

## Research article

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# The financial losses from the migration of nurses from Malawi

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## Abstract

**Background:** The migration of health professionals trained in Africa to developed nations has compromised health systems in the African region. The financial losses from the investment in training due to the migration from the developing nations are hardly known.

**Methods:** The cost of training a health professional was estimated by including fees for primary, secondary and tertiary education. Accepted derivation of formula as used in economic analysis was used to estimate the lost investment.

**Results:** The total cost of training an enrolled nurse-midwife from primary school through nurse-midwifery training in Malawi was estimated as US\$ 9,329.53. For a degree nurse-midwife, the total cost was US\$ 31,726.26. For each enrolled nurse-midwife that migrates out of Malawi, the country loses between US\$ 71,081.76 and US\$ 7.5 million at bank interest rates of 7% and 25% per annum for 30 years respectively. For a degree nurse-midwife, the lost investment ranges from US\$ 241,508 to US\$ 25.6 million at 7% and 25% interest rate per annum for 30 years respectively.

**Conclusion:** Developing countries are losing significant amounts of money through lost investment of health care professionals who emigrate. There is need to quantify the amount of remittances that developing nations get in return from those who migrate.

## Background

The healthcare delivery systems of many countries in Africa are unable to deliver adequate quality and quantity of services attributable to, among other reasons, the shortage of health professionals. In Malawi, the high maternal mortality ratio estimated at about 1120 deaths/100,000 live births has been partly blamed on the unavailability of trained midwives to deliver satisfactory quality intra-partum care [1]. There have also been concerns that the rapid scaling-up of antiretroviral therapy aimed at serving about 170,000 Malawians will be constrained by non-availability of adequately trained nurses, clinical officers and doc-

tors. Health care at district level facilities suffers the most from these human resources shortages as they are rural-based and have difficulties recruiting health workers. As a consequence, many cases requiring general care are referred to central hospitals [2]. The shortage of adequate health human resources in Malawi has been described as a 'crisis' by some authors [3].

The inadequate numbers and quality of health professionals in the health system arise from several factors such as inadequate output from the training institutions [4], poor motivation and the migration of health professionals to