

SLAB Policy on management of extraordinary events or circumstances affecting SLAB accredited bodies and their customers

1. Introduction:

In order to prevent competition among accreditation bodies and to strengthen meeting WTO/TBT objectives of facilitating international trade by removing technical barriers to trade through mutual recognition between SLAB and other accreditation bodies, SLAB accepts that there should be necessary policy for SLAB to follow when conducting conformity assessment nationally or abroad.

Every organization is continuously exposed to opportunities, challenges, and risks in a normal business environment. However, extraordinary events or circumstances beyond the control of the organization happen. In such circumstances, accreditation body and its accredited conformity assessment bodies including their clients should have a process for the proper maintenance of accreditation and as well as certification/validation/verification/inspection status in case of certified/verified/validated/inspected clients.

It is important to SLAB and its Accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) to be able to demonstrate reasonable due diligence, mutual understanding, and trust to establish an appropriate course of action in response to extraordinary events.

In the event of extraordinary situation, following consequences may be expected

- A) Accreditation body may not be able to access to accredited Conformity assessment body /branch office/ franchise or any place where witnessing activities/ assessment related activities are to be carried out by the accreditation body.
- B) Accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies may not be able to conduct audits/validations/verifications/inspections/testing/calibration/ performance of activities related to PT Programmes or prevent access to its branch offices/franchise or geographical areas where such conformity assessment activities carried out.

2. Scope:

This defines the SLAB policy on management of extraordinary events or circumstances affecting SLAB accredited bodies and their customers.

3. Responsibility:

Director/CEO / Additional Director / Technical Managers / Authorized officers
Conformity Assessment Bodies

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4. Reference:

4.1 IAF ID 3:2011 Informative Document for Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CABs and Certified Organizations

4.2 IAF MD 4:2018 IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing/Assessment Purposes

4.3 IAF ID 12:2015 - Principles on Remote Assessment

5. Definition:

5.1 Extraordinary event or circumstance:

A circumstance beyond the control of the organization, commonly referred to as “Force Majeure” or “act of God”. Examples are war, strike, riot, political instability, geopolitical tension, terrorism, crime, pandemic, flooding, earthquake, malicious computer hacking, other natural or man-made disasters.

6. SLAB Policy on Management of Extraordinary events or circumstances affecting CABs:

In an extraordinary event affecting the SLAB or accredited /applicant CAB may temporarily prevent the SLAB from carrying out planned assessments on-site. In such situation SLAB shall establish a reasonable planned course of action.

6.1 Communication by SLAB

6.1.1 If the extraordinary issue relates to the SLAB, SLAB shall communicate with its affected CABs with information on outcome of an evaluation on current and expected future situation, postponement /rescheduling /cancellation of assessment activities/ extension of validity of accreditation status, extension of transition period, extension of period for public comments on accreditation related policies.

6.1.2 As a result of extraordinary event SLAB will not be able to revise transition periods unless such transitions are revised by related international (ILAC/IAF) or regional (APAC) bodies. However, internal timelines for achieving such transitions or comments on public documents shall be reviewed by the SLAB and inform changes, if any to affected parties and publish on SLAB website.

6.2 Communication by CAB

6.2.1 If the extraordinary issue relates to an applicant or accredited CAB, CAB shall communicate to the SLAB with information on outcome of an evaluation on current and expected future situation with statistics (Ex. number of audits /testing/calibrations/inspections/validation/verifications affected due to particular event, expected period, names of certified/inspected clients, level of transition (%), etc) , postponement /rescheduling /cancellation of audits/validation/verification/inspection related activities and following specific information.

- CABs scope and extent of the affected activities/services, business areas, officers, sites and franchise and status of current activities
- CABs plan to resume the functions affected which the CAB had before the event for the current scope of accreditation

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- A justified action plan to address temporary deviation from accreditation requirements/ regulatory requirements/ CABs own procedures and procedures relevant to its own sites/branch office /outsourcing bodies and CABs plans to outsource its activities to competent CAB and also how CAB ensure business continuity.

6.2.2 In the event of an extraordinary situation which affected the CABs business continuity or not able to recuperate form the damaged caused and CAB is no longer able to offer its accredited service either completely or part and also liquidation or bankruptcy, CAB shall immediately notify to the SLAB.

7. Actions to deviations from regulatory requirements:

7.1 In the event of extraordinary event which affected to regulatory compliance by CABs or its customers (certified clients/validators/ verifiers/inspected clients) and not able to meet the requirements of regulations shall automatically result the temporary suspension of accreditation status of CAB and certification status of certified/validated/verified/inspected client. Any failure to meet the condition of suspension may result withdrawal of accreditation.

7.2 Upon receipt of communication from accredited CAB, SLAB shall initiate procedure for suspension of accreditation and similarly certification/validation/verification body /inspection body shall review changes to regulatory compliance by their clients and initiate the actions for suspension of certification status and withdrawal certification if required.

8. Events or circumstances affecting certified organizations; required actions by the Certification Body (CB):

8.1 General:

8.1.1 For each case affected by an extraordinary event or circumstance, the Certification Body (CB) will need to evaluate the risks presented to the organization and to the certification concerned.

8.1.2 In the first instance it will be necessary to evaluate the extent of any impact of the situation on the ability of the certified organization to continue to operate in accordance with the certification requirements. The CB will need to take account of the extent of the impact on the certified organization or product and to determine whether it is possible for certification to be maintained under the circumstances.

