Flexibility + Commitment = Resilience

A few weeks ago, I stood at a stream in Malawi’s Phalombe District and stared into the distance at a mountain scarred by mudslides. At my feet were the remains of a bridge that had been washed away during the devastating flood less than a year ago, the same storm (Cyclone Freddy) that displaced tens of thousands in this district alone. In the cyclone’s direct aftermath, the death toll totaled at least 1,216, but many more remained missing, and the health impacts were just beginning. With scores of people huddled in Displaced Persons Camps, contagious diseases like cholera, scabies, and diarrheal disease surged. Dozens of fixed health facilities were destroyed and access to the remaining facilities was cut off as swollen rivers and damaged bridges made passage impossible. The need for GAIA and our partners has never been more clear.

Climate change has come to landlocked Malawi in the form of tropical cyclones, seven of which have made direct landfall in Malawi’s southern region in the past five years, destroying homes, drowning crops, flooding schools, and devastating the fragile healthcare system. But each time, GAIA continued to provide clinical services, adding essential health care to Displaced Persons Camps as soon as they were established. The flexibility of the Mobile Clinic model permitted these adaptations; the passion and commitment of our local staff put them in operation.

Nearly a year removed from the terrifying storm, I again witnessed this formula in action as one of our mobile clinic teams rerouted to a shallower section downstream in order to deliver healthcare to communities on the other side of the washed out bridge. GAIA’s Country Director, Joyce Jere, stood with me and pointed to the mountain’s scars, noting that “the mountain is now weakened,” an ominous observation as the rainy season commences.

GAIA did not set out to be a first responder to climate change. But climate change and global health have become inextricably linked. Malawi certainly bears the brunt: according to the Global Climate Risk Index, Malawi is among the five nations worldwide most affected by extreme weather events. A resilient healthcare response in Malawi is urgently required, which GAIA has been proud and well positioned to support.

Our approach, successes, and challenges are spelled out in the pages of this report. We are grateful to all who have supported our efforts through financial crises, epidemics, and environmental catastrophes.

The mountain may be weakened, but Malawi’s people — including GAIA’s staff — remain strong.

Todd Schafer, Executive Director
GAIA's Role in the Climate Crisis

The link between climate change and health is real. In Malawi, the GAIA team is being forced to respond to collective calamities. In 2023, our community health programs provided swift and adapted relief in response to natural disasters and an increase in disease outbreaks resulting from extreme weather.

On February 5, a cyclone once again hit southern Malawi. Cyclone Freddy lasted 37 days and caused catastrophic flash floods followed by devastating mudslides, displacing over 650,000 people. GAIA’s mobile clinics quickly pivoted and supported emergency healthcare provision at displacement camps for several months.

In Freddy’s wake, a cholera outbreak worsened, resulting in the deadliest outbreak in Malawi’s history, with almost 60,000 cases and 1,768 deaths. GAIA’s mobile clinics connected clients to government cholera centers and increased prevention-focused health talks. GAIA also directed United States Agency for International Development (USAID) resources to train 48 fellows and 79 permanent district staff in cholera case management.

Malawi also saw an increase in malaria in 2023, with GAIA clinics treating more than double the number of cases treated in 2022. In addition to treating those testing positive, GAIA distributed bednets to communities in need and emphasized malaria prevention in health talks.

Heatwaves and water shortages were another significant cause for concern for the team. With support from the nonprofit Formidable Joy, GAIA facilitated the drilling of 4 new boreholes, bringing much-needed clean water to communities in our Mangochi clinic catchment area.

With the rise in climate-related health emergencies in Africa, it’s clear that more needs to be done to bolster preparedness to climatic hazards so that communities can better cope with the impacts of the devastating natural disasters.

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa
In 2023, GAIA’s mobile clinic program continued its strong track record of increasing access to quality health care, while supporting the Ministry of Health (MoH) to achieve UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets and end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030.

We added youth outreach services to our events aimed at reaching those most at risk of HIV. **Youth Friendly Health Service days** provided opportunities for HIV testing for this high-risk population, as well as general health care and critical sexual reproductive health services, including family planning and cervical cancer screening — all provided at venues convenient for youth and accompanied by music and entertainment to increase interest and attendance. **School health events** were opportunities for Social and Behavioral Change Communication through sexual reproductive health and HIV prevention education for older students. Our clinic teams conducted **12 Youth Friendly Health Service days** and **17 school health events**, reaching over 5,800 young people. The teams also conducted **25 men’s weekend clinics** and **15 outreach events for female sex workers**.

GAIA’s mobile clinic outreach approach was again validated in the recommendations from the 2023 UNAIDS report: **The Path That Ends AIDS**, which highlighted the urgent need for outreach to adolescent girls and young women (who are two-thirds of new infections in Southern Africa) and other key populations, as well as the importance of integrated services — a hallmark of GAIA’s mobile clinics.

