Uganda scraps import duty on TV decoders

By Walter Wafula

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The cost of acquiring television decoders in Uganda is set to reduce following government's decision to scrap import duty from the electronic devices. The decision was announced on Thursday, 14 June 2012, by Uganda's minister of finance, Maria Kiwanuka as she read the 2012/13 national budget in Kampala.

"To facilitate a smooth transition from analogues to digital terrestrial transmission by used of Set-Top Boxes (decoders), import duty was reduced from 25% to 0% for a period of one year," Kiwanuka said.

The decoders are distributed by pay television service companies including; MultiChoice Uganda (DStv), StarTimes Digital TV, Wananchi Group (Zuku TV) and MoTV Africa. Prices of the decoders range UGX60 000 ($24) to Shs400 000 ($161), depending on service provider.

The move comes hot on the heels of several forecasts made about Uganda's inability to beat the 2012 East Africa analogue to digital migration deadline. The five East African countries including; Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, agreed to complete the process by 31 December 2012. The regional deadline comes ahead of 31 December 2015, the global deadline which was agreed upon by member countries of the International Telecommunications (ITU).

Analogue to digital broadcasting migration

Uganda's analogue to digital broadcasting migration has been dogged by disagreements about the choice of the company which should carry out digital signal distribution, mismanagement of the process and wrong choice of migration platform.

The implementation of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) involves upgrading of analogue television sets to receivers, according to the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the regulator of the communication and broadcasting industry.

As such, the public; users and consumers are expected to purchase set-top boxes or integrated digital TV receivers in order to receive digital terrestrial transmission.

On the other hand, broadcasters are required to migrate from analogue to digital technology in the studio facilities. This means, they will be freed from the difficulties of site acquisition, infrastructure development, operational and maintenance costs and will be required