

Justice@Work

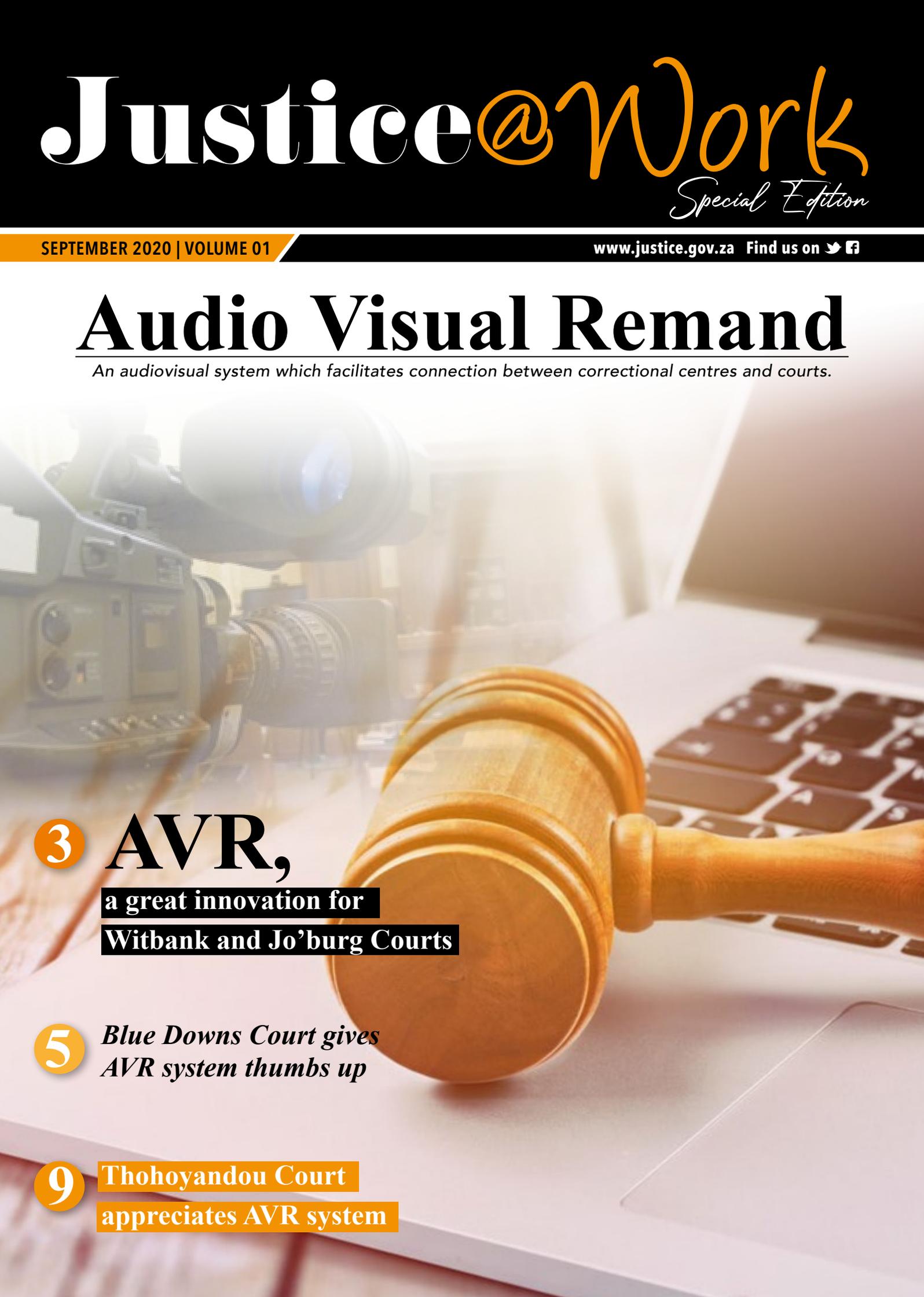
Special Edition

SEPTEMBER 2020 | VOLUME 01

www.justice.gov.za Find us on  

Audio Visual Remand

An audiovisual system which facilitates connection between correctional centres and courts.



