For the international office, 2019 was a year in which the efforts and endeavours of our small Netherlands based team continued to be focused towards the achievement of our key outcomes and deliverables outlined in the 2017-2020 Strategic Outlook, which includes the 2019 targets set out across our five objectives.

To this end, we continued to place particular emphasis on achieving long term sustainability across the organisation, whilst maintaining quality and providing strategic, technical and communications input and support for the Eastern and Southern African regions.

Throughout the year we’ve made significant strides on the implementation of our matrix management model, which has already begun to accelerate our institutional growth, enhance our governance and strengthen leadership and team engagement across the organisation. Our matrix structure is built on an organisation wide model, to facilitate smart scaling, as well as quality improvement, monitoring, evaluation and research activities cross regionally, as well as on a country and clinic level.

Matrix management conference calls are taking place on a regular basis, and in June and November, two face-to-face meetings were held in Mombasa, during which the group identified building blocks to strengthen North Star’s institutional capacities and capabilities, as well as drive efficiency, quality and impact across the organisation.

Amongst the topics discussed were plans for the final preparation phases of the revenue generation clinic in South Africa ahead of its opening in March 2020, as well as mechanisms for enabling efficient data management, resource mobilisation, quality and the sharing of best practice across the organisation.
We also initiated the finance matrix block with a three day meeting in April, which took place in Utrecht involving the Finance Managers from our Eastern and Southern regions, together with financial experts from Sumerian Partners, which was followed up by a meeting in Nairobi in May. In addition, we also established our HR matrix block, with members regularly meeting via conference calls to discuss HR related policies and procedures.

As part of our partnership with Johnson & Johnson (J&J) and their Global Community Impact programme, North Star was again the beneficiary of receiving a J&J secondee for a six month period. This year we welcomed Senior Sales Manager, Jette Zoëga from Denmark, who was assigned to develop and facilitate a data awareness training programme for all staff. The primary objective was to further strengthen the level of data awareness across the board, especially for frontline workers, whilst ultimately enhancing data quality throughout the organisation.

This would in turn increase our organisation’s data processing proficiency and prepare staff for the introduction of our new Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system. Furthermore, the programme was also designed to empower and equip staff with the necessary skill sets and knowledge, to ensure that going forward, accurate data would be captured and processed as a result of the introduction of standardised data operating procedures.

The training was segmented into two tiers, the first of which was a four day session in July, involving 45 of our staff members, including all site coordinators and clinicians, together with representatives from our regional and international offices. This was followed up by a ‘Train the Trainer’ session for some of the tier one participants, who subsequently co-facilitated a series of three additional data awareness sessions for a further 49 clinic staff, from both our East and Southern African regions.

Having identified and selected an EMR suitable for our cross-border requirements, which followed a rigorous procurement process, the identification of our needs and gap analysis were finalised. This enabled us to start the development phase with our developer Easy Clinic, ahead of the system being tested and subsequently rolled out in 2020.

Significant strides were also taken regarding resource mobilisation, most notably with the establishment of a new partnership with Grand Challenges Canada, who’ll be providing backing on two important projects.

The first of which will be supporting the roll-out of the EMR system across three pilot sites in three countries. The second, will comprise of a 15 month programme which commenced at the start of October, that will extend our delivery of SRHR services, through the scaling up of our Crisis Response Teams in both our Southern and East African regions.

Last year we worked with photographers and videographers Opmeer Reports, who produced a series of compelling videos and photographs featuring our clients, clinic staff and local stakeholders, which explained and depicted the impact of North Star’s work in bringing valuable healthcare access into some of the hardest to reach communities in sub-Saharan Africa. The outcome of their work can now be seen across our YouTube and other social media channels, as well as the North Star website.

In addition to their regular conference calls, our Supervisory Board met in person on two occasions in April and latterly in November. During the second of the two meetings, the baton was passed on from our outgoing Chair, Pim de Graaf, to Bernard Kadasia. In 2019 the Supervisory Board was also strengthened with two additional board members appointed, Vincent Faber and Kawien Ziedses des Plantes, bringing the Supervisory Board to a total of five members.

The achievements of the International Office can be attributed both to the dedication of the team, as well as the continued support received from our partners: Trafigura Foundation, Puma Energy Foundation, Pfizer Foundation, Grand Challenges Canada, Johnson & Johnson Corporate Citizenship Trust and Stichting Dioraphte. We’d like to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all our partners for their invaluable and ongoing support throughout 2019, which has enabled North Star to make significant progress and headway towards realising our core strategic objectives.

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Images: Opmeer Reports

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