

# The Response of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission to Labour Migration from Malawi to South Africa 1889–1994: A Leaf to be Borrowed by the 21st Century African Churches

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## Abstract

This article mainly highlights what southern African Churches can learn and borrow as a leaf from the contribution of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission to labour migration from the Central Region in Malawi to South Africa between 1889 and 1994. It is argued that although push factors for labour migration were the legacy of Western economic imperialism, the Malawi government's inability to create jobs for its citizens and some Malawians' belief that migration from Malawi to South Africa was a means to fulfil their heart-felt and lifetime desire for economic opportunities, the mission played an important role in responding to labour migration. While it is understandable that the contexts of the 19th century and 21st century are different. Also, the truth that the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa supported the apartheid government, this article arguably stresses that there are important lessons the Southern African Churches may learn from the mission's response to labour migrants.

**Keywords:** Labour Migration; Response; Dutch Reformed Church Mission; Malawi; South Africa

## Methodology

This article has been written largely depending on library and archival sources. The data was collected from books and reports from the International Labour Organisation and the Ministry of Labour in Malawi and of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRCM), today the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)-Nkhoma Synod. As one of the Malawian citizens who migrated to South Africa between 2014 and 2020 in search of better-paying jobs, examining the DRCM's contribution to the response to labour

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migration in Nyasaland (today) Malawi, I have implicitly used my personal experience.  
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## Introduction

The heart of this article is how, through its missionary enterprises, the DRCM responded to, reduced, and combated the labour migration from Malawi to South Africa and what the southern African Churches can learn and borrow. What follows highlights Malawi's geo-economic, socio-economic, and religious setting that might have exacerbated the labour migration.

## Geo-Economic Setting

Lying in the south and southeast of Tanzania, the west, north and north-south of Mozambique, and the east of Zambia is a small landlocked country called Malawi [previously named Nyasaland] (Cullen 1994:9; Ross 1996:15). The country is 901 kilometres long and ranges in width from 80 to 161 kilometres and it has a total area of 118,484 square kilometres, making it the smallest countries of its neighbours in southern Africa (Douglas at. el. 2003:30). Arguably this article proposes that though Malawi's geographical location did not contribute directly to the labour migration, the country's central location in southern Africa might have made South Africa easily accessible by Malawians who believed that labour migration provided a vital economic lifeline for their families (Delius 2014: 315).

**Figure 1:** Map of Malawi and neighbouring countries



Source: Country Reports<sup>2</sup>

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1 Nyasaland, today Malawi, was part of the Central African Federation from 1953 to 1963 with present Zambia (previously Northern Rhodesia) and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) declared its independence on July 6th, 1964, and changed its name into Malawi in 1959.

2 <https://www.countryreports.org/country/Malawi/map.htm>. Accessed on 13 August 2013

Lake Malawi lies in the northeast, central east, and southeast of Malawi. The lake covers a total area of 22,490 km<sup>2</sup> and drains into the Shire River to the South; the Shire River joins the Zambezi River, which ultimately enters the Indian Ocean through Mozambique. People living in lakeshore rely solely on the lake, rivers and streams for water, transport, recreation, irrigation and fishing.<sup>3</sup> Since much of the total area is covered by water, Malawi has one of the highest population densities compared to neighbouring countries in southern Africa. The Malawi government and the private sector have failed to provide sufficient employment opportunities for citizens.

Malawi's rain-fed agricultural system remained the country's economic engine and the largest employer of its citizens. But insufficient employment opportunities and low salaries and wages turned Malawi into a primary supply of unskilled workers to neighbouring countries, including South Africa (Dinkelman et al. 2016:4). This article highlights the DRCM's response to labour migration and what southern African Churches can learn from the intervention.

Malawi's geopolitical structure is also another aspect. The structure strongly reflects its colonial heritage regions (Niboye 2002:11). The country comprises three administrative regions (the South, the Centre and the North) whose boundaries were inherited from the colonial era. Notably, the northern region has the least dense population. It is the poorest of all the regions, which has had the following implications: First, the region became the largest labour supplier in other regions within Malawi. Second, migrants from the northern districts dominated during the earlier decades of labour migration. Still, by the mid-twentieth century, the balance had shifted as more and more men (and some women) from the central and southern districts migrated to South Africa. (McCracken 2012: 256-60 c.f. Vail 1984: 23-4). However, McCracken (2012:260) observed that the Northern Region and Southern Malawi were worse off than Central Malawi. This article suggests that Malawi's administrative division into three regions has seriously affected the country's economy and labour migrants in particular. Generally speaking, both internal and external migrations were enhanced by the British colonial government that allowed people to move to South African gold mines to work to pay for the imposed head taxes (c.f. Niboye 2002:11). Second, to many people, migratory labour was a scapegoat for many evils in their communities (Pretorius 1972:22).

Now, it can preliminarily be concluded that push factors for labour migrations included Malawians' long tradition of cross-border labour migration, which was facilitated partly by the country's central location, long migrancy history, shifting cultivation, rain-fed agricultural system, high unemployment rate, and foreign imperial economic policies.