3 **AVR,**
a great innovation for
Witbank and Jo'burg Courts

5 *Blue Downs Court gives
AVR system thumbs up*

9 **Thohoyandou Court**
appreciates AVR system



Inside

Editorial team

Editor-in-chief

Nina Bhaktawar
NBhaktawar@justice.gov.za

Editor

Nomusa Mngadi
NMngadi@justice.gov.za

News Editor

Luyanda Makapela
LMakapela@justice.gov.za

Sub-editor

Rodgers Ndhlovu
RNdhlovu@justice.gov.za

Design & Layout

Boitumelo Sekgothe
BSekgothe@justice.gov.za

Contributors

Mokgethwa Ngoepe
MNgoepe@justice.gov.za

Hlanganisa Mbatha
HMbatha@justice.gov.za

Virgilate Gwangwa
MoGwangwa@justice.gov.za

Justice@Work is an online staff newsletter of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. It aims to help staff to network, get motivated and stay informed about issues in the department.

For the latest issues and archived editions visit: <http://djini/default.aspx>

To include your event, story or questions contact:

Luyanda Makapela
LMakapela@justice.gov.za or

Rodgers Ndhlovu
RNdhlovu@justice.gov.za

Whilst the whole world has swiftly moved into the fourth industrial revolution, the Department continues gravitating towards modernisation as a possible investment to its systems which ultimately improves efficiency.

Over the years, Justice has made great strides in embracing technology and modern systems to maximise efficacy in its mandate to disburse justice services for all. During the 2016/17 financial year, the Department introduced a new administrative solution, Mojapay, to address the accounting and service delivery challenges and inadequate management and administration of Third Party Funds.

A couple of years before the launch of the Mojapay system, the Department unveiled an efficient, time and cost-saving system for the awaiting trial detainees which was piloted at a number of courts and correctional centres nationally.

Officially unveiled in 2011, the Audio Visual Remand (AVR) system allows detainees to be tried while at correctional centres through a video link to corresponding courts handling their cases. This revolutionary system has proven to be very effective in minimising the possibilities of escapes as most detainees tend to escape while in transit from a correctional centre to a court and vice-versa.

In sharing the progress on the benefits of the AVR system to date, we have put together this special edition to showcase how court officials, who are using the system, marvel at its

effectiveness, not only in saving time and minimising escapes, but also in the prevention of the spread of COVID-19.

Read more in this special edition how all the courts that spoke to *Justice@Work* admire the fact that they were able to remand cases even during level 5 of the national lockdown, all thanks to the AVR system.

We hope you will enjoy reading this special edition and please do feel free to contact us if you have any comments or queries.

Until next time,

Rodgers Ndhlovu

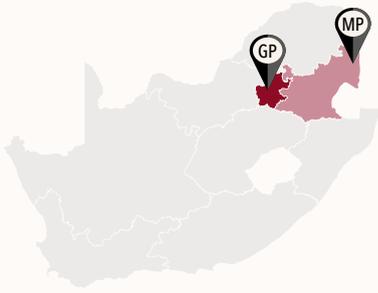
3 AVR, a great innovation for Witbank and Jo'burg Courts

5 AVR system, making life easier at New Brighton Court

6 Bluedowns Court gives AVR system thumbs up

8 AVR proves to be best project fitting in the 'new normal'

9 Thohoyandou Court appreciates AVR system



AVR, a great innovation for Witbank and Jo'burg Courts

Virgilatte Gwangwa

Audio Visual Remand (AVR) system is said to be efficient, reliable and saves time for both the Johannesburg and Witbank Magistrates' Courts. Officials from the two courts have nothing but praises for the new technology, especially during the different levels of lockdown. Officials are so content with the system, such that they are pleading with the Department to roll it out to other matters besides postponements.

