the materials.

Having to use edited versions means that facilitators and participants are denied full information about issues which are always there. This can leave them vulnerable.

Exercises most likely to be left out relate to topics which are recommended by UNESCO in its Sexuality Education Guidance, but which are often considered 'taboo'.

However, we note that the majority of respondents (who all have been trained with the full manual) said that they are sometimes asked questions about these controversial areas by some community members and are able to provide explanations about them.

Results 2: Exclusion



The *Stepping Stones Stepping Stones with Children* approach is to work with different sub-sectors of the population in 4 or 3 peer groups respectively, based on age and gender. The peer groups work separately but cover the same topics, and then come together to learn, and negotiate changes in behaviour and social norms.

However, funders may not support this whole community approach. In our survey:

- 61% said that funders prioritise adolescents over younger children;
- 43% said that funders prioritise women and girls over men and boys;
- And some funders are implementing *Stepping Stones* only with adolescent girls.

Which leaves us with....

Results 2: Exclusion



...this!

We argue that focusing on adolescent girls and young women:

- Unfairly puts responsibility for change on them alone!
- Excludes young children – against UNESCO's Technical Guidance mentioned above
- And excludes boys, men and older women, all of whom have a lot of influence on social norms and the lives of adolescent girls!

Results 3: Quantity over Quality

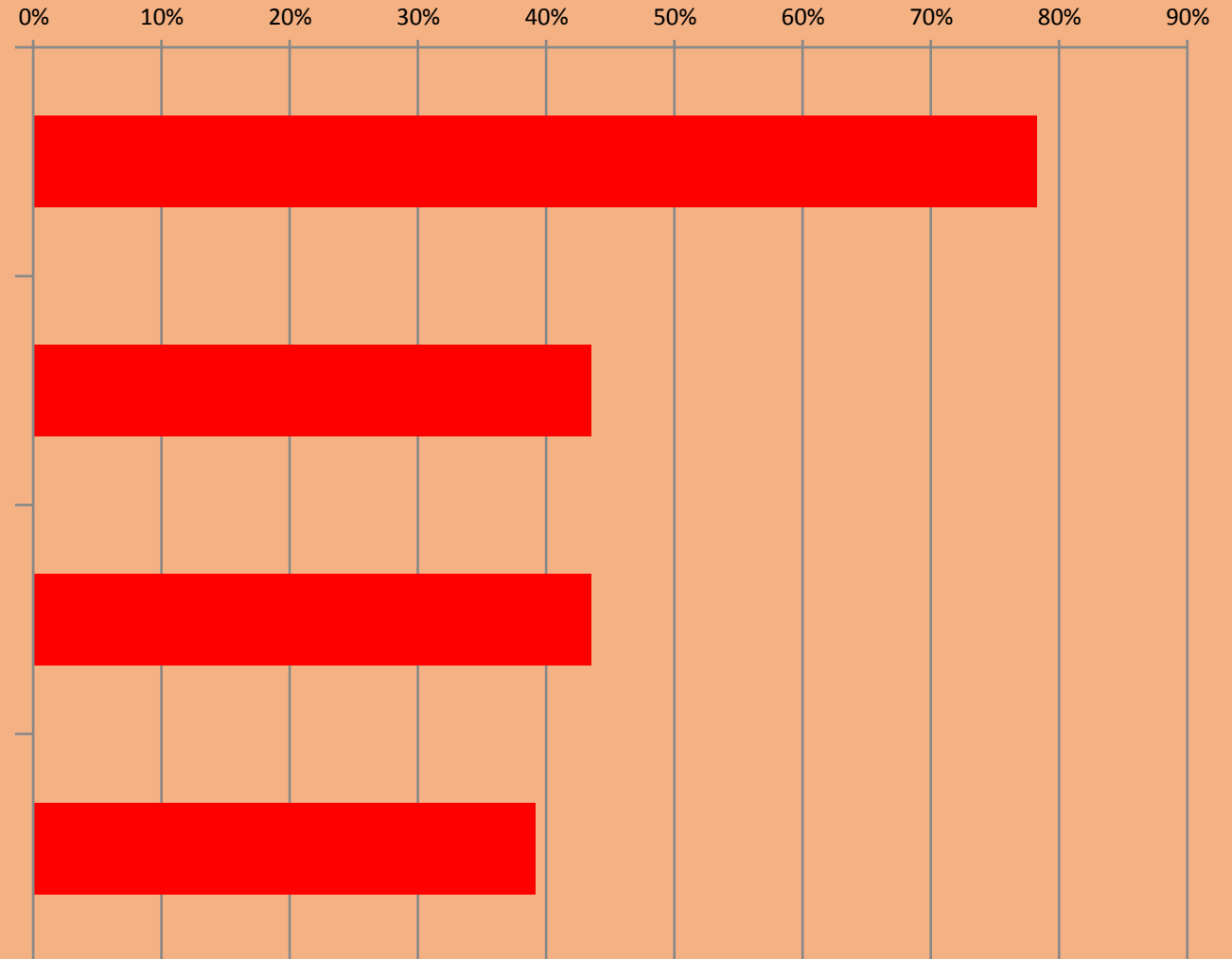
CHALLENGES

Getting funding to run the full community workshops as set out in the manuals.