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3 [https://web.mit.edu/africantech/www/articles/Lake\\_Malawi.html](https://web.mit.edu/africantech/www/articles/Lake_Malawi.html), Accessed on on 13 July 2023

## Social-Economic Setting

We need to examine Malawi's socio-economic setting to understand how the DRCM contributed to the response to labour migration. Malawi is where the following Bantu tribes and races met: Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tumbuka, Tonga, Nkhonde Chewa/Maravi, Ngoni, white and other people from Europe (in particular) Scotland), America, South Africa and Asia (Labuschagne, 2003: 2, 3). But the country's original inhabitants, the *Abathwa*, *Akafula*, or *Mwandionerakuti*, earned a living by hunting, fishing, and gathering (Le Maitre et al. 2003:106). The *Akafula* lived in caves and trees near lakes and rivers, and their main activities were fishing, root and fruit gathering and hunting. They did not have well-organised political or economic structures. They lived a scattered life in different parts of the country. Their supremacy in Malawi lasted around 1500 with the arrival of the mentioned tribes from different neighbouring countries (c.f. Nervi 1999: 44). This article only focuses on the Chewa/ Maravi and the Ngoni peoples because they have been the majority of the membership of the DRCM [today the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod] (Zeze, 2012:16).

Popularly known as Maravi, Nyanja or Mang'anja, the Chewa people migrated from north-west Ulaba, the Katanga Province of Zaire [today The Democratic Republic of Congo] (Zeze, 2012:33) . Their migration was the result of population pressure, accusations of witchcraft and discrimination in the appointment of people to high offices and scarcity of land for settlement, farming and grazing of farm animals (Phiri, 2004:13). In Malawi, the Chewa settled in different districts in Central Region and some parts of the Southern Region, Mozambique and eastern part of the present Zambia (Pachai, 1974:4). Sawasawa wrote:

The Maravi are commonly believed to have immigrated to Malawi in search of a better land for farming, pasture for grazing their cattle and a new peaceful settlement. It is also believed that upon arrival in the territory now called Malawi, these people lived in villages and practised a mixed type of economy. The Maravi were farmers and always looked for new lands to cultivate and rear animals (Sawasawa, 2014:237).

Three things come to the fore from these remarks: First, the Maravi had a mixed economic system, i.e. growing of crops and rearing of farm animals and production of iron implements (Phiri, 2004:36). Second, the Chewa farming system and production and production of iron implements depended on local labour force (Sawasawa, 2014:237). It may be preliminarily concluded that when the DRCM established departments, it employed people with skills and experience in farming and producing iron implements (c.f. Banda 2019:2).

The other group of settlers who entered Malawi were the Ngoni, who originated from South Africa in the 19th century. They were driven by the necessity of searching for more land (Sawasawa, 2014:237). According to Phiri (2004:79), the Ngoni migration was also a result of internal conflicts. The Ngoni people are traditionally warriors. They

fought many wars wherever they went to either gain passage or get free food from their captives (Sawasawa 2014:237). Later, Sawasawa argues:

Although the Ngoni were also agriculturalists like the Maravi, they concentrated on animal farming. They kept large herds of cattle, something that played a great role in their economy. Crop and animal husbandry requires vast land and good water supply for both people and animals. .... By the time the Maravi and the Ngoni people migrated to Malawi, the right to own land as a property was automatically vested in those who had political, economic, or religious powers (Sawasawa 2014:237).

All the remarks and the entire discussion highlight the socioeconomic background that exacerbated the migration groups of people from South African countries to Malawi (Zeze 2012:36). Interestingly, both the Chewa and Ngoni people had similar economic systems. Shillington writes:

...whole community was a labour unit engaged directly in economic processes, and largely in control of it. Its own inner organisational structure, men and women, children and parents, enjoyed a productive relationship.... Labour was divided for cattle-breeding or agricultural farming (Shillington 1989:197).

He continues:

Adult men were responsible for the building of houses, the clearing of new lands, herding of cattle. Hunting, fishing, and the care of domestic animals. The men thus took charge of development and, above all, of defence. On the other hand, women were active in agriculture, planting seeds, weeding, and harvesting (Shillington 1989:197).

Before colonialism, Malawians had their own methods of farming. They could choose suitable plots for settlement, cultivation, and animal farming and provide labour without personnel. Sawasawa comments:

Work or labour in pre-colonial Malawi had always been a humanitarian issue, thus, it was through work that people could come together and help each other for a common good. It was not only considered as an activity, but it had also both a social and a spiritual dimension (Sawasawa 2014:237).

The Chewa and Ngoni's socioeconomic environment changed with the arrival of Europeans, who brought a combination of Christianity, commerce, and education (Ncosazana 1998:45). They aimed to motivate Malawians to produce raw materials that they could trade with Europe (Banda 2019Phiri 2004). Through this, Malawi was spotted as a potential exporter of raw materials and cheap labour.

