For the past few months we have been working with our colleagues to prepare Malawi’s antiretroviral treatment (ART) scale-up plan for 2006–0. This poor landlocked country is gripped by a serious HIV epidemic. With a population of almost 12 million, Malawi has an HIV/AIDS burden the same size as that of the USA; nearly 1 million people are infected with HIV. There are about 100 000 new HIV infections and 90 000 AIDS-related deaths per year, and an estimated 170 000 HIV-infected patients need ART. Every year an additional 90 000 HIV-infected patients become eligible for ART as their immune systems become further compromised by the virus.