Witbank Magistrate's Court Manager, Mr Thulani Mabena could not stop praising the system describing it as 'revolutionary'. Although the court had been using AVR system even prior the COVID-19 pandemic, he says it (AVR) came through for the court during the pandemic as they managed to attend to their scheduled cases even with national restricted movement during level 5.

He called for a further rollout of the AVR system to other courtrooms, saying that "COVID-19 has just opened our eyes about the importance of this system and now I wish we had it in all our courtrooms."

According to Mr Mabena, the system started as a pilot project in Witbank as it was only installed in one of their courtrooms. His wish is that the system could be extended to other matters such as bail hearings, among others. "It would really come in handy if it could be used broadly to a point where witnesses do not have to travel from far places to come to the court to testify. If they could go to their nearby court and testify from there, that would actually save us money as well," suggests Mr Mabena.

Sharing Mr Mabena's sentiments, Mr Edward Ramolefe, Assistant Director at the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court says the AVR system is the best innovation the Department has ever came up with.

Initially, explains Mr Ramolefe, one had to wait for the court orderlies going back and forth to fetch the accused persons from the holding cells, an exercise which, on its own, was time consuming. "Johannesburg Court is the largest magistrate's court countrywide, accommodating about 300 detainees coming from inside; there is a lot that goes into getting them to court. It includes prison officials having to verify each detainee's



COVID-19 has just opened our eyes about the importance of this system and now I wish we had it in all our courtrooms."



identity. That alone takes about two hours, but now with the AVR system, all of that is in the past as we have to deal with all detainees on camera as they do not have to travel," he adds.

Mr Ramolefe confirmed to *Justice @Work* that AVR system is faster; "It literally takes about a minute for the accused to appear on screen, have their matter postponed and be given another court date."

"I think rolling out of AVR will certainly bring a huge relief in the system and improve efficiency within the criminal justice chain."

As expected with every system, AVR also has its advantages and challenges. According to Mr Ramolefe, the main issue that they face - from time to time - is when the system is down. "When AVR system is offline, it means that we have to book-off the prisoners, contact the prison to have them transported to court. And due to the verification process done at prison, court proceedings would be delayed by close to four hours," he highlights.

Even so, both court officials agreed that the system assisted with avoiding escapes, adding that most escapes took place in transit between prison and court. "I think rolling out of AVR will certainly bring a huge relief in the system and improve efficiency within the criminal justice chain," concludes Mr Ramolefe. ●





AVR system, making life easier at New Brighton Court

Hlanganisa Mbatha

The Audio-Visual Remand (AVR) system has been viewed as a 'blessing in disguise' for New Brighton Magistrate's Court in the Eastern Cape as it continues to reduce the possibility of disruptions at the court by offenders as well as curbing the spread of COVID-19.

As one of those working on the AVR system, Ms Erna De Lange, Administrative Officer at New Brighton says disruptions from offenders when they come to appear in court has proven unbearable at times. "These disruptions were rife when all prisoners were brought upstairs to appear whilst court proceedings continue in other court rooms. Offenders tend to make noise on their way to the court rooms from court cells, and would even sing, and dance in some instances, making it unbearable sometimes," she recalls.

Not only 'such', but Ms De Lange indicates that the accused persons who were referred for mental observations also disturbed court proceedings. Some of the accused who were referred for psychological observation, she explains, could not always be managed by police officials due to their mental condition and they ended up disrupting the courts as they are not mentally stable. "Now it is easier to deal with such cases on AVR because they can immediately go back to the hospital section after their appearance. And it is also about minimising the risk of unruly behaviour of prisoners in cells," she says.

One of the many AVR imperatives, highlights Ms De Lange, is to ensure that court officials work efficiently at all times whilst minimising as much movements and traffic in the court as possible. "Not only has it reduced disruptions and traffic but also minimised administration during COVID-19. Work has definitely changed over the past months for us frontline workers as we work with a lot of offenders when they come in. With AVR, we have avoided a number of offenders coming in and only being present when it is necessary," she adds.