“Deeper integration of HIV and other health services — including noncommunicable disease and mental health services — would help improve the uptake of non-HIV services (by making them more convenient and responsive to people’s needs), enhance HIV treatment outcomes, and support the achievement of universal health coverage.”
2023 Mobile Health Clinic
Achievements & Key Statistics

277,995 clinic visits
2,900,416 Total clinic visits since program launch in 2008
21,044 sexual reproductive health visits

Family planning, antenatal care, and cervical cancer screening are critical services for the health and empowerment of Malawi’s young women and girls.

Respiratory illnesses were the most frequent condition seen at the clinic this year.

With a total of 55,584 cases, malaria was 19% of all client visits and more than double the number of cases seen last year.

GAIA conducted 2,432 HIV tests, with 2% testing positive. Men and women tested positive at the same rate — a difference from the past few years when men tested positive at higher rates.

Health education talks were delivered to more than 162,000 attendees.

Topics included HIV, malaria, and cholera prevention and treatment options.
Health Workforce Development

A well-trained and resilient nursing workforce is vital to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and responding to global health threats.

In Malawi, nurses form the backbone of health service delivery. With only 7 nurses per 10,000 people (compared to 125 nurses per 10,000 people in the United States) and public sector vacancy rates of 40%, Malawi has a chronic nursing shortage.

Despite shortages, many nurses cannot find work due to constrained government funding to absorb new graduates into the public health workforce. GAIA’s Health Workforce Development Program (HWDP) builds long-term health infrastructure by funding the next generation of frontline health workers through nursing scholarships and fellowships.

GAIA achieved a milestone in 2023, surpassing our five-year 200-student scholarship target under our cooperative agreement with USAID. Since 2021, GAIA has awarded 200 full scholarships and supported 92 additional students at risk of school dropout due to an inability to pay school fees.

With 205 nurse fellows (61% female) deployed and trained under the USAID award, we are well on our way — and ahead of schedule — to achieving our 240 target by 2026. Of note, 91% of fellows secured employment within one year of fellowship completion.

- GAIA continued to provide technical assistance to Malawi’s nurse training institutions, teaching hospitals, and regulatory bodies.
- GAIA was a key partner supporting the Ministry of Health (MoH) to revamp and roll out a national health worker tracking database — a critical tool to improve service delivery and equitable health worker deployment nationwide. By the end of the year, GAIA’s nine partner districts were successfully entering health worker data into this new system.
- GAIA supported the increased capacity of partner colleges to provide quality nursing and midwifery education and training through clinical mentorship, the introduction of e-libraries equipped with required textbooks, and improved internet connectivity, enabling greater access to online resources and study tools for students.
- With support from the University of California San Francisco’s (UCSF) Global Action in Nursing (GAIN) program and a new local partner, NBS Bank, GAIA continued support of students upgrading their qualifications from diploma to bachelor-level nurses — bringing on a new cohort of 10 upgrading students specializing in mental health nursing, an area identified as a national priority by the MoH. GAIA’s partnership with GAIN reached new heights — with 174 nursing scholars supported with GAIN funding to date.

Scholarships

2023: Full scholarships awarded to 99 new students
864 scholarships awarded to date, increasing the nursing workforce by 532 nurses in Malawi (519) and Liberia (13)

Fellowships

2023: Deployed and trained 59 nurse fellows
250 total fellows have been deployed and trained in priority health topics like antiretroviral therapy (ART) and maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) since the program began

Sustainable Impact of Malawi graduates

- 97% completed their academic programs
- 99% have been successfully licensed
- 98% have been employed
- 99% remain in Malawi
- 67% have held leadership positions
- 11% are nurse educators
- 19% have pursued advanced training
I am pursuing university education without any financial problems.

Most of the young girls my age were married and did not further their education.

I have made it to university which has never been done in my family.

My life is different because, when I finish my course, I will have an opportunity for employment and will be able to manage my needs.

Q: What's your greatest fellowship success?

Chikondi: Now, I work independently without hiccups. I've grown as a nurse because I supervise staff and someone is looking up to me.

Kimberley: Reducing patient death through improved use of treatment charts and by introducing what we call a mini high-dependency unit, whereby we isolate critically ill patients in need of close monitoring. When they're identified, they're moved to a separate area where vital signs are monitored twice hourly. Before, there was a lot of death because critical patients were mixed with others, making follow-up difficult. Some would die without staff knowing. We used to go to the mortuary nearly every day. Now, we go maybe once per week, and it's often for unavoidable deaths.

Q: How has your role improved service delivery?

Chikondi: Before, only basic family planning services were provided. Patients had to go to a monthly outreach clinic or traveled more than ten kilometers one-way to access other services. Now, antenatal, postnatal, and family planning services are fully functioning. Pregnant women were often coming presenting with malaria and anemia. Now, they're healthy because they're taking their preventative drugs and supplements. Whenever patients notice something that doesn't seem normal, they immediately come in. What we're teaching them about danger signs is sticking. I've also seen improvements after implementing what I've learned in training. For example, after the MNCH training, we transitioned from focused antenatal care to WHO guidelines. Now, we treat every antenatal woman as high-risk.

