

# Everything Changes Everything Stays the Same

It may seem unlikely that I would invoke a Buddhist quote, but it seems very apt when it comes to a recent constitutional change in HAI's governance. That said, I will leave Zen and the art of NGO management, there (*before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water*) but it is true to say, that nothing much will change and the transition from a traditional nine-person Foundation Board to a three-person Supervisory Board will pass almost unnoticed to the casual observer.

The old constitution was tired. It was passed into law in 2007 when HAI was a very different fish. Those who can remember that far back, and sadly I am one of them, it was to reflect the global architecture of the Dutch funded programmes, supporting regional offices. Those days are long gone, and we are correctly now driven by decolonialisation of development and localisation; grass-roots demand-driven intervention. So, when there is a call from a donor, we start with our in-country implementing partners and work upwards to the funding proposition. The current programmes on access to sexual and reproductive health are a good example of how we build that intervention from the ground up. There are exceptions, of course. Our European work, such as the impact of artificial intelligence on health and health policy is a good example.

But I digress. The truth is, the board has long operated in a supervisory role, delegating the direction, day-to-day management and leadership to the staff management team. And the board trusted the Amsterdam team, and understood they were actually quite expensive, with members scattered across the globe, coming together twice a year for strategic meetings with the management staff. Moreover, they were no longer representative of regional offices. Just as an aside, we now work with many more implementing partners in low- and middle-income countries than we ever did as a regional structure.

The board now comprises three members of the 'old' board but can have up to five members in due course. The board is led by [Cecilia Sison](#), from MeTA Philippines, who has worked with HAI for many years and brings a wealth of insight and experience. Cecilia is joined by Marc Vreeburg (treasurer) and Mellouki Cadat (member). Given that Marc and Mellouki's tenure is due to expire in 2024/5 it gives us time to carefully recruit new members.

What has changed is the overall accountability of the Foundation. Whereas before, it was the board, it is now me. The board will still sign-off on important strategic and legal items, like the accounts and budget, it is the director who carries the can if something goes horribly wrong. To be honest, I would have assumed that would always be the case, but now it is constitutional. And we will be guided by rules; both the [Supervisory Board](#) and Management Board (staff) will have regulations that demarcate our responsibilities.

We also took to opportunity to widen our remit somewhat. Access to medicines and their

rational use is and will always be front and centre and our entry point for intervention, but we have added some horizon thinking, such as climate change, which will give us more leverage in the future when funding opportunities arise, if we are constitutionally equipped to pitch.

The last board transition was massively painful, and I still bear the scars, but that was a massive transition, not only of HAI but of the 'development industry' that was driving it. This time, it is seamless. Our sister organisations are unaffected and the freedom it affords us builds on the trust established over the last decades and long may it continue.

To finish as I started, well almost, because this one is Greek philosophy: 'There is nothing permanent except change', but I would add, even if you don't notice!