The labour system during the colonial and post-colonial periods was marred with injustices. Labourers were obtained through tribal wars. Though the labourers were provided with food, they were deprived of their liberty and their right to own land as property and better wages (Sawasawa, 2014:237). After the abolishment of the slave

trade, labourers were considered property (objects) and items for gains. This might have been why Malawians who migrated to other countries used to accept low wages or salaries without objections.

## Political-Economic Setting

Before 1800, various tribes had extended their political powers through tribal wars. Trade was carried out within their communities using the barter system. With the coming of the Arabs and Portuguese, Malawi entered into a new political-economic system. They traded with local chiefs and kings in elephant tusks, rhino horns and slaves in exchange for guns, calico, beads and other European products.

Between 1891 and 1964, Malawians' economic activities were mainly left in the hands of European planters, traders and administrators, while education, agriculture and health on the other hands were left in the hands of European missionaries, as Jere narrates:

Land and labour policies were formulated to serve the interest of the Europeans. The needs of Africans were largely ignored. This shows that the colonial government brought capitalism to Malawi. Even in the very early days of its inception, the natives had already felt its exploitative nature (Jere, 2006:6).

In addition, most local chiefs sold portions of fertile land to the European farmers and settlers at a very cheap price (Phakati, 2000:1).. They sold pieces of the tribal land, which they had no right. Still, they assumed they had the right, and none of their people initially objected to their chiefs, who pocketed the proceeds from selling their ancestors' land. Besides this, in 1892, the colonial government introduced the poll or hut tax of African tax per homestead. Those who could not pay were forced to work for three months on farms in the Southern region. Estate owners took advantage of the arrangement by forcing the locals to work for more hours and more days than the value of the tax (Phakati, 2000:1). Phiri (2004:263) cited as an example the incident in which for two months, the tenant was compelled to work for his landlord without pay. The tenant worked for the landlord for a third month, who paid him what he thought he was worth. Such economic practices forced people to leave their families and villages for neighbouring counties where they could find jobs. Similarly, the Land Act of 1967 favoured estate owners at the disadvantage of the rural masses because many rural farmers were not allowed to benefit from cash crops (Jere, 2006:2).

Before 1994, education, agriculture, health, and economic development remained in the hands of the post-government and the ruling elite (Jere, 2006:2). To control the prices of commodities, the government-owned many companies under Press Corporations. As a result, men moved to work on the estates elsewhere within Malawi, but their annual income was still lower than what they could earn in other southern African countries. Against this background, Malawi's labour migration trends can be traced and understood within the political-economic setting.

## Religio-Ecclesial Setting

Malawi's religious setting is important in addressing how the DRCM contributed to the response to labour migration. We begin the discussion by highlighting how the African Traditional Religions (ATR) contributed to the phenomenon. According to Ajibade in ATR, work is one of the divine means of fulfilling man's existence because the distinctive human capacity for self-expression and self-realisation is embedded in it.<sup>4</sup> In this, work is a compulsory exercise for every person because it is through work that people earn a living and gain a reputation in communities.<sup>5</sup> Laziness in this regard was strongly condemned. Some community leaders used to expel lazy people from communities.<sup>6</sup>

According to ATR, work at a household level is divided according to age and sexability. Old people were responsible for teaching young people different labour-related activities. Young girls were involved in activities such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing, etc., while boys were involved in hunting, building huts, fishing, etc. In this case, work was understood as something done to provide basic needs for people.<sup>7</sup>

Like in any traditional African society, in Malawi, even in the 20th century, there was no designed formal payment for labour except a small token of appreciation or gratitude that would be given to workers. Those who provided labour would only be given a cup of local beer, good food, tobacco cigarettes, etc., for the work done during the day. Based on the assumption, this article suggests that many Malawians who migrated to South Africa might have been driven by the ATR's tradition and acceptance of low wages or salaries.

The history of the relationship between the Church and labour migration can be traced back to Scottish Missionaries' Christianity, Civilization, and Commerce, commonly known as Three Cs (Monk 1860:24; (Nkosazana 1998:45). It was David Livingstone who passionately advocated Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization popularly in Malawi as the best solution to the country's social, moral, political and employment problems (Bolink 1967:5).

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4 <https://www.academia.edu/6139384/africantraditional-work-ethics-and-the-challenges-of-decent-work-agenda>, Accessed on 22 June 2023

5 <https://docplayer.net/228153623-Patterns-of-work-in-african-traditional-society-characteristics-of-work-in-a-t-s.html>, Accessed on 23 June 2023

6 <https://www.academia.edu/6139384/africantraditional-work-ethics-and-the-challenges-of-decent-work-agenda> , Accessed on 22 June 2023

7 <https://www.academia.edu/6139384/african-traditional-work-ethics-and-the-challenges-of-decent-work-agenda>, Accessed on 23 June 2023



**Figure 2:** Picture of David Livingstone<sup>8</sup>

Commenting on Livingstone's 3 Cs theory, Nkosazana said:

Livingstone believed that the development of agriculture and industry would raise people's standards of living and eventually overcome their greatest enemy, "slavery... Livingstone believed that Christianity, commerce and civilisation had interests in common, and could therefore unashamedly support one another (Nkosazana 1998:45).

