

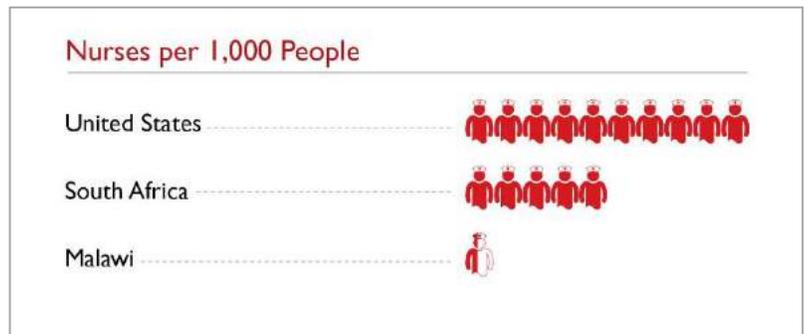
## The GAIA Nursing Scholars Program

### Context

Two-thirds of all people living with HIV globally reside in Sub-Saharan Africa. Malawi, ranked by the World Bank among the poorest economies in the world, is an HIV/AIDS hotspot within the region. More than one million of the 17 million people in Malawi are living with HIV. In 2017, 39,000 Malawians were newly infected with the virus and 17,000 died from AIDS (UNAIDS 2018). With 84% of the population living in rural villages, millions of the most vulnerable live far off the healthcare grid without access to reliable disease prevention, treatment and care. At the same time, opportunities for girls and women lag behind those of their male peers. Malawi ranks near the bottom of the gender inequality index, a measure of female empowerment and economic status, with a value of 0.591 (compared to 0.461 in South Africa and 0.046 in Germany) (UNDP 2013). Less than 3% of females attain some level of post-secondary education (MMIS 2014).

### The Challenge

The HIV/AIDS epidemic and widespread poverty have led to a chronic shortage of qualified health professionals in Malawi. A small pool of nurses forms the backbone of healthcare delivery, particularly in rural areas where they are often the only trained healthcare providers. Nationwide, the shortage is most acute in government facilities where **60% of nursing positions remain vacant**; as many as 72% of nursing positions are vacant in the rural areas where GAIA works.



### GAIA's Response



GAIA created the Nursing Scholarship Program to both empower vulnerable young women and girls, as well as build healthcare capacity in Malawi. The program selects qualified students in financial need, providing them with university education and a bridge to stable, fulfilling careers as nurses in Malawi's critically under-staffed public health sector. The program provides comprehensive support for young nurses-to-be in extreme financial need. More than just tuition, GAIA Scholarships offer clinical supplies, exam fees, uniforms, a modest living stipend and follow-up from program staff to encourage and monitor student progression and on-time graduation. In exchange for the scholarship, GAIA Scholars commit to work in government health facilities upon graduation, in service of the country's poorest people, for the same number of years they were sponsored.

#### GAIA Nursing Scholar Profile

**550+ nurses supported to date**

**81% female**

**63% orphaned**

*“My desire is to work in the health sector to care for the sick so no one would have to suffer what I experienced in my parents’ deaths.” – GAIA Scholar Alumnae*

## Impact to Date

GAIA scholars are posted in 27 of 28 districts, bringing quality care to the most remote areas. GAIA has supported 9% of registered nurses currently working in Malawi's public sector.

- 95% of graduates have successfully completed their public sector service commitment
- 99% of graduates have remained working in Malawi.

## A Recognized Model

Research on the GAIA Nursing Scholarship Program was published in *Global Health: Science and Practice* in 2015 that documents the program's effectiveness in achieving workforce retention in the public sector, and identifies obstacles, like poor supply chain management and human resource shortages, that challenge nurses' daily work in rural and remote settings. Authors found that -- due to the program's close follow-up, culture of community service, and sense of belonging cultivated among nursing professionals by GAIA program staff in Malawi -- GAIA Scholars are well-supported in their studies and at their worksites to overcome these challenges. GAIA Scholars report pride as members of an active GAIA alumni network that provides on-going encouragement and professional refresher gatherings to help them stay connected and effective in often demanding, understaffed and under-resourced workplaces.

Regional scholarship providers, including Doctors without Borders (MSF), Partners in Health and the ELMA Foundation, have recognized GAIA program success in tracking, monitoring and following-up Scholars, and have sought GAIA consultation on best practices. With expressed permission, MSF has adopted the GAIA program tracking tools in its own monitoring and evaluation of programs.

## Return on Investment

The annual direct cost of a comprehensive scholarship and follow up for a GAIA Scholar pursuing a four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Midwifery (BScNM) degree is \$2,500. We estimate that each GAIA nurse graduate will provide high-quality care to 300,000 patients over the course of her career.

View *"AIDS isn't over, but it can be"* and *"The Far End of the Road,"* short films featuring GAIA's work and two GAIA nurses working to create an AIDS-free future in Malawi:  
[www.thegaia.org/news/photos-and-videos/](http://www.thegaia.org/news/photos-and-videos/)

Nursing program and university partners:  
*Kamuzu College of Nursing (KCN)*  
*Malawi College of Health Sciences (MCHS)*  
*Mzuzu College of Nursing (Mzuni)*  
*Holy Family College of Nursing*



**History:** The GAIA Nursing Scholarship Program was launched in 2005 with generous support from the Gruber Family Foundation. GAIA was awarded \$2.9 million in grants from USAID to expand the program, including training for nursing faculty and practicing nurses through a partnership with the University of California San Francisco's School of Nursing.

In mid-2014, GAIA replicated its proven program model in Liberia in the wake of the Ebola crisis. GAIA joined Global Strategies and Mother Patern College of Health Sciences to rebuild Liberia's healthcare workforce, inducting the first Liberian GAIA Scholars in early 2015 and its second cohort in 2018. GAIA has also sponsored Malawian graduate students to obtain advanced degrees in South Africa at the University of Witwatersrand.

Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA)  
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