Kimberley: Resource availability has improved. Whenever something is out-of-stock, I inform my supervisor, search for resources myself and regularly push management. If medication is available at the hospital, you'll find it in my ward now. Recordkeeping has improved after pushing for the use of treatment charts, often left blank previously. I've filled knowledge gaps by sharing what I've learned in fellow training. For example, I shared revised ART guidelines with my colleagues through our WhatsApp forum and proposed posting them in the ward so that nurses who weren't trained can easily access these resources.
In July, GAIA staff attended the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Congress in Montreal, the largest gathering of nurses globally, joining representatives from the Malawi MoH and the National Organization of Nurses and Midwives of Malawi. With this year’s theme of “Nurses together: a force for global health,” ICN brought nurses, health experts, and government leaders together to share and discuss the ways that nurses serve as agents of change and how the global community can best support them.

Along with Chemonics, the Frontline Health Workers Coalition, IntraHealth International, and UHC2030, GAIA participated in the “Invest in Me” video campaign as part of World Health Worker Week 2023. Featuring video testimonials from frontline health workers around the world, the campaign highlighted the benefits of investing in a resilient and diverse health workforce.

Former GAIA staff member Ellen Schell presented *Building a well-trained and resilient health workforce to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic* at the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (ANAC) Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana in October. The poster, co-authored by Ellen, Janet Botha, Joyce Jere, Nelson Khozomba, and Chimwemwe Mwangonde, highlighted how GAIA’s Nursing Scholar and Fellowship programs produce qualified nurse-midwives equipped to lead, educate, and respond to global health threats like HIV/AIDS.

GAIA is a proud member of the Frontline Health Workers Coalition, which released a new report in September emphasizing the importance of investing in primary healthcare workers. Co-authored by Beth Geoffroy, GAIA’s Director of Programs and Strategic Partnerships, the report urged heads of state, donors, and other policymakers at the 78th United Nations General Assembly to invest in health workers to reach global health goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, UHC, climate resilience, and pandemic preparedness, prevention, and response.
GAIA U.S. Around Town

In 2023, GAIA hosted three events in California, recognizing the work of key individuals and organizations who have made extraordinary contributions to global health efforts.

Our spring event in Sonoma recognized **UCSF’s Global Action in Nursing (GAIN)** for their invaluable partnership and commitment to improving health outcomes and strengthening Malawi’s nursing and midwifery workforce, ultimately improving the quality and capacity of rural health facilities nationwide for the long term. The award was accepted by GAIN’s Director Kim Baltzell, and GAIA Nursing Scholar Graduate and GAIN Nurse Midwife Mentor, Luseshelo Simwina.

**Rev. Frannie Hall Kieschnick**, one of GAIA’s earliest supporters and longtime ambassador of our work, was honored at our October event hosted at Lightspeed Venture Partners in Menlo Park, for her extraordinary contributions to reducing health disparities, particularly for women.

Our November event in Los Angeles honored **Dr. Michael Gottlieb**, GAIA Trustee and Medical Advisory Board member. In addition to his foundational support of GAIA, Dr. Gottlieb has made significant contributions to HIV/AIDS research and shown steadfast advocacy for those living with HIV throughout his long career.

In addition to honoring GAIN, Rev. Frannie Hall Kieschnick, and Dr. Michael Gottlieb, these events were a wonderful opportunity for our GAIA community to come together and resulted in over **$630,000** raised for our programs.

GAIA Legacy Circle

In 2023 we received significant gifts from the estates of Dan King and Elizabeth Suna, longtime friends of GAIA who have left a legacy of service in their continued support for our work.

Thank you to our committed supporters who have designated GAIA in their estate plans:


If you have questions about adding GAIA to your will and would like to join GAIA’s Legacy Circle, please contact Cristin Klein: Cristin@gaiaglobalhealth.com | 415-461-7196.
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2023 Financials

In 2023, GAIA’s income totaled $6.4M and expenses totaled $6.4M (audited). GAIA has an annual independent audit each fiscal year. The 2023 audit report will be available at www.gaiaglobalhealth.org later in 2024.

![Income 2023 Chart]

- 70% Grants
- 17% Donations
- 10% Events
- 3% Other
- 1% Religious Organizations

![Expenses 2023 Chart]

- 83% Programs
- 17% Operations*

* Operations includes administrative, fundraising, and related staff costs.

GAIA Staff and Trustees

**Malawi Leadership Team:** Joyce Jere, Country Director • Nelson Khozomba, Program Manager • Adalireni Manyungwa Nkhata, Finance & Administration Manager • Lucy Munthali, APA Program Manager

**GAIA currently employs 138 Malawi-based staff**

**U.S. Staff:** Todd Schafer, Executive Director • Beth Geoffroy, Director of Programs & Strategic Partnerships • Molly Brostrom, Program & Grants Officer • Kelsey Fisher, Program & Grants Officer • Cristin Klein, Director of Development & Communications • Doug Bozick, Director of Finance • Shruthi Reddy, Development & Communications Officer • Hannah Graykowski, Events & Operations Coordinator

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