According to Ms De Lange, by end June, New Brighton Magistrate's Court had already dealt with about 93 cases through the AVR system, highlighting that the system came in handy during level 5 lockdown. "Even though we are still within the lockdown, reducing the number of people accessing the court when lockdown was first imposed proved to be a smart move. When numbers were going up in the province, it created an uncomfortable working environment because we are constantly interacting with the public, so less numbers coming in, the better" she explains.



Ms Erna De Lange: Administrative Officer,
New Brighton Magistrate's Court.

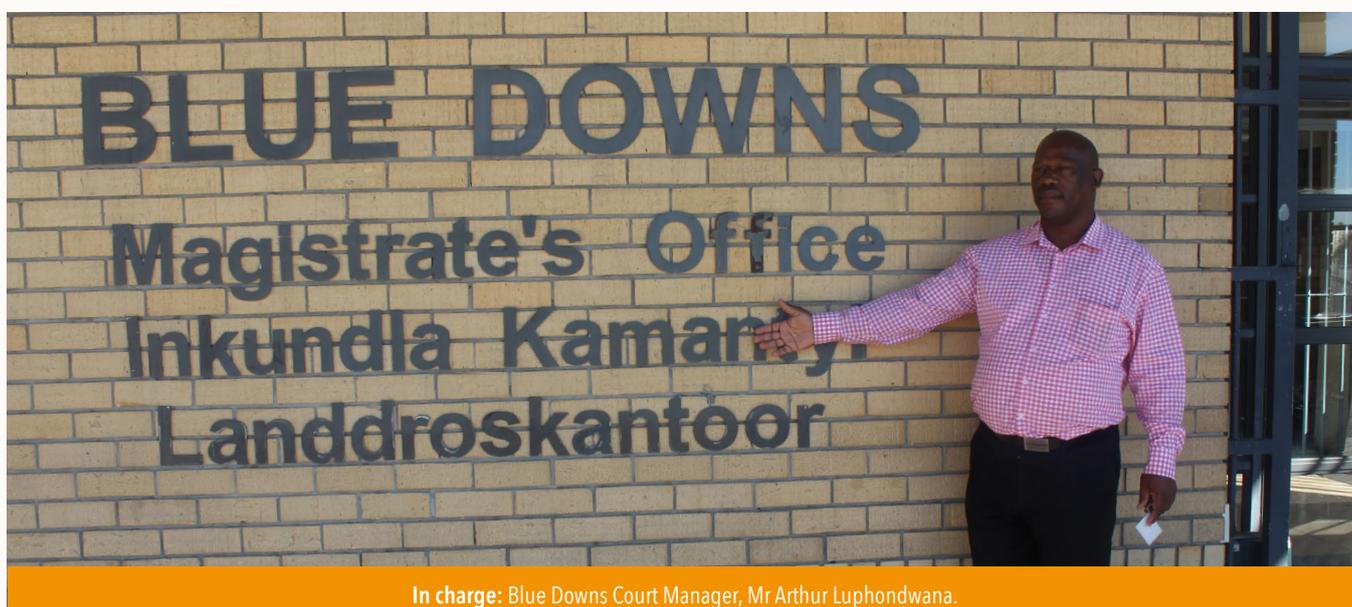
***“Even though we are still within the lockdown, reducing the number of people accessing the court when lockdown was first imposed proved to be a smart move.*”**

Ms De Lange is convinced that the AVR system came at a critical time when it came to curbing the spread of COVID-19 in courts because it reduces human contact. "It is great that there is less time spent on searching and loading prisoners as well as screening and sanitising, of which the process has to be repeated on arrival in court cells as well as on their return to correctional facilities." ●



Blue Downs Court gives AVR system thumbs up

Mokgethwa Ngoepe



In charge: Blue Downs Court Manager, Mr Arthur Luphondwana.