Livingstone was also quoted saying:

Christianity would provide principles for moral guidance, while legitimate commerce and education would encourage Africans to produce their own goods from their fertile soil to trade with Europeans. All this, according to Livingstone needed a good system of government, to ensure civil rights for the people (Nkosazana 1998:45).

The three Cs model led to the establishment of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (today Anglican Church), Blantyre Mission (today Blantyre Synod of the CCAP), Livingstonia Mission (today Livingstonia Synod) and indirectly, the founding of the DRCM (today the CCAP-Nkhoma Synod), Roman Catholic Church. The three Cs have also been embodied in various missionary enterprises, such as educational, medical, agricultural, and manufacturing industries.<sup>9</sup> This article, however, considers the implementation of the three Cs by the DRCM as a response to labour migration from the Central Region in Malawi to South Africa between 1889 and 1994.

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8 [https://library.princeton.edu/visual\\_materials/maps/websites/africa/livingstone/livingstone-portrait.jpg](https://library.princeton.edu/visual_materials/maps/websites/africa/livingstone/livingstone-portrait.jpg), Accessed on 27 June 2023

9 Compare <https://montfortmediamw.org/2020/11/03/the-church-and-social-economic-development-in-malawi>, Accessed on 30 June 2023



## Malawi-South Africa Labour Migrancy from a Historical Perspective

The labour migration from Malawi to South Africa dates back to the 1880s<sup>10</sup> following the establishment of diamond and gold<sup>11</sup> mines in South Africa and Zimbabwe. In the period up to 1994, this migration took either a formal or informal nature. However, according to Boeder:

The first Malawians to head south to work were four freed slaves who went to Cape Town in the mid-1860s as servants for Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) missionaries) Scattered Nyasas continued to trickle southwards as South African diamond and gold mines opened up and Europeans began to exploit Rhodesia's mineral and agricultural wealth. Although colonial administrative regulations in fact forced Africans to emigrate to earn tax money, little was done by government until after 1935 to protect the rights, health and well-being of migrant workers and their families or to control the manpower flow. (Boeder 1984:17).

A few comments should be made from these remarks. First, though the names of the first four Malawians who travelled to South Africa on the ticket of the UMCA are unknown, it is evident that for many reasons, the trajectory of undocumented foreign nationals travelling to other countries has continued even during the post-apartheid era. Second, South Africa was not the only destination for migrant workers. Third, there are several reasons why people leave their countries for foreign countries. Fourth, every civil government is responsible for providing employment opportunities and foreign investors who can create jobs for their citizens. Fifth, the involvement of the Church in labour migration activities denotes that Southern Africa Churches have a role to play in either promoting or combating labour migration. The DRCM in this article is just a case study of the contribution of the Church to the response to labour migration.

The recruitment of labourers to South Africa became institutionalised, particularly when the South African mining industry established a network of recruiting stations in Malawi. These stations were run by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Agency (WNLA, or WENELA), the mining industry's centralised labour recruitment organisation that coordinated all recruitment activities. Crush et al. comment:

WENELA went to the extent of launching an air service for its Nyasa labour recruits from Chileka Airport in Blantyre to Johannesburg in the 1950s which WNLA was initially banned from recruiting Nyasas in 1913 due to high death rates from pneumonia and tuberculosis suffered by tropical miners from north of Beitbridge (Crush et al. 1991:40).

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10 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-modern-african-studies/article/abs/return-of-malawian-labour-from-south-africa-and-zimbabwe>, Accessed on 30 June 2023

11 <https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/perspectives-of-labour-migration-from-mzimba-district-malawi-to-south-africa> Accessed on 30 June 2023

On the one hand, the centralised and highly bureaucratic procedure of recruiting foreign labour enabled the mines to maintain a uniform wage across the industry, thereby eliminating labour competition. On the other hand, the government agreed to deliver recruits to WENELA depots throughout the country, charging the South Africans one rand for each worker.

The Malawi government benefited from this system because WENELA agreements required mines to defer a large fraction of workers' pay and send it directly to Malawi, where workers could withdraw their wages upon return. In this way, the government could be certain that a large share of income earned abroad was spent in Malawi and that labour resources would not be lost to the country.

Before 1967, Malawi's post-colonial government and WENELA restricted the number of workers WENELA could recruit. These restrictions were lobbied for by European plantation owners in Malawi to protect access to a cheap source of labour (Paton 1995: 46) and by the Zimbabwean government, which was concerned that its enterprises could not compete with South African mine wages. In the same year, the government signed a new agreement with WENELA, removing all quotas on recruitment of Malawians.