For guidance regarding the content and extent of this evaluation please refer to IAF ID 3: 2011 chapter 3 "Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting a certified organization".

8.1.3 The outcome of the review must be recorded and must be available for assessment by SLAB on demand.

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8.1.4 CBs that have to deal with an extraordinary event or circumstance that could affect SLAB accredited certificates, must inform to SLAB contact person of the existence of this event or circumstance within one month. The CB should be able to provide the following information on request of the SLAB:

- Scope and extent of the affected services and business areas and sites,
- Number of affected clients,
- When the CB will be able to function normally within the current scope of accreditation,
- Alternative assessment methods which will be applied like e.g. remote assessments (IAF MD 4) or desktop reviews of documents submitted,
- Alternative programs planned to maintain confidence in the certified client’s systems during the period that access cannot be gained,
- Planning of the re-establishment of the regular oversight activities according to CB oversight plans when the normal situation is restored.

Furthermore, the CB should inform to SLAB contact person of any cases that, taking into account projected timescales for the event, may result in a high risk to the integrity of the issued certificate concerned.

8.2 Initial certification and scope extensions:

8.2.1 Initial certification and extension of existing scopes can only be operated when the full planned audit and appraisal is possible as in such cases it is not possible to support a certification decision with existing information originating from previous oversight activities.

Therefore, during a period when due to extraordinary circumstances, normal operation and auditing is not possible, initial certification and extension of existing scopes of certification is not possible.

8.3 Surveillance activities (if applicable):

8.3.1 Surveillance activities must be completed as quickly as possible once the emergency status has been lifted and as soon as the normal situation and operation is restored. Wherever possible the surveillance must take place within the current certification year. Subsequent surveillance activities should continue in line with the original program.

8.3.2 In case of the first surveillance audit after initial certification a postponement of the audit should not exceed 6 months (18 months from date of initial certification).

8.3.3 In case of subsequent surveillance audits a postponement of the audit should not exceed 6 months.

8.3.4 Extended periods between surveillance visits as specified above may result in a need for additional surveillance visits for the remainder of the certification cycle.

8.3.5 During postponement the CB should consider other means of monitoring that may be available such as remote assessments (refer to IAF MD 4), desktop reviews of documentation submitted or other methods.

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8.4 Re-certification:

8.4.1 If based on information gathered (for guidance see also IAF ID 3: 2011 chapter 3 "Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting a certified organization"), there is sufficient documented proof to provide confidence that the certified management system is effective, the CB may consider to extend the certification for a period not exceeding 6 months beyond the original expiry date.

8.4.2 If the recertification assessment cannot be undertaken within 6 months the certificate should be suspended. In this case the regular policy of the CB in case of suspension will be applicable.

8.5 Records and information to SLAB:

The CB shall maintain full records of actions and deviations from the established certification program, together with the rationale behind decisions on actions taken. These records shall be made available for SLAB to review upon demand.

9. Events or circumstances affecting the accreditation of Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs):

9.1 General:

9.1.1 An extraordinary event affecting the CAB may temporarily prevent SLAB from carrying out planned assessments on-site. When these situations occur, SLAB and CABs shall need to establish a reasonable planned course of action.

9.1.2 Possible actions that can be considered include postponement of planned assessments or implementation of alternative assessment methods like e.g. remote assessments or desktop reviews of documents submitted.

9.1.3 Where appropriate efforts should be made to utilize another IAF/ILAC member Accreditation Body to complete the assessment on schedule before deciding to suspend or reduce of scope of accreditation.

9.2 Initial accreditation and scope extension:

During a period when due to extraordinary circumstances, normal operation and on-site assessment is not possible, initial accreditation and extension of existing scopes of accreditation is not possible.

9.3 Surveillance activities:

9.3.1 Surveillance activities must be completed as quickly as possible once the emergency status has been lifted and as soon as the normal situation and operation is restored. As SLAB conducts on-site assessments annually, postponement of the assessment should not be such that this period is exceeded.

9.3.2 Extended periods between surveillance assessments as specified above may result in a need for additional surveillance assessments for the remainder of the accreditation cycle.

9.3.3 During postponement, SLAB will consider alternative means of monitoring that may be available such as remote assessments, desktop reviews of documents submitted or other methods.

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9.4 Re-accreditation:

9.4.1 SLAB accreditation cycle is three years. Postponement of the assessment should not be such that this period is exceeded. Within this limit SLAB can consider to grant a prolongation of an existing accreditation.

9.4.2 Such a prolongation may result in a need for additional surveillance assessments for the remainder of the accreditation cycle.

9.4.3 During prolongation SLAB will consider alternative means of monitoring that may be available such as remote assessments, desktop reviews of documents submitted or other methods.

10. Breakdown of the CAB:

10.1 Temporary breakdown

In case of a temporary breakdown of the CAB, when the body or part thereof, is not able to perform any activities during a period not exceeding 6 months, it is not required to apply for voluntary suspension. In such cases the CAB is required to exercise proper control when restarting operations, e.g. regarding equipment and resources. Such a breakdown and restart may result in the need for additional assessment(s) by SLAB.

10.2 Permanent breakdown

Upon receipt of communication from CAB or any means of communication regarding permanent breakdown of a CAB (e.g. due to the inability to recuperate from an extraordinary event or circumstance that affected the CAB's business, or due to liquidation or bankruptcy), the SLAB will seek further information and validate received information prior to initiate decision making process. Actions on such situations shall be initiated according to SLAB regulations and procedures.

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