One of the Department's modern technological interventions, the Audio Visual Remand (AVR) system aims to reduce unnecessary travelling and the costs associated with moving offenders from correctional facilities to courts, and Blue Downs Magistrate's Court in the Western Cape is one of those who benefits from the project.

As a digital recording system for courtrooms, AVR is explained as a cutting edge software platform optimised for courtrooms recording that includes intelligent audio and video processing, which simplifies the process and uses the resources efficiently. Furthermore, it is viewed as an ideal system to promote the digital transformation in the Justice sector.

“The advantage of using the AVR system at court is that it curbs the risk of accused persons from escaping and not forgetting that it also limits the spread of COVID-19.”

According to Mr Ernest Modibane, AVR Project Manager, the system has been developed to meet the needs of courts as well as making it possible to prepare the session automatically or manually. “AVR helps to manage the intervening parties and key points in the session, generating minutes or digitally signing the event. It is also suitable for the hardware and software systems used in courts, making its integration easier.”

Attesting to the effectiveness of the system is Ms Caroline Visser, Clerk of Court at Blue Downs Magistrate's Court, who, in her view, AVR is the future. “I would like AVR to go further than just being utilised at district court level. I believe that would be more beneficial and effective if a witness could link with courts in other provinces as well. That can save the Department a lot of money in this regard,” she explains.



I would like ARV to go further than just being utilised at district court level. I believe that would be more beneficial and effective if a witness could link with courts in other provinces as well. That can save the Department a lot of money in this regard.”



AVR controller, Mr Devon Baadjies of Blue Downs.



Blue Downs Court Manager, Mr Arthur Lumphondwana.

Ms Visser is of the view that not everyone knows that the system can connect with other courts. “We need to make full use of this effective system daily. In our court, we have an understanding where we have a team working together on the AVR value chain. For instance, we have an official who knows how to connect and capture our statistics on National Operations Centre (NOC), as well as the court manager who regularly promotes and monitor the use of the AVR system,” she explains.

AVR Controller at Blue Downs, Mr Devon Baadjies highlights that AVR could definitely be used to curb the possible spread of COVID-19, and at their court, the system is fully effective, despite intermittent challenges with network and connectivity.

Pollsmoor and Goodwood correctional facilities are connected to Blue Downs, and the court usually encounters connection problems, especially with Goodwood. “Training in terms of the process is needed,” says Mr Baadjies, adding that “since lockdown, Blue Downs Court dealt with 460 cases through the AVR.” Blue Downs is one of the few courts in the Western Cape which started using AVR in 2012.

“We do make provisions for the family to see an accused person by making full use of the system. The advantage of using the AVR system at court is that it curbs the risk of accused persons from escaping and not forgetting that it also limits the spread of COVID-19,” he says

Another important aspect, adds Mr Baadjies; “Regional court dates are communicated better via the AVR system which ensures that the accused does not have to come to court just for a date. It is effectively dealt with via the AVR system.” ●



AVR proves to be best project fitting in the 'new normal'

Virgilatte Gwangwa



The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has been the 'talk of the town' for some time now, but talks quickly came to reality when COVID-19 hit the entire world. The pandemic has since forced the entire global community to live under strict regulations and among those was limited movement and gatherings.

Even with the Coronavirus, the Department's implementation of the Audio-Visual Remand (AVR) came in handy at various courts as well as the correctional services centres countrywide.

The Department first implemented the AVR project back in 2010 and had been rolled out to 47 magistrate courts and 36 correctional facilities.

Explaining the scope of the project to *Justice@Work*, Mr Ernest Modibane, AVR Project Manager says the main objective is to minimise transportation of inmates from correctional facility to courts for the remand (postponement) of cases, thereby eliminating their flight risk and transportation costs. He deemed the project to be a success as "AVR reduced the risk of offenders escaping as well as cost savvy in terms of financial (transportation) resources for courts, police and prisons."

