

SADCAS EXPERIENCE IN REMOTE ASSESSMENTS

In an effort to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on assessments, SADCAS has introduced alternative arrangements to conduct assessment as outlined in *SADCAS AP 23-Remote Assessments-Management and Execution* published on the 1st of April 2020.

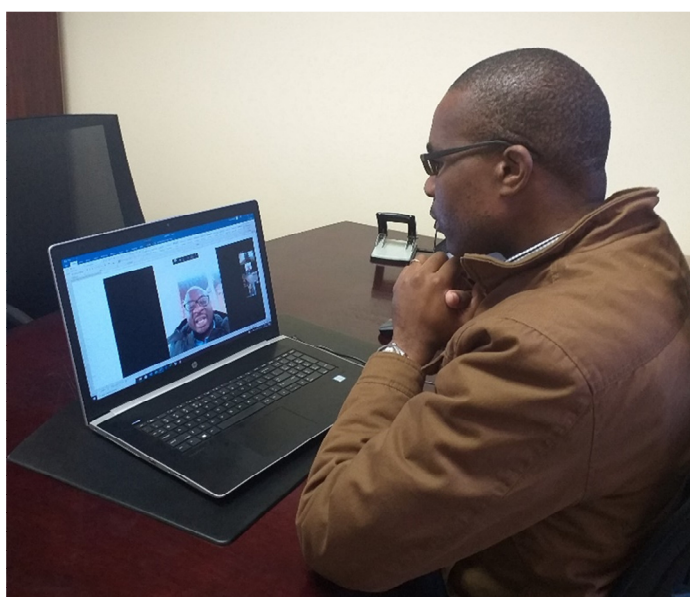
As defined in SADCAS AP 23, remote assessment means assessment of the physical location or virtual site of a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB), using electronic means. Remote assessments include assessments conducted via electronic means such as online access, video links, web conferencing, telephone interviews, desktop assessment of documents/records, etc. To date SADCAS has undertaken 5 remote assessments in 3 SADC Member States.

Prior to the assessments, SADCAS verified the prerequisite requirements for remote assessments for each CAB which included access to internet through a reliable connection by all team members as well as the CAB staff, suitable video conferencing software and confirmation of confidentiality of information that will be accessed via the internet.

The CABs were requested to submit copies of Management System Quality Manual (policies, procedures, methods and work instructions) and all records required for management system assessment, vertical assessment, witnessing of activity, evaluation of Proficiency Testing requirements and partly completed F 121- Compliance to SADCAS Policy on Metrological Traceability. The CAB fully cooperated and submitted all required documents ahead of the scheduled assessments. The documents were then forwarded to the assessment teams for review prior to the assessment.

Virtual opening meetings were conducted via Zoom and WhatsApp video calls using the standard assessment agenda and chaired by the assessment Team Leaders. During the Opening meeting, the Team Leader established the names of the personnel who will provide additional information to the assessment team, along with contact email and phone numbers to ensure constant contact during the assessment.

During the assessment, the assessment team members reviewed the records and completed applicable SADCAS Checklists. Interviews were conducted to seek clarity and additional evidence. All nonconformities identified were discussed and verified with CABs to ensure correctness of information. Virtual closing meetings were held during which the findings and Assessment Recommendation reports were presented following the standard closing meeting agenda.



Mr Xavier Mugari chairing the assessment closing meeting

The remote assessments were successfully conducted without compromising the integrity of the accreditation granted by SADCAS. All records that would be required for a typical onsite assessment were submitted to the assessment teams for review and Witnessing of Activities was conducted via video calls. The assessors were able to gather enough objective evidence to verify the competence of the CABs. The CABS cooperated fully in providing the requested records and ensuring constant contact during the remote assessments. The remote assessments were as thorough and beneficial to CAB as an on-site assessment.

Feedback received from the CABs after the assessments indicated that the facilities were satisfied with the way remote assessments were conducted. Suggestions for improvement were received from the CABs and Assessors who were involved in the remote assessments. SADCAS is committed to maintaining the integrity and credibility of the assessment process and building confidence in accreditation and shall evaluate the suggestions and implement them as appropriate.

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