



With the outbreak of Covid-19, a significant proportion of our focus and effort across Southern Africa was diverted to our response to the pandemic. Above all, this was to ensure the communities and vulnerable key populations we serve continued to receive access to the essential healthcare and vital medication they need. Thanks to our partners, we were able to ensure our clinics and staff were equipped and sufficiently prepared throughout the outbreak, resulting in minimal disruption to our services.

In September, we finalised the HIV fund round three contract with the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This comprised of three funding proposals through which we will manage twelve clinics across eight countries: Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The twelve sites were previously part of a larger group of 29 clinics that North Star had set up, operated and transitioned to the respective Ministries of Health across the region, as part of SADC's health systems strengthening programme.

Whilst under their watch, the service delivery package was largely focussed towards primary healthcare. However, the need to reduce HIV infections and mitigate the impact of the disease on mobile populations and affected communities across member states remains one of SADC's key priorities. Given our experience and accomplished reputation for providing quality healthcare and access to key and mobile populations such as sex workers and truck drivers in a stigma free environment, North Star was identified as the chosen partner to deliver on this mission. Whilst doing so, we will continue to work hand in hand and in close partnership with Ministries of Health throughout the region.

Following a four-month refurbishment, we reopened the doors to our Cato Ridge clinic in South Africa in March, to launch our first revenue generation pilot project. The clinic now offers an affordable fee for service model, which is designed to provide North Star with a supplementary income stream, with a view to supporting our longer-term sustainability and as a result, reduce reliability on donor subsidies. With the introduction of strict lockdown measures that kicked in just a few weeks after the reopening, client visits and the resulting income were relatively slow, however as the restrictions began to be lifted, the numbers have steadily increased.

We would like to thank the Trafigura and Puma Energy Foundations for their kind support for this project. We are also extremely grateful to MSD who have provided additional support, which has enabled us to carry out an in-depth analysis and examination on the outcomes and results from the first six months of the project.



The scaling up of our Crisis Response Team (CRT) programme, which protects sex workers from the threat of gender based violence by employing a multi sectoral approach, continued throughout the year. Gender based violence (GBV) remains prevalent across the region and in an effort to combat this unwelcome trend, earlier in the year South Africa President Ramaphosa introduced three new bills, which are designed to bring justice to GBV victims and survivors. With support from our partner Grand Challenges Canada (GCC) and additional backing from Aidsfonds, CRT activities will continue and are being rolled out at the 12 additional sites that were transferred back to North Star from SADC, as mentioned above.

In the meantime, the Bridging the Gaps project which was also supported by Aidsfonds, came to an end in December. Both North Star and Aidsfonds have been extremely pleased with the results throughout, which has also played an integral part in the success of the CRT programme. This year also marked the introduction of the HandsOff! 2 project, which Aidsfonds also supported. The initial implementation and delivery phase proved to be considerably more of a challenge than initially expected, primarily due to Covid-19. Nonetheless, having implemented a number of strategic modifications, we're extremely satisfied with its subsequent progress and have delivered a significant number of activities as a result. We are now very much looking forward to further continuing with this work in 2021.

The PEPFAR project at our Ngodwana clinic in South Africa concluded at the end of September. We were able to successfully achieve each of our targets across the project life cycle. Preparations are in place to apply for a funding extension, beginning in 2021. In addition, Sappi Southern Africa has continued to provide valuable support which has enabled us to further channel our focus towards the delivery of additional activities at the Ngodwana clinic. Furthermore, they also generously provided in-kind support to help with the implementation of our Covid-19 emergency response.

At our Inchope clinic in Mozambique we've continued our work with Amend, a road safety specialist NGO that develops, implements and evaluates evidence-based programmes to reduce road traffic injuries in low to middle income countries. Funded through the World Food Programme, the project also focussed on healthcare strengthening along the Beira Corridor as well as road safety awareness, which resulted in the introduction of ART as part of our service package at the clinic. The project ended in December, however overall it was deemed to have been a tremendous success.

We would like to also give a very special mention and heartfelt thanks to GCC, as well as the Trafigura and Puma Energy Foundations who provided us with vital support during the Covid-19 outbreak. This in turn enabled us to significantly strengthen our emergency response to the pandemic. To this end, our clinics were made Covid-19 safe and our staff were fully protected with PPE.

In addition, we trained all clinic staff on how to respond to the virus, should there be a local outbreak, whilst also recruiting a professional therapist who was on hand to provide psychosocial support should it be required.

We recognise that the coming period will not be without its challenges, with the transition of our Netherlands operations moving over to our Southern and Eastern African regions, coupled with the fact the impact of Covid-19 is lingering into 2021 too. Nonetheless, we are also optimistic that the coming period will present the chance for the Southern Region to solidify and build upon the valiant efforts of the team during the past few years.

This includes the expansion of our footprint across the region because of the additional clinics we are now managing through the SADC agreement. In addition, we are also very hopeful of a sustained period of growth at our Cato Ridge clinic, both in terms of client visits and revenue, as and when government lockdown measures are fully lifted.