Getting funding to train the workshop facilitators well.

Organisations needing to cut workshop sessions to save time and money.

Organisations needing to cut controversial content from the manuals.



We asked our trainers what top 3 challenges (out of 9 options) they face in scaling up *StSt* and *StStwC*

These are the issues that over a third of them picked out.

As you can see, the first 3 relate to funding: difficulty in getting enough funding to run the full workshops, finding enough money to train facilitators well, and having to cut sessions to save money. The 4th relates to censorship, as already discussed.

Note that none of them selected “lack of interest from participants” as a top 3 challenge!

Results 3: Quantity over Quality

limited funding

+

tight timelines



poorly adapted materials with fewer sessions
and inadequately delivered training (but to more people)



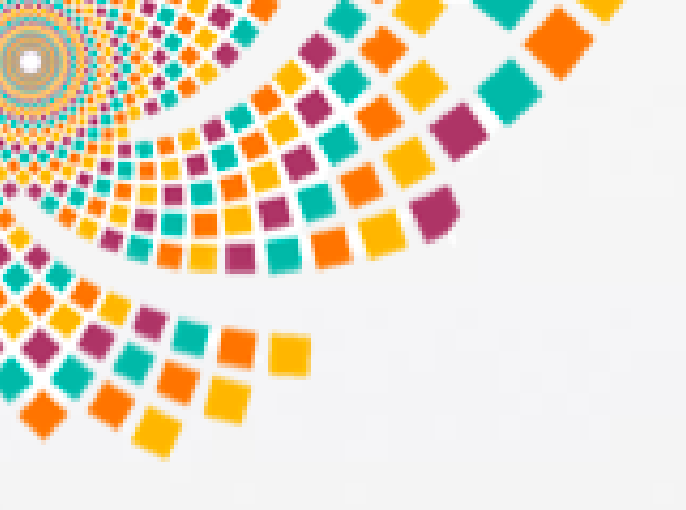
LESS ETHICAL AND LESS EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMES



☹️ poorer outcomes for communities ☹️

We understand that funders are under pressure to achieve as much as possible with the money they have, and this tends to lead to “targeting” and reaching the maximum number of people.

However, social norms change is complicated! Short time frames, cutting sessions, excluding certain sectors of the population and not investing in training can all lead to a higher **quantity** – the number of people reached - but **poorer quality** in terms of how ethical and effective the work is. It’s perhaps considered easier to ‘target’ people than to ‘work *with*’ them. But where does the real change happen? I think we all know the answer to that.....



Salamander Trust is the co-convener of the Community for Understanding Scale Up (CUSP) working group, together with Raising Voices (originator of *SASA!*).

The CUSP has developed several case studies, blogs, webinars, presentations and a journal article about the opportunities and challenges that emerge when external groups adapt and scale up our respective methodologies.

Our presentation here concurs with CUSP's wider findings and recommendations, summarised in this slide.

Conclusions

- ✓ Support and defend the right to accurate gendered-, rights-based, *inclusive* & age-appropriate information;
- ✓ Involve *all* sectors of the community in social norms change;
- ✓ Resist the drive for short-term results of quantity over quality;
- ✓ A child-centred, human-rights approach should also be holistic;
- ✓ Above all, ensure ethical and effective programming.

We conclude that for more effective and ethical social norm change work we need to attend to these points.

By “inclusive” we mean including people with HIV as well as respect and support for *any* people who are socially and/or economically marginalised by society in any way.

You can find more evidence about *Stepping Stones* work and the findings of CUSP in the articles and other materials listed on the next slide.

Some relevant references



- ✓ Our CUSP materials: <https://tinyurl.com/CUSPMaterials>
- ✓ Jewkes, Flood & Lang, Lancet, [2014](#)
- ✓ Petroni et al, Journal of Adolescent Health, [2019](#)
- ✓ USAID / PEPFAR / Youth Power Learning, Systematic Review, [2017](#)
- ✓ Salamander Trust *Stepping Stones* adaptation guidelines, [2017](#)
- ✓ Holden et al, Health Education Journal, [2018](#)
- ✓ Salamander Trust, Poster about *Stepping Stones with Children* counsellors' guide, [2018](#)



Salamander Trust

ON THE RIGHT(S) TRACK



Thank you

www.steppingstonesfeedback.org

www.salamandertrust.net

