

## **CS-CLMA CONTRIBUTES TO INCREASED HEALTH SERVICES DEMAND**

**By Christer Kalukusha**

Citizen Science Community Led Monitoring and Advocacy (CS-CLMA) project is largely contributing to a growing demand of health services including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) by key populations in health facilities in Kasungu and Dedza districts.

CS-CLMA is a project being implemented in Kasungu and Dedza districts by Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (MANERELA+) in partnership with the Network of Journalists Living with HIV (JONEHA). It is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) with an aim of improving health service delivery and uptake of services by the target populations.

Clinical Officer at Kasungu District Hospital, Twaibu Chipwele said MANERELA+ through CLMA has been conducting community engagement meetings which is an eye opener for key populations on the rights they have when it comes to accessing health services.

“People in communities never realized that they have the right to access health services because there was no platform for them to learn about these rights. But with CLMA they have been empowered to ask for a service at the hospital they feel they are in need of. For example, we have been having about hundred people asking for PrEP compared to when the year had just started when only twenty or thirty were asking for it,” said Chipwele.

However, despite the growing demand for PrEP, some health facilities are unable to meet the demands due to unavailability of the commodity in their facilities and lack of training of the health care workers to start providing it

Authorities at Kaluluma and Kasalika Health Centres in Kasungu, Mayani Health Centre in Dedza said they do not issue PrEP at their facilities because they have not yet been trained for it.

“The District Hospital offers PrEP but here at the Health Center we do not have it. So we are still waiting to be trained by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and have the drugs supplied at the facility because people are usually asking for it”, said Gift Chilangiza, Clinician at Kaluluma Health Centre in Kasungu.

PrEP is the use of antiretroviral medication to reduce the risk of infection for people who are HIV negative. Especially for key populations like Female Sex Workers (FSWs) who face inequities to negotiate consistent condom use with clients. Therefore, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended the use of PrEP in 2015 to populations at substantial risk of HIV infection.

CLMA Data Supervisor in Kasungu, James Nthondo said not only do the communities go to ask for medication. They also request for appropriate health service structures where they see there's need.

“In one of our engagements with these groups in 2021, a recipient of care requested for an ART structure which has now been built at the District Health Office because they felt privacy was being compromised at the district hospital due to having a small space where ART was offered,” said Nthondo.

CLM seeks to improve quality of health service delivery in facilities by engaging both target populations, health workers and other duty bearers in meetings to help address concerns between parties around health service delivery.

The demand for improved quality of services by different population groups demonstrates knowledge on health as a right for life to everybody irrespective of status, race, gender, religion etc. The right to health is well protected in international human rights instruments like Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 12 of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) protect health rights. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) interprets it as the right to have access to health care services with a corresponding state duty to make such services accessible to all. It also includes an

entitlement to a system of health that provides "equality of opportunity for people to enjoy the highest attainable level of health."