He adds that major benefits were realised during the various stages of lockdown as a result of COVID-19 pandemic where AVR allowed for social distancing and non-physical contact during court sessions which were held between courts and prisons.

Initially, says Mr Modibane, there were challenges when piloting the project which included network issues where data lines required to be upgraded for improved picture and voice quality, AVR conference calls, including network infrastructure at sites which were not ready in terms of the data line speed.

"Re-training of users due to staff turnover; limited contract scope as AVR was initially earmarked for fewer sites proved to be a challenge.

Also lack of contacts from correctional services staff when arranging for joint trouble-shooting or access to prisons by engineers were some of the challenges," he recalls, adding that those challenges continued to get the necessary attention to ensure smooth running of AVR.

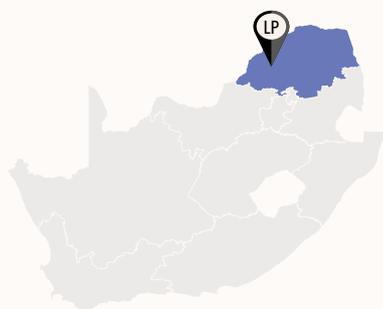
Mr Anele Dzingwa, who headed the implementation part of the project shares Mr Modiba's sentiments, adding that there were courts where AVR could not be installed as such facilities were using copper as data link and copper "does not have enough capacity to accommodate AVR."

Mr Modibane further told *Justice@Work* that he would recommend the roll-out of the project to all the courts

because AVR has proved to be doing well in this new technology era.

"Since the outbreak of this global pandemic, there has been an increase in the AVR demand because it serves as an essential mechanism to curb the spread of COVID-19," he concludes. ●

AVR reduced the risk of offenders escaping as well as cost savvy in terms of financial (transportation) resources for courts, police and prisons."



Thohoyandou Court appreciates AVR system

Mokgethwa Ngoepe

Despite minor network challenges, the new modern technology, in a form of an Audio Visual Remand (AVR) system is the way to go for the Thohoyandou Magistrate's Court as it is one of the courts effectively using the system countrywide.

Speaking to *Justice@Work*, Area Court Manager for the Thohoyandou Cluster, Mr Tshiane Munyai says he is impressed with the new system and believes it will take the Department forward in terms of the new technology.

"AVR has really come handy, especially during the various stages of the lockdown since March, I think if it was not for the lockdown, maybe we would not have seen the real impact and effectiveness of utilising in such a larger scale," says Mr Munyai.



During stage 5 of the lockdown, from March until May 2020, Thohoyandou Court dealt with more than 350 cases. "Our court was amongst the first pilot sites around 2013 and the only court which is using the system in Limpopo, since then, all detainees' cases identified by our control prosecutor are being remanded through the AVR system," he explains.

According to Mr Munyai, Thohoyandou Court is connected to Matatshe Medium B Correctional Centre and sometimes faces challenges with Telkom lines which are regularly out of order. "There is a need to upgrade those lines around Matatshe Correctional Centre. It will be good if all courts which receive detainees from Matatshe can be connected," he adds.

Sharing with *Justice@Work*, Mr Turfros Phalanndwa, AVR Operator at Thohoyandou Court says the advantages of using AVR system at court include:

Cost-saving in terms of transporting detainees to court;

- » Saving court's time logistically;
- » More detainees' cases can be postponed within a very short space of time;
- » No physical movement to the courthouse;
- » Limiting the spread of COVID-19;
- » No congestion in holding cells; and
- » Limiting escapes.

"For us, this is a great system; it is more useful and convenient, taking into consideration that in court, there is lot of movement of various people coming to acquire various services such as protection order applications and maintenance amongst others. Therefore they create noise and disturb the court proceedings. Nonetheless, AVR has since eliminated such disturbances as detainees are no longer coming to court like before. Thank you so much for the initiative as other officials are now getting used to the system," says Mr Phalanndwa.

