

Sex workers develop an interest in HIV Testing Services

By John Folena

Female sex workers (FSWs) in Kasungu particularly around health facilities where Citizen Science-Community Led Monitoring and Advocacy (CS-CLMA) project is working have developed a strong interest in HIV Testing Services (HTS) as noted by a growing number from 18 in the last quarter to 189 in the current quarter according to a report presented and validated at the Community Consultative Group (CCG) meeting on 22nd June 2022 at Kasungu Boma.

The Chairperson of the Kasungu CCG Billie Msokera attributed the appetite for HTS among sex workers to sensitization exercises by the CS-CLMA in collaboration with other partners on the benefits of the HTS and formation of sex workers support groups. He expressed pleasure over the rising number of the services pointing out that doing so chances of transmitting the virus is automatically reduced.

However the Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) Officer Tayana Tembo from the Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living With or Personally Affected by HIV (MANERELA+) bemoaned over the non-existence of HTS among young ones aged below 14. She on the other hand described as a success on prevention of the spread of HIV observing a decline in number of people who tested positive for HIV.



More and more Sex Workers are now interested in HIV Testing Services

MANERELA+ and the Network of Journalists Living with HIV (JONEHA) are jointly implementing CS-CLMA project with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) at 14 selected facilities in Kasungu and Dedza.

The CCG meeting also noted a general decline in uptake of HTS in comparison to last quarter which has dropped from 23,610 to 17,999. The meeting learnt that on male versus female in accessing the services males lagged miserably behind females a situation that demands an advocacy targeting males. The meeting also identified the need for reviving Moonlight and Index services as part of the DSD in the HTS to reach other

groups.

The Malawi National Strategic Plan (NSP) for HIV and AIDS of 2020-25 says HTS aims at increasing the number of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) identified and linked to timely prevention, care and treatment services. The NSP indicates that the proportion of unidentified PLHIV in the population is estimated to be at 2% and to expand case finding, Malawi will have to scale up active index testing and assisted HIV self-testing using community-based cadres.

Among other strategic interventions the NSP cites strengthening of integrated and targeted facility and community testing of all key and priority populations, improving the quality of HTS diagnoses

through better planning, management, and quality assurance systems, strengthening linkage of HTS clients to comprehensive prevention and treatment services.

The NSP is targeting men, children, FSWs and their clients, MSM, refugees, migrant labourers, prisoners, students of higher education institutions and colleges, and people in uniform in a differentiat-

ed manner. It says to reach these key and priority populations, HTS will be fully integrated with Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) and other key health services.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE TESTED FOR HIV