The agreement also permitted WENELA to withhold two-thirds of miner wages until the miners returned to Malawi to ensure that at least two-thirds of earnings were returned to sending communities. The same year, the Malawi government and WENELA restricted the number of workers the latter could recruit. These restrictions were lobbied for by European plantation owners in Malawi to protect access to a cheap source of labour (Paton 1995:46).

In 1967, the Malawi government signed a new agreement with WENELA, removing all quotas for recruiting workers. The agreement also permitted WENELA to withhold two-thirds of miner wages until the miners returned to Malawi to ensure that at least two-thirds of earnings were returned to sending communities. Dinkelman noted:

By the late 1970s, one in five Malawian men had worked abroad, typically on a series of two-year labour contracts that diverted up to two thirds of earnings – called deferred pay – to be paid upon return to Malawi (Dinkelman et.al 2016:3).

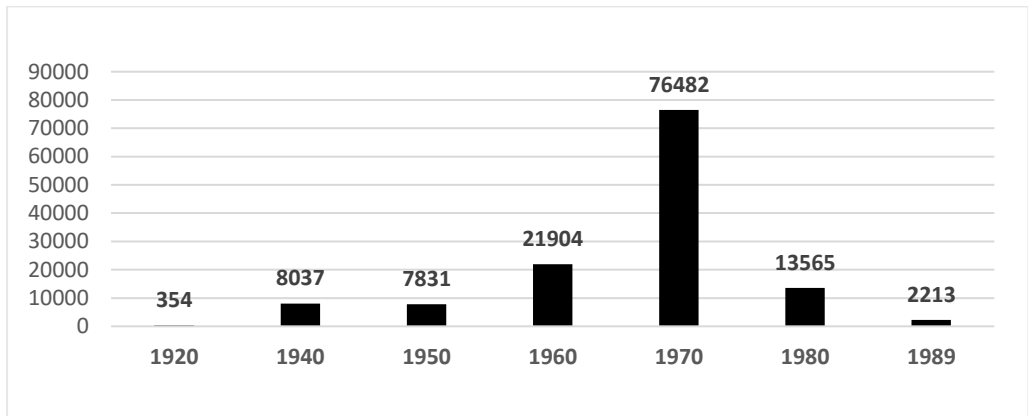
He also argued:

These men could not choose when to return, nor could they choose the amount of deferred pay to send. By entering into an institutionalized system of circular labor migration, the Malawian government could be certain that a large share of incomes earned abroad would return home, and that labor resources would not be forever lost (Dinkelman et al. 2016:3).

The labour expansion came to an abrupt halt in April 1974 when a WENELA plane transporting miners back to Malawi crashed, and 74 miners were killed on the spot. In response, the Malawi government rescinded the labour agreement, banned all recruiting by WENELA and recalled all Malawian migrant workers' homes.

In 1977, WENELA recruiters were allowed to restart operations in Malawi. However, employment levels for Malawians never returned as the South African mines had turned their strategy of recruitment inwards, substituting local labour for what they saw as unreliable foreign supplies (Crush et al. 1991:129).

**Figure 3:** Number of Malawians employed in South African mines from 1920 to 1989



Source: International Labour Organization report of 1998

The results of the chart above show the following things: First, Malawians have historically migrated both to the country's urban areas and other Southern African countries, especially South Africa, in search of economic opportunities. Second, although according to the findings of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as early as 1920, Malawian workers were already in South African mines, these numbers rose sharply from the 1960s and peaked in 1970 when a total of 76,482 Malawians were working in South Africa under the bilateral contract system; by 1989, the number had dropped to 2,213. The reasons for the sharp decrease in people going to South Africa before 1994 are reported as follows:

In March 1988 the South African mining industry stopped the country's tradition of recruiting workers from Malawi. The official reason was that over the previous two years a considerable number of Malawians recruits had tested HIV/AIDS positives (Jeeves and (Yuldelman 1991:120)

However, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the steep decline was the result of false accusations (IOM, 2006:2). Despite this, unsanctioned

migration continued, apparently because many Malawians had social, economic, and religious networks created by those who went earlier to South Africa.

## Stimuli for Migratory Labour from Malawi to South Africa

Although motives for labour migration from Malawi to South Africa varied from one person to another and from one government to another, it is observed that many factors in Malawi have exacerbated labour migration. The main factor was probably the Malawi government's inability to create an environment that could provide employment opportunities for its citizens (Banda, 2019:40). Affirming this, Else (2001:42) explains, "Nyasaland's most significant export was manual labour because there was insufficient employment to cater for the population (Dinkelman et al. 2016:3). Other factors included lack of markets for rural agricultural production and the Malawi government's inability to extract valuable mineral resources to take up the potential labour force (c.f. Malawi government Blue pages 1973:16). Dinkelman observed:

Average annual earnings on local estates were K94.4 in 1968, about 70% of what a returning migrant received in 1969. These wages rose to K112 in 1973 and to K126.80 in 1974, but still represented only 37% of a migrant's deferred pay in that year...due to faster growth in mine wages (Dinkelman 2016:9).