The area court manager also applauded the appointment of Mr Phalanndwa who is dedicated to the AVR system in Thohoyandou Court and amongst other duties, he trains other officials for continuous service delivery when he is on leave.

"Mr Phalanndwa is very proactive in ensuring functionality, daily testing and call logging and he follows up to have speedy resolution for any network related challenges. I ensure that I get daily feedback on AVR system utilisation and statistics," concludes Mr Munyai. ●

Justice@Work

**The Minister of Justice
and Correctional Services**
Mr Ronald Lamola, MP

PRETORIA

Private Bag X276, Pretoria, 0001
SALU Building, 28th Floor,
316 Thabo Sehume Street, Pretoria
(c/o Thabo Sehume and Francis Baard Streets)

*Andries Street was renamed Thabo Sehume Street and Schoeman Street was renamed Francis Baard Street by Tshwane Council in March 2012.

Tel: 012-406 4656
Fax: 012-406 4680 / 086 507 5765
E-mail: Ministry@justice.gov.za

CAPE TOWN

Private Bag X256, Cape Town, 8000
120 Plein Street, Cape Town

Tel: 021-467 1708
Fax: 021-467 1730

**The Deputy Minister for Justice
and Constitutional Development**
Mr John Jeffery, MP

PRETORIA

Private Bag X395, Pretoria, 0001
SALU Building, 26th Floor,
316 Thabo Sehume Street, Pretoria
(c/o Thabo Sehume and Francis Baard Streets)

*Andries Street was renamed Thabo Sehume Street and Schoeman Street was renamed Francis Baard Street by Tshwane Council in March 2012.

Tel: 012-406 4854
Fax: 012-406 4878
E-mail: deputyminister@justice.gov.za

CAPE TOWN

Private Bag X9135, Cape Town, 8000
Room 541, 120 Plein Street, Cape Town

Tel: 021-467 1750
Fax: 021-467 1732

**The Department of Justice and
Constitutional Development**
Acting Director-General, Ms Kallay Pillay

PRETORIA

SALU Building,
316 Thabo Sehume Street, Pretoria
(c/o Thabo Sehume and Francis Baard Streets)

*Andries Street was renamed Thabo Sehume Street and Schoeman Street was renamed Francis Baard Street by Tshwane Council in March 2012.

Tel: 012-406 4750
Fax: 012-406 4703
E-mail: KalaPillay@justice.gov.za

Momentum Building
Private Bag X81, Pretoria, 0001
329 Pretorius Street, Pretoria

Tel: 012-315 1111

REGIONAL OFFICES

EASTERN CAPE

Tel: 043-702 7006
Fax: 043-722 5525
No 3 Phillip Frame Road, Weaverly Park,
Chiselhurst,
East London, 5201

FREE STATE

Tel: 051-407 1800
Fax: 051-448 4458
53 Charlotte Maxeke Street,
Bloemfontein, 9301

GAUTENG

Tel: 011-332 9000
Fax: 011-331 0425
15th & 16th Floor, Schreina Chambers,
Commissioner Street,
Johannesburg, 2001

NORTHERN CAPE

Tel: 053-839 0000
Fax: 053-832 6815
Cnr Stead & Knight Streets,
New Public Building,
Kimberley, 8301

NORTH WEST

Tel: 018 - 397 7000
Fax: 018 - 384 3406
22 Molopo Road, Ayob Building,
Mafikeng 2745

WESTERN CAPE

Tel: 021-462 5471 / 5479
Fax: 021-462 3135
Plein Park Building, Plein Street,
Cape Town, 8001

KWAZULU-NATAL

Tel: 031-372 3000 / 3007
Fax: 031-304 9213
2 Devonshire Place, Smith Street,
Durban, 4001

LIMPOPO

Tel: 015-297 5577
Fax: 015-297 5570
92 Bok Street, Polokwane, 0700

MPUMALANGA

Tel: 013-753 9300
Fax: 013-752 2666
24 Brown Street, Nelspruit, 1200

