

05 January 2024

The Director
University of Missouri South Africa Education Program (UMSAEP)
213 Hulston Hall
Columbia
MO 65211

Dear Prof. Uphoff,

Report: 2021-2023 UMSAEP Award (M. Lembani)

This report narrates the accomplishments under the project 'Migration and Health in light of COVID-19: Lessons from Malawian Migrants in South Africa' that was awarded for the period September 2021 to December 2023.

Project summary

The funding was awarded to me in collaboration with Dr Wilson Majee (Missouri partner). The main objectives of the projects were to

- Document the experiences of Malawian migrants living in South Africa and those who had returned to Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic focusing on various aspects of their health and wellbeing such as income, food security, housing conditions, etc.
- Explore perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders in South Africa and Malawi that were directly involved in working with migrant populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Develop a graduate course on Migration and Health that will be jointly taught with the MU Collaborator, Dr. Wilson Majee.

The major outputs from these research objectives included

- Four publications
- Two international conference presentations of the study findings
- Development of a short course on Migration and Health
- Joint teaching of the short course during the SOPH Winter School programme
- Develop a scaled up-project proposal on migration and health among African migrants based on the findings of this study



Project Outputs

Publications

Although we had planned to produce four publications from this research project, the data we have analyzed has provision for 5 to 6 papers. Our first paper was published in 2023 and can be accessed on the following link [COVID-19 and Migrant Coping Strategies: A Person in Environment Perspective on Experiences of Malawian Migrants Living in South Africa](#)

The second one is under review in the Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies under Submission ID: 235186785). The title of the paper is 'COVID-19 and immigrant status: A qualitative study of Malawian immigrants living in South Africa'. The third paper is undergoing final edits and will be submitted for review. It focuses on demographic characteristics of Malawian migrants in South Africa. Data analysis for the fourth paper was completed in November when Dr. Majee was still here in South Africa. Drafting of the paper will commence early Spring 2024. It focuses on experiences of Malawian migrants that returned to Malawi during Covid-19 based on qualitative interviews. The fifth paper is at draft stage, all the data analysis is available (it focuses on the economic situation of Malawian migrants in South Africa during COVID-19. The sixth paper (if data permits) will focus on the socio-demographic information of Malawian migrants who returned to Malawi during COVID-19 and some have returned back to South Africa.

A supplementary paper was produced in collaboration with one of the key stakeholders that participated in our study and was at the center of repatriation of Malawian migrants. The paper focused on documenting the repatriation process of Malawian migrants from South Africa to Malawi. The paper was sent for publication a couple of months ago but it was not reviewed. We are now planning to send it to another journal.

International conferences

So far, we have not had any opportunity to present any of the research findings at international conferences. However, we sent an abstract to a national conference – The Public Health Association of South Africa – PHASA. Unfortunately, the paper was not accepted for presentation. However, I submitted another abstract for an organised skills building session in collaboration with other colleagues working in the field of migration and health. The topic was 'understanding and confronting health xenophobia within public health. An update on legal developments on access to health care services, and forging sensitisation strategies towards Health for All'.

We have also submitted an abstract to the SMB at the 45th Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions, Philadelphia PA. We are still waiting to hear the outcome. We are planning to send more abstracts once our other papers are ready for submission.

Development of a post graduate module

We have finalised drafting a module on Migration and Health which will be submitted to the Academic Planning Committee during the next submission period which is in March 2024. Upon approval, the module will be taught as an elective module within the School of Public health for the MPH programme as well as in the newly developed Masters in Migration and Development programme under the EMS Faculty. It will also be taught as a short course for practitioners during our winter schools.

Development of scaled up proposal

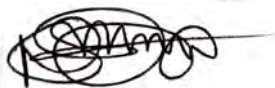
From the findings of this project, I was able to develop a scaled-up project proposal on access to health services among under five children from migrant households. The proposal was submitted to Medical Research Council (MRC) at the end of June 2023. We are still waiting for outcomes. My Missouri partner, Dr Majee and I are currently working on another joint proposal following research gaps realised from this research.

Challenges faced in this project

We had challenges in getting ethics approval in Malawi, it took much longer than anticipated. However, we eventually managed to get it in October 2022 when I travelled to Malawi. In addition to the delayed ethics approval, we faced challenges in identifying eligible participants as many of these migrants have returned to South Africa. The few that were available, some were not willing to be interviewed. We fortunately managed to collect sufficient qualitative data. Quantitative data still remains a challenge to reach the numbers. Among the few that are available, some are unwilling to take our survey, partly due to research fatigue and also some are demanding huge sums of money in order to participate in our research because other projects pay good sums of money to participants. We have now resorted to interviewing those that have returned to South Africa to narrate their experiences while in Malawi. This exercise is expected to be finalised by end of January 2024.

Acknowledgments

I and my Missouri collaborator, Dr Majee are very grateful for the funding that was provided to us to undertake this project which has created a strong partnership between the two of us and other colleagues within UWC. We look forward for a continued collaboration based on this work and other work in future which we are planning to collaborate on in the area of migration and health and community development.



Martina Lembani
Senior Lecturer
The School of Public Health
University of the Western Cape



A WHO Collaborating Centre
for Research and Training in
Human Resources for Health