Later, he concluded:

Despite the growth of the estate sector immediately after independence, many men continued to seek employment with Wenela because of low relative wages in agriculture, challenges associated with being a visiting tenant, and the decline of the smallholding sector (Dinkelman 2016:9).

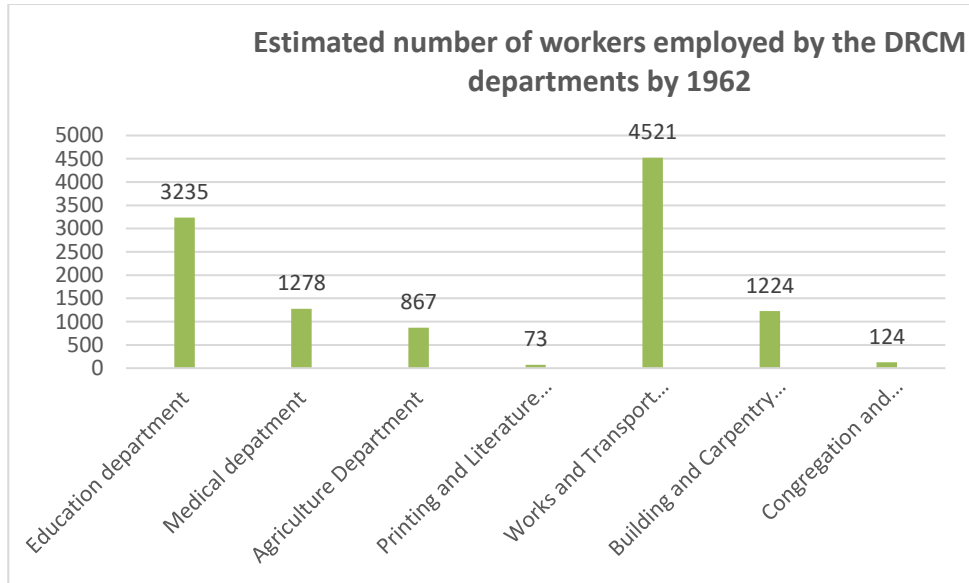
As already alluded, the thangata system, which prompted the white farmers to extract labour in exchange for the right to reside on the estate, also exacerbated the labour migration. According to Banda (2019:40), labour migration resulted from unemployment, underemployment, low wages, poor working conditions, and no economic opportunities. Migrants concerned with their improvement choose rationally the destination country that would benefit them most economically. Perhaps one of the important questions is how Malawian churches contributed to the response to labour migration. This article used the DRCM as a case study to answer this question.

## The DRCM's Contribution to the Labour Migration Response

Taking its incentives from the teaching of Jesus Christ, since its establishment in Malawi in 1889, the DRCM realised that in addressing spiritual problems, every Malawian should not be treated as an individual but as a person rooted in the social, political, and economic situation (Pauw, 2016:107). As such, not only did the approach to mission work concern the spiritual and Christian character formation and the founding of local churches but also the provision of auxiliary services such as education, medical,

agricultural, industrial and literacy activities, which, according to this article became a means of combating labour migration (c.f. Bolink 1967:92).

The mission saw the verbal proclamation of the Word of God as its primary task, and the provision of social and economic services was related to and part of this task (Pauw, 2016:107). Thus, the services' provisions had value and meaning in so far as they explained, concretised, and put emphasis on the verbal proclamation of the gospel as well as a response to labour migration.



Source: The reports of the General Administrative Committee<sup>12</sup>

The graph above shows how the DRCM, through its departments, contributed to the response to labour migration. The works and transport department was the largest employer, followed by the Department of Education, and the medical and building and Carpentry departments, respectively, came third. The mission also provided temporary and permanent employment to European and Malawian citizens. Though the graph does not show the distinction between European and local employees, the mission created jobs for those who might have migrated to other countries.

## Education Department

The DRCM, following the example of the Livingstonia Mission regarding the importance of education, immediately after the establishment of the first mission work at Mvera, opened the station school with 22 learners and with Rev. AC Murray, Rev.

<sup>12</sup> From the reports of the medical, education, works and transport, Printing press and Literature, 1962. These reports are found in the records of the Nkhoma Museum, Nkhoma, Malawi.

TCB Vlok and Mr. Tomani, a graduate who was trained of Cape Maclear as the first teachers. By 1897, the school had an enrolment of 400 learners. Commenting on the same, Smit observed:

The largest of all the endeavours of the mission was its educational programme. A network of village schools called outposts was started and rapidly expanded. These village schools were staffed by teachers-evangelists (Smit, 1988:84).

He continues:

By 1914, there were 750 village schools with 66700 pupils and 1400 teachers. Those schools were supported by individuals and congregations in South Africa. The schools were regularly visited by a missionary inspectors (Smit, 1988:84).

