

Frequently Asked Questions about Stepping Stones programmes

July 2020

What are the Stepping Stones programmes?

Stepping Stones (1995, 2008, 2016)¹

- Was developed in Uganda, for use with HIV-affected communities;
- Works with 4 peer groups of older male and female adolescents and male and female adults;
- Comprises 18 sessions + 5 community meetings;
- Shown to reduce Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and HSV-2 (eg Jewkes et al [2008](#), Paine et al [2002](#)).
- Has been translated and adapted many times around the world, with varying degrees of fidelity to the programme's core principles, structure, ethics and methodology.

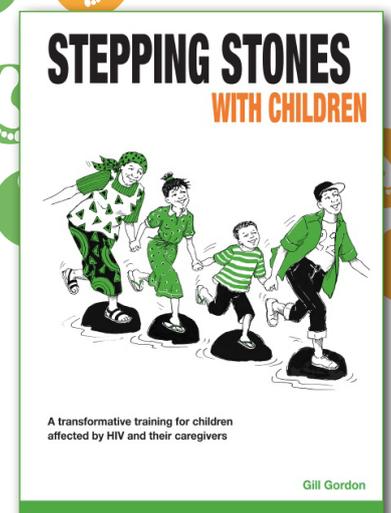
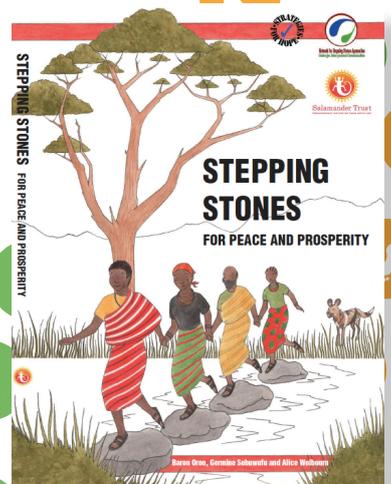
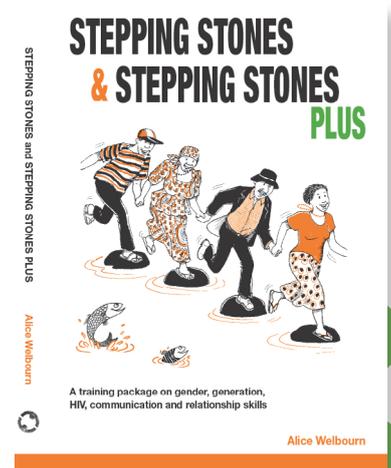
Stepping Stones for Peace and Prosperity (StSt4P&P, 2014):

- Was developed in Uganda, for use in communities affected by small arms proliferation, sexual violence and conflict;
- Works with 4 peer groups of older male and female adolescents and male and female adults;
- Comprises 15 sessions + 4 community meetings;
- Shown to reduce IPV, improve behaviour management, higher feelings of safety and greater task sharing (Stites et al [2014](#)).

Stepping Stones with Children (StStwC, 2016):

- Was developed in Tanzania;
- Works with 3 peer groups of children and younger adolescents affected by HIV and their caregivers;
- Comprises 15 core sessions and 14 optional sessions;
- Shown to increase body weights and CD4 counts (Holden et al [2018](#)).
- Is mainly designed to be used with children aged 5-8, and 9-14 who are living with HIV (who may or may not know their status), and also includes children who are affected and vulnerable to acquiring HIV, such as their siblings. Inclusion of their caregivers is critical.
- The methodology works from a child- and gender-rights-based, inclusive perspective to build community-wide understanding, respect, trust and support.

¹ *Stepping Stones* was first published in 1995. A supplement, *Stepping Stones Plus*, was published in 2008. A wholly revised and updated edition, *Stepping Stones & Stepping Stones Plus*, was published in 2016.



How can I get copies of the official materials?

You can buy the wholly revised and updated **Stepping Stones** manual from [Practical Action Publishing](#), in paper and electronic formats, in English only.

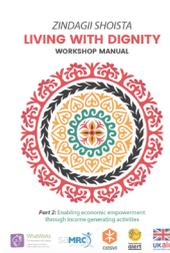
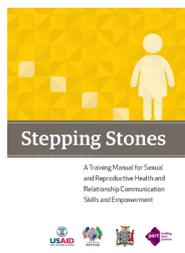
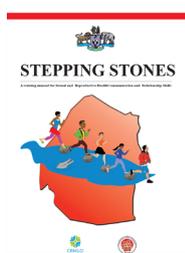
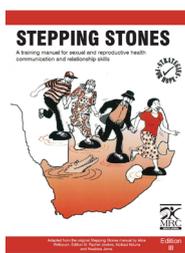
You can also buy the **Stepping Stones with Children** manual from [Practical Action Publishing](#), in paper and electronic formats, in English and, for the e-books, in Kiswahili. We also have some **free copies** in English, for organisations that cannot afford to buy them: click [here](#) to find out about them, and to get other free downloads related to StStwC.

For both manuals Practical Action Publishing offers discounts for bulk purchases.

For **Stepping Stones for Peace and Prosperity** please [email us](#) and we can sell you a PDF of the manual.

What adaptations are available?

Some adaptations are translations of the original (1995) *Stepping Stones* manual. However, because that text has been wholly revised and updated those translations are now out of date. Here are some adaptations in current circulation that we know about.



The adaptation of **Stepping Stones** by the MRC in South Africa (2010) cut 10 sessions and added 2 new ones (leaving 10 sessions), made cuts within sessions, cut the 2 open community meetings, and made the 3 peer group meetings (when all the groups meet to negotiate change) optional. Its scientific content is considerably out of date.

The PACT version for Swaziland (now called Eswatini) (no date but around 2016) was made without our knowledge. It is based on the MRC version, and added 2 sessions, making 12 in total. It was mainly used with adolescent girls and boys, sometimes put together in one joint peer group.

The PACT Zambia version (2017) was also made without our knowledge. It is based on the PACT Swaziland version, but adds 2 sessions, making 14 in total. It dispenses with the methodology of 4 peer groups and instead works only with girls and young women aged 10-24.

The Zindagii Shoista Living with Dignity programme (2018) was developed in Tajikistan, and Part 1 draws on the MRC adaptation of *Stepping Stones*. It works with gender and generations within families. Part 2 concerns enabling economic empowerment.

We are not aware of any adaptations of **Stepping Stones for Peace and Prosperity**.

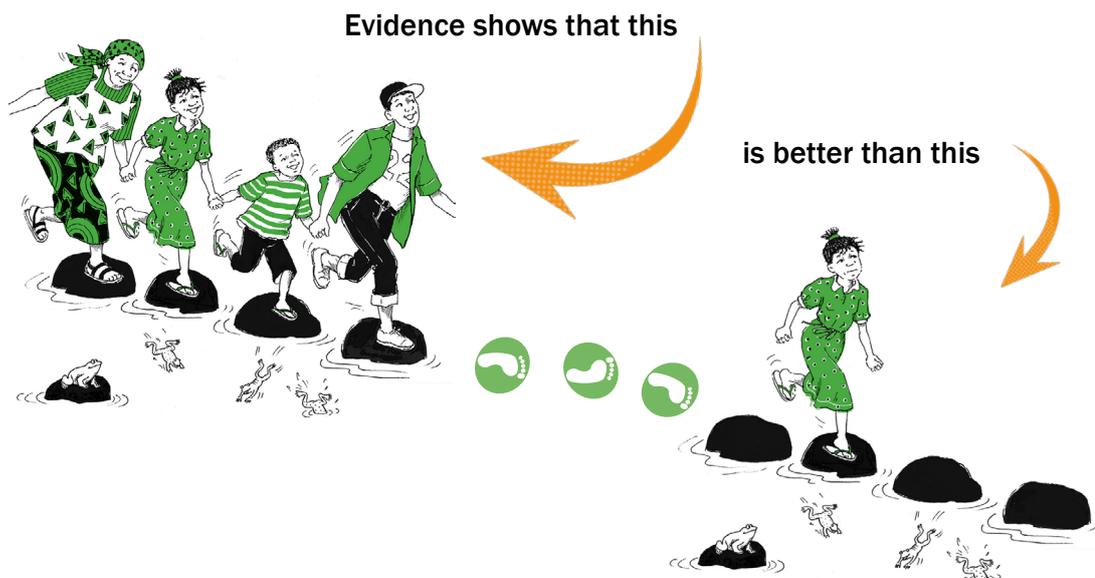
We are currently supporting our partners in Uganda and Tanzania to make adaptations of **Stepping Stones with Children**, to align the content with their respective governments' current guidelines.



What are the differences between the official materials and the adaptations?

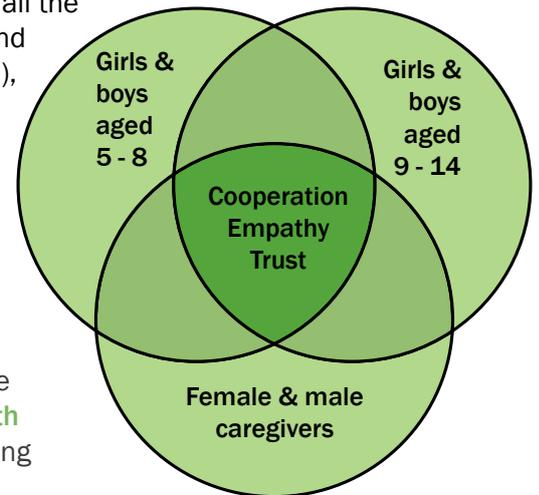
The adaptations vary to the extent that they diverge from these original principles:

1. All original *Stepping Stones* programmes involve and focus on the links and relationships between people of different generations and genders working separately and together, through a women's- and child-rights lens. By going through the same issues and process of change, and by meeting intermittently to present ideas and requests to each other, there is coherence and synergy in their learning process and more ability to change social norms. Some adaptations however only use an adapted version of the programme to work just with girls aged 10-14, who mainly do not have HIV. *It is not ethical to expect change by working only with girls and young women, who are likely to have the least power to act independently.*



2. Some programmes recognise that others need to be involved too, and complement their use of *Stepping Stones* just with girls by adopting a 'layering' approach, where other organisations use other programmes with parents or with boys. By contrast, evidence indicates that use of the *Stepping Stones* approach with *all* gender and age groups, as originally intended, enables community members to benefit much more through the delivery of a **coherent and effective approach**, that **synchronises** the learning process and builds **synergies** around the issues across all the peer groups within the same time period (see eg Jewkes, Flood and Lang [2014](#) and What Works (slide 10, [2020](#))).
3. All *Stepping Stones* programmes use **inclusive, rights-based and gender-equitable messaging**. Issues of inequitable gender and inter-generational power imbalances – and how to redress them - are woven throughout.

- All programmes take a **holistic approach**, covering many different and interrelated issues (also known as structural drivers), and responding to participants' lived realities and priorities. The programmes focus on the issues each peer group chooses to incorporate in the overall learning process, through role plays largely based on their own experiences. But because all the participants are exploring the same themes and learning the same skills (adapted for their age), cooperation, empathy and trust are able to flourish between them. They cross the river together, negotiating the same obstacles and using the same stepping stones. This is how trust and confidentiality are built within each peer group and across the peer groups.
- No one is required to take an HIV test** to participate in **Stepping Stones**. The programme is inclusive and serves all. **Stepping Stones with Children** describes a careful process for reaching out to families directly affected by HIV.



Example of how the Stepping Stones with Children structure works

Can I adapt the materials?

Yes! Indeed an adaptation to each particular context is an important early step in its use. We welcome careful adaptations, which adhere to the structure, principles, ethos and methodology of the original manuals. We have developed adaptation guidelines for the original **Stepping Stones** programme, which are available [here](#). Our trainers can support you in adaptation and piloting of a new adaptation, but you need to budget for their time. For more information please send an email to us by clicking [here](#).

How much training do facilitators need to be able to run the workshop sessions with community members?

This will depend on the level of experience and skills that the facilitators already have, in relation to both the content of the workshops, and the participatory methods used. The manuals set out every step to follow, and how to adapt the process to suit the setting and community priorities. But it's crucial that facilitators fully understand the issues, believe in the ethos and principles of the approach, and have the skills to manage the participatory process. For instance, some facilitators may be very experienced at working on these issues with adults but not with young people or children. Others may work a lot with children but not on these issues. For this reason, we recommend that facilitators first experience the programme themselves, as participants, before going on to learn how to guide others in different age groups through the programme. We recommend they spend two weeks doing this, plus a further three weeks of training.

How do I find people to support us to train facilitators and to adapt the programme?

We have a network of talented accredited *Stepping Stones* trainers who can support you. Please email us via this [link](#) for more information.

How much does it cost to use the programmes?

The costs of course vary depending on how your organisation works, how you train and implement, and the scale at which you work. For example, training a lot of facilitators is cheaper per head than training a few. Your costs will be relatively low if you train volunteers to be facilitators, can use low-cost community facilities, and if participants do not require travel expenses to attend. Conversely the costs will be higher if facilitators receive salaries, if community participants need attendance fees and refreshments, and if you must rent venues.



To give you some idea, however, 5-weeks of residential training for facilitators in a modest venue typically costs around \$2,000 per facilitator. Running **Stepping Stones** in full (18 sessions plus 5 community meetings), with modest payments to facilitators and participants, currently costs approximately \$200 per participant of the programme in East Africa (this is under \$US9 per three-hour session). The longer **Stepping Stones with Children** training programme (15 core and 14 optional sessions) currently costs approximately \$300 per participant in East Africa (this is US\$10.35 per three-hour session).

We emphasise that investing in good training at the outset is critical and often overlooked or undervalued. Yet investment in good initial training will reap benefits for years – both for the facilitators themselves and for both the initial and future workshop participants.

Can I use a few sessions and not others?

All *Stepping Stones* materials use a staircase approach, with each session providing a new step, building on the sessions which have gone before. The earlier sessions in each programme could be used on their own but not later ones. Later sessions depend on participants having had time to develop the peer group cooperation and trust needed to create safe spaces for in-depth personal sharing. It is NOT therefore acceptable for later sessions or exercises in them to be used outside the full *Stepping Stones* programme. If you have any particular queries about this, do contact us for further information.

Our donor will not fund our organisation to run all the sessions, or to work with all the peer groups. What should we do?

This is a common situation. Whilst there is an increasing body of evidence which confirms the effectiveness of comprehensive programmes which work with people of different ages and [genders](#), currently there are still few funders ready to support such approaches. We continue to advocate for this: however, this will take time. We recognise that funders hold more power than community organisations who need their funding, and that you may need to compromise in order to secure grants. There are also national guidelines to consider. In some countries, local organisations have had to compromise by adapting the content of the manuals (and therefore losing some topics) in order for the programme to meet with current government guidelines. In relation to including people living with HIV, we encourage you to contact us and to object yourselves, if any donor suggests using HIV testing to exclude those living with HIV from **Stepping Stones** workshops.

Can we add topics to the programme?

Yes! This is part of effective adaptation. To fit with the principles and ethos of the materials all new content needs to be rights-based, and to use inclusive, rights-based and gender-equitable approaches, which support participants to explore the pros and cons of each issue, both to themselves and to others around them, in the context of their own experiences and lives. To fit with the methodology new topics should be handled in a participatory way. Please read our adaptation guidelines to learn how best to do [this](#).

If we don't cut sessions and/or peer groups we will not be able to run the programme; surely a modified programme is better than none?

Again, please refer to our [adaptation](#) guidelines. If you have further questions, do please contact us to discuss your suggestions.

Why don't your materials clearly tell children or adults what is right and what is wrong, and what they should and should not do?

Our approach is to facilitate a process whereby participants, including children, develop critical literacy by exploring issues and reaching their own conclusions. This is not to say that the materials are free of values and judgements, as they stand on the principle of universal human rights (which some people do not agree with). But it is more effective, for example, for caregivers and children to reflect on the issue of inequity regarding girls' access to education, and to consider for themselves the short and long-term pros and cons of going to school or not in their own lives, than to tell them to send their girls to school. This approach takes longer and needs more skills training of facilitators and their trainers. However, years of experience have shown us that, by improving critical literacy, based on human rights, participants are better able to weigh up complex situations to guide their decisions throughout their lives. The importance of nurturing collective change by providing space for critical reflection and dialogue was one of the findings of What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls final evaluation (read more about that [here](#)). Such critical literacy skills, used throughout the programme, are lifelong skills which are more important than ever these days. For instance, they can enable children and young people to be more discerning about their use of the internet, especially when 'fake news' about so many topics is so widespread these days.

Surely what's most important is to reach greater numbers of the most vulnerable girls and young women rather than also working with others?

This is the position of some donors. Of course, we and they would ideally want to reach high numbers of vulnerable girls and young women and boys and young men and adult men and women and others that influence their lives such as caregivers. However, in an either/or situation our view is that quality is a more effective investment in the long term than quantity: that we can achieve more lasting social norms change, albeit among smaller numbers of girls and young women, by also working with others, to the benefit of all the participants.

Can I use Stepping Stones as part of a package of other methodologies in one project?

If you feel it essential to add an additional methodology while the *Stepping Stones* programme process is taking place, and if the request to do so has not come from community members, then we recommend you discuss this in depth with them – do they want to be involved in more than one process at a time? Do they have the time available to do this? Where do they feel their own priorities lie? What time(s) of year would work best for them?

This depends also on what you are trying to achieve and whether there is a potential problem with trying to keep track of the source of any changes that take place, for research purposes.

We recommend you use *Stepping Stones* materials with all peer groups, rather than with only certain groups (such as girls). Please see our comments above about a 'layering' approach.

If you want to add in another element, such as para-legal training for participants (COWLHA decided to do this in Malawi), it may well improve overall outcomes for the community. However, please consider how much time participants have on top of their existing *Stepping Stones* commitments. It may work better to run the additional elements as a follow-up programme, once the *Stepping Stones* workshops have been completed. This is the strategy used in the South African *Stepping Stones Creating Futures* income-generating programme, which was used *after* the *Stepping Stones* workshops, and not *during* them.

When should I adapt *Stepping Stones* materials?

Ideally at the outset of your project, rather than during it. However, if when using *Stepping Stones*, you find there are adjustments that need to be made to address some problems, or there are opportunities to improve its effectiveness, then you could adapt the programme at that point. Do get in contact, as may have examples from elsewhere that may help to inform your decision.

Can we put our adaptation of *Stepping Stones* up on our website?

No. This is for several reasons. First, *Stepping Stones* & *Stepping Stones Plus*, as well as *Stepping Stones with Children* are both copyrighted materials and the sole publisher is Practical Action Publishing. Neither manual is for open distribution, electronically or in any other form, without the express written permission of the copyright holders and the publisher. Any adaptation of our materials which includes 400 words or more of the original programmes is subject to standard international copyright [laws](#). The materials are available for sale, both in electronic form and in print form, at a very modest fee, from the publisher's [website](#).

Secondly, we want to act as a central learning and sharing information hub, to support everyone using *Stepping Stones* around the world to build on one another's experiences. **Building and strengthening a movement for gender-transformative change is our central focus and the more users cooperate with us and support us in doing this, by contributing to and becoming part of the movement, the more we can all advance our learning and support for the communities with whom we all work.** Please do share your evaluations and other reports with us, so that we can post them on our site and share them with others. Please do not undermine this global collective effort by posting your adaptations of our manual on your own site, or sharing them, without our permission.

Thirdly, as one UNAIDS official told us recently: "*Stepping Stones* is deceptively simple to read. People think that it is easy to follow the curriculum, while in fact it is richly complex and needs people to be really well trained to use it properly." If you put your adaptation up on line, then others are very unlikely to find or use all our freely accessible resources described above, to build on those to make their own adaptation, best suited to their own needs. Our experiences around this chime with those of our [CUSP](#) colleagues, who have also found that others have used their materials in ways which do not adhere to the structure and principles of their original versions, with inevitable disappointing – and potentially damaging - results. **Please do not undermine our efforts to support others to make best use of these materials.**

Thank you for reading these FAQs! Please feel free to share them widely with your colleagues and partners. Our work is wholly not-for-profit and we offer these FAQs, as with all our *Stepping Stones*-related materials in the spirit of shared learning. We are here to help you! Do please contact us to learn more. You can contact us via this [link](#).

Some quick links to some of our key resources:

Our adaptation guidelines: click [here](#).

Our presentation for the USAID-funded Youth Power Learning Project: click [here](#).

Our plenary presentation at the 3rd International Workshop on HIV and Adolescence, Nairobi, October 2019: click [here](#).

You can read much more about the *Stepping Stones* programmes and how they can best be used here: www.steppingstonesfeedback.org

Suggested citation: Salamander Trust, CFAR-Uganda, and partners, 2020, Frequently asked questions about Stepping Stones programmes



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