

Training Stepping Stones Facilitators: Lessons Learned from Zimbabwe July 1998

The Zimbabwe AIDS Network (ZAN) with the ActionAid Regional Office in Harare is in the process of providing a four-stage Stepping Stones (SS) training process for 25 of its member organisations. This is funded by the UK government's DFID. Two stages have so far taken place. These were an initial 6 day Training of Facilitators (ToF), followed more than 6 months later by a 5 day review and introduction to Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA). In each case the training was run twice, once each for the Northern and Southern regions. This note brings together the lessons learned so far, as communicated in a number of reports, memos and conversations. We have summarised them here in the hope that they will be useful to other Stepping Stones users around the world.

I am grateful to Dr Jacqueline Bataringaya of ActionAid, and to Barbara Kaim who facilitated the second stage training, for the trouble taken to share and document these lessons and to review these notes.

What has been achieved

- two training courses have been run in both the Northern and Southern regions. 50 people from 25 organisations have participated, and ?? Zimbabweans have acted as trainers.
- all the trainees are, in some way, using what they have learned from the SS training, and find the SS manual to be a useful resource
- the training has given them more confidence and ability as facilitators
- they also have a greater understanding and appreciation of the use of participatory methods
- there is better networking among the organisations, and potential for much more
- there is commitment and enthusiasm to developing the use of SS in Zimbabwe, including running pilot SS workshops at community level, and adapting SS to fit organisations' working contexts

Lessons learned

1) Practical issues

- Organisations need advance warning of course dates, if they are to be sure of sending their trainees. This is particularly important when we want the same trainees to attend, rather than the organisations sending different people each time.

- All trainees should receive the SS manual. These need to be bought or photocopied in advance.

2) Selection of trainees

- The criteria for selection of trainees should be clearly communicated and enforced. The trainees were supposed to be Programme Officer level who work directly with the community, but this was not always the case.

- Managers are less likely to use SS themselves. Volunteers with no decision-making powers in their organisations may also find it hard to use SS.

- Mixing trainees of very different levels of education and positions of responsibility affects the pace at which the training can happen. Ideally they should be of similar levels.

- To use SS as described in the manual, you need teams of 4 facilitators. As only 2 (one man and one woman) were invited from each organisation, they did not have complete teams. In two cases, the trainees trained others in their organisations, and used SS in full. For the others the lack of a complete team was an obstacle to using SS in full. So if the objective of a ToF is for SS to be used in full, it would be better to train 4 people from half as many organisations, rather than 2 from each. Alternatively, if it is only possible for 2 facilitators from each organisation to attend, they should be preparing from the start to run SS workshops for two peer groups each afterwards - ie the female facilitator would need to run both the older women's workshop and the younger women's workshop; and the male facilitator would need to run two separate workshops for the older and younger men respectively. However this approach is not likely to be as good as having a team of four facilitators of appropriate gender and age for all four groups.

- Inviting trainees from a wide geographical spread seems fairer in terms of covering the whole region, but this makes it harder for trainees to meet up and support each other. If an objective of the training is to encourage networking, it would be good to make sure that each of the organisations is close to at least one other. It might then even be possible for organisations to share facilitators with each other. However, in practice this has not yet happened.

3) Content of Training

- Six days for the initial training was quite short. Given the skills and experience of the trainees, it would have been better to have more time. With limits on funding, this would mean training fewer people for longer. (*The SS TAP training guidelines recommend at least 2 weeks for trainees who have limited experience of participatory approaches*).

- We should not assume that people working in AIDS support organisations know all about gender issues. It is important to assess the trainees' understanding, and to spend time on gender issues at the first training. Discomfort with gender issues was

one obstacle identified by trainees (and particularly by male trainees) in using SS. If they have not worked through these issues for themselves, then they will be reluctant to use exercises which bring out gender issues.

- Trainees may also be unfamiliar with using participatory approaches. If it is very different to their usual style of working with the community, they may need more time to learn about and practise PRA and role-play before they are confident to use the techniques in the community. After the first training, all the trainees had used at least the energisers and games from SS, but after the second training they were more confident to use more.

- The first training held by ZAN concentrated on going through the SS manual. An alternative approach would be to concentrate on the basics of participation and gender, with an introduction to SS, on the assumption that the manual is detailed enough for trainees to use providing they understand the basics. However, this idea is untested as yet. A longer ToF would allow time for the basics of participation and gender and for participants to experience SS initially just on a personal level, as participants, rather than as trainee facilitators.

- Giving trainees time to share their experiences is important and very worthwhile. At the second training some people shared how they are using SS in their existing work:- for example, in a peer education programme, or in home-based care workshops. This helped other trainees to think about how they can incorporate SS into their existing work. Other groups shared how they have used extracts of SS. For example, some used Session M, 'The Long Journey' in conjunction with the film *Neria* to stimulate discussions around inheritance and will-writing. By sharing ideas and thinking about adapting SS, they countered the fear that you must use 'all or nothing'. (*Note: SS TAP guidelines on adapting SS are now available and will be sent to all SS contacts including ZAN trainees*).

4) Using SS and follow-up

- We should not expect trainees to return to work and implement SS immediately. Organisations have workplans, which may be fixed for 6 months or more in advance. It would be useful at the training to help trainees to think about how and when they may use SS. If they cannot use it in full, then could consider how can they begin to use what they have learned. Alternatively, this may need to be discussed with the trainees' managers at a one-day initial introductory workshop, where managers had a chance to learn about what the whole process is likely to entail.

- Networking between organisations could improve access to video machines and hence use of the SS video. In addition, trainees should be aware that it is not necessary to use the SS video with the manual. (*Alternative exercises are outlined in the SS TAP adaptation guidelines*).

- It is easy for attention to be focused on the actual training courses, at the expense of other important activities such as follow-up, documentation and monitoring & evaluation. These are time-consuming but very important activities which ideally require the

commitment of a skilled individual from the lead organisation.

- Bringing the trainees together again for the second training helped strengthen links between them and countered feelings of isolation. However, in general the organisations in Zimbabwe feel isolated from SS users in other parts of Africa. We hope to reduce this by linking all the ZAN trainees to the SS TAP; all the trainees will now receive updates from the global project.

I hope that you found these lessons from Zimbabwe useful. Please share *your* lessons with us too, so that we can continue to learn from each other.

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