As the number of learners rose to 49605 by 1929, the number of teachers employed by the DRCM's Department of Education also reached 7196.<sup>13</sup> The high enrollment percentage led to the number of teachers, excluding that of the support staff, rising to 3673 by 1939, 7196 by 1955, 14345 by 1965 and 23456 by 1975.<sup>14</sup> The DRCM trained its teachers at Nkhoma and employed more teachers than any other mission in the country (c.f. Pauw, 2016:119).

Based on the data above, this article argues that the recruitment of teachers and other support staff by the Department of Education should be seen as an intervention by the Church to prevent labour migration not only in South Africa but also in neighbouring countries. At the same time, the current church and other churches should embark on various interventions, such as opening schools, colleges and universities that can create more job opportunities for people from all walks of life rather than only for church members.

## Medical department

Though for the DRCM, medical practice was not a primary means of promoting growth of mission work and of building up church, it provided job opportunities for those employed as medical orderlies, midwiferies, nurses and general staff at mission station-medical rooms established in the following sequence: Mvera (1889), Nkhoma (1906), Mlanda 1901, Mphunzi 1903, Malingunde (1907), Malembo (1907), Chinthembwe (1909), Mchinji (1914), Dzenza (1921) and Kasungu [1923] (Smit, 1988:91,153 c.f. Pauw, 2016:145). Writing on the same, Pauw argued:

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13 The annual reports to the Nkhoma Presbytery meeting of 1939 and Nkhoma Synod meetings of 1955, 1965 and 1975.

14 The annual reports to the Nkhoma Presbytery meeting of 1939 and Nkhoma Synod meetings of 1955, 1965 and 1975.

Although the aspect of mission work is of less direct significance for the growth and life of the Church, it was an important factor in the general development of the people. As a means of by which people could be brought into contact with the gospel, it served the additional function of an evangelizing agent (Pauw, 2016:143).

He went on:

Not only the Christian atmosphere in a Mission, or Church hospitals, but also personal contact between patients and Christian staff as well as various ways of directly conveying the Christian message to patient made the medical work part of the evangelizing endeavours of the mission (Pauw, 2016:143,144).

In the early stage, only ordained missionaries who had undertaken a six-month-long training course in medicine either in Edinburgh or at Livingstone College, London, in addition to their normal theological studies, were medical practitioners. Smit observed:

These ordained missionaries, trained as medical missionaries, played an important part in treating the indigenous people, their families and fellow missionaries on the stations where they were stationed (Smit, 1988:93).

The DRCM acquired the first full-time medical doctor, A.W. Murray, in 1900. However, it was impossible for him to provide medical care to all people under the DRCM's jurisdiction. The medical doctor was only called for serious illnesses when ordained medical missionaries could not cope (Smit, 1988:94, 95, 113). It was the duty of the ordained missionary wives, especially those who received short courses in medicine (Smit, 1988:94, 95).

During 1903, Dr. W.A. Murray started with the training of the class 1 nurse or dressers. These were Africans who were merely trained in the dressing of wounds and the handing out of medicine. The training lasted for six months. No special courses was drawn as everything was taught practically. They learnt from the doctor, trained nurse or trained dresser with whom they worked (Smit, 1988:136,137).

After their training, the nurses were posted to various mission station clinics and health centres to assist missionaries responsible for medical work.<sup>15</sup> They provided basic care and helped spread the message of hope.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, they took turns praying in the clinics, health centres, hospitals and medical rooms where they were employed. The midwives were trained to assist women during deliveries and even conduct normal deliveries. When more mission nurses joined the DRCM in 1910, the nurses were placed at different mission stations to be in charge of the medical work, assisted by the dressers.

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15 Sarai Msumwa also better known as Sara Lingodzi Nabanda was one of the first group of 19 converts baptized in the DRCM and one of the first boarders at the Girls Boarding school at Mvera, became a very practical and efficient nurse with a good sense of humour.

16 Report of the Second General Missionary Council of the DRCM 1904:21, 22.

In 1915, the main centre of the medical department was transferred to Nkhoma, where there was a well-equipped hospital and a nurses' training school. Towards 1959, when the Malawi government was taking more and more responsibilities, the DRCM closed many of the mission station medical rooms and elevated the following clinics to rural health centres: Mvera, Malembo, Mlanda, Chinthembe, Chigodi, Malingunde, Mphunzi and Dzenza.<sup>17</sup> The medical department had employed 545 workers by 1942, 573 workers by 1952, 676 by 1962, 769 by 1972, 891 by 1982 and 713 by 1992.<sup>18</sup>

Though the data above does not show the number of European workers the health sector employed, what may come to the fore is that the sector had created job opportunities for Malawians, those who would have migrated for well-paid work in South Africa and other countries in southern Africa. This article suggests that Christian churches in southern Africa must help governments create jobs for citizens, thereby presenting the migration of people seeking employment elsewhere (Pauw, 2016:184,185).

