

## Recipients of care bemoan unavailability of Bactrim

By John Folena

Recipients of care through focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising of key populations (KPs), Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW), Men Living with HIV (MLHIV), Women Living with HIV (WLHIV) and Young People Living with HIV (YPLHIV) expressed their concern on the persistent stock outs of essential drugs particularly Bactrim medically called Co-trimoxazole at their respective health facilities. They observed that Bactrim is no longer dispensed as in the past at public ART clinics since COVID 19 emerged.



*Women in group discussion at Kaluluma Health Centre*

The Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS (MANERELA+) under a project called Citizen Science in Community Led Monitoring and Advocacy (CS-CLMA) with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022 facilitated FGDs at Kaluluma, Mnyanja and Chamwabvi health centres in Kasungu District. The FGDs were grouped into 3 categories namely Young People living with HIV (YPLHIV), Men living with HIV (MLHIV) and Women living with HIV (WLHIV).

The CS-CLMA project covering 8 health facilities in Kasungu has two goals. The first is to assess and generate evidence on the access gaps and HIV service barriers for people living with HIV/key populations in the context of COVID 19. The second goal is to improve

HIV service delivery and service uptake by the target population amidst the COVID 19 pandemic.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2022 Civil Society Organisations through the Malawi Network of people living with HIV/AIDS, (MANET +) National Association for People living with HIV/AIDS (NAPHAM), Malawi Interfaith AIDS Association (MIAA), Coalition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (COWLHA+) and the Network of Journalists Living with HIV (JONEHA) presented a petition to Parliament in which government was asked to increase the health budget to at least 15% in line with the Abuja Declaration. In the petition Bactrim was highlighted as a drug that was very essential to people living with HIV.

The 2014 World Health organisation (WHO) guidelines points out that Co-trimoxazole prophylaxis might be discontinued for adults with HIV infection who are clinically stable on ART with evidence of immune recovery and viral suppression. The guidelines however further says in settings where malaria or severe bacterial infections are highly prevalent co-trimoxazole prophylaxis should be continued regardless of CD4 cell count or WHO clinical stage.

The BMC malaria journal 19 Article 308 of 2020 reports that in Malawi malaria is among the three most significant public health issues. The journal says nearly 4 million people are diagnosed with the infection in Malawi every year. It further states that Malawi accounts for 2% of malaria cases worldwide and that it is among the top 15 countries with a high malaria burden.

Lancet Infectious Diseases 2015 report says while ART is the main intervention needed to reduce morbidity and mortality and to prevent tuberculosis in adults living with HIV; Co-trimoxazole is a preventive therapy irrespective of CD4 cell count because it reduces morbidity and mortality with benefits that continue indefinitely.