### Agricultural and Industrial Training Departments

The DRCM established agriculture and industrial training departments to serve as an evangelising agent (Pauw, 2016:183). People were trained to grow cash crops such as coffee, cotton, wheat, and a larger variety of fruit trees, especially peaches, apples, plums, oranges, guavas, nectarines, and pawpaw. On the same, Pauw commented:

What further prompted the Mission was... the fact that they found it necessary to teach people such skills and crafts in agriculture and crafts as would enable them to pay taxes and provide in their daily needs without necessarily having to leave their homes to work as migrants (Pauw, 2016:183,184).

He adds:

These included such matters as fighting and overcoming indolence, preventing large numbers of people from going to the mines in South rather than working in their own country, ennobling and civilizing people which also contributing to the general development of the individual and preventing the negative influence migrants brought with them which tended to unsettle and uproot. The overall effect would be the economic uplifting of the people in general (Pauw, 2016:184).

Commenting on the same, Smit said:

Village industrials and agriculture was one of the important attempts of the DRC Mission to combat migrant labour with all its evils. Missionary farmers and teachers were appointed to teach the people agriculture and crafts like basketwork, spinning, and weaving tailoring, book making (Smit, 1988:88).

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17 Reports of the Medical department 1939, 1949, 1959, 1969, 1979, and 1989

18 Reports of the Medical department 1932, 1942, 1952, 1962, 1982 and 1992.



The two remarks by Pauw and Smit significantly affirm that the DRCM did not aim at training people who would be leaving their homes to work as migrants. It did what it could to provide employment opportunities and prevent people from going to neighbouring countries to look for employment opportunities. Writing on the same Smit, observed:

The DRC mission has a very practical outlook in teaching agriculture and crafts. Unlike the other missions, they did not teach the people such refined skills which they were unable to use in ordinary village life. The villages were able to cultivate their own crops and maintain small industries. Local markets were started to encourage trade in agricultural products and homemade crafts (Smit, 1988:88).

The founding of the Department of Christian Literature and Printing Press was another aspect of the DRCM's effort to provide jobs for Malawian nationals. Many missionaries, including medical doctors, pastors, teachers, and evangelists, participated in the writing and translation of literature in the vernacular for educational, medical, evangelistic, agricultural, and industrial purposes.

Through the Department of Works and Transport, the DRCM cleared several roads that connected mission stations, such as Mvera and Domirabay, Mvera and Kongwe, Mvera and Nkhoma, Nkhoma and Dedza, Kongwe and Ntchisi (Pauw 2016:188). The roads became modern roads (Pauw 2016:188).

In 1907, the Mission acquired its printing press, making the printing department one of the most successful. Besides supplying all the needs of the Mission and other missions, as Smit (1988:88) reported, "The press gave employment to many people and also trained printers."

Instead of training people solely for salaried employment in the European sector within or outside Malawi, the DRCM believed that its mission work was to enable trainees to enter the services of its departments or to set up businesses for themselves in their respective villages<sup>19</sup> (Pauw, 2016:151). However, these were in particular cases of carpentry, bricklaying and farming. W.H Murray was quoted illustrating the DRCM's policy on education:

We do not turn skilled artisans that is not our object. We would far rather see one of our boys setting up for himself as a carpenter in his own village and turn out simple doors, windows, tables, bedsteads, etc., for sale to his neighbour, gradually rising in the scale of civilization, than have him enter into the employment of a European (Pauw, 2016:150).

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19 See for example reports of the General Mission Committee to the Synod of the DRC. Acta 1919:32, 1924:70.

The report of the Education Department of the Nyasaland Protectorate for 1943 indicated that out of a total of 239 learners who had enrolled at Nkhoma mission schools from 1933 to 1939, were serving as teachers in the mission schools, 58 setting up shops and businesses in their respective villages, 27 in military service, 18 were clerks, 12 still at school, 26 were variously occupied, and 66 were employed in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Pauw, 2016:184ff c.f. McCracken, 1977:141,293).

The statistics above affirm the proposition that southern African churches have the potential to proclaim the gospel and, more importantly, create jobs for the citizens of the countries where they operate. Second, while realising the importance of globalisation, churches can establish academic institutions that provide transferable skills so that graduates may make a living in their villages, towns, and cities.

## Conclusion

This article has answered the following questions: How did the DRCM contribute to the Response to Labour Migration from Malawi to South Africa from 1889 to 1994? What can 21st-century African Churches learn from the way the DRCM responded to labour migration? The following have been the answers: First, the DRCM contributed to the response to labour migration by establishing medical, agricultural and industrial work as auxiliary departments, eventually creating employment opportunities for those who could have migrated to other countries to look for the same jobs. Second, training local people on better methods of farming, introducing cash crops, and establishing viable village industries and crafts might have enabled some individuals to make a living in their villages and towns. Third, the involvement of the church in social and economic development is a lesson to be learned by many Southern African churches. However, the DRC's policy of not providing higher (sophisticated education) to the indigenous people, as well as its unqualified support of the apartheid regime in South Africa, is a serious warning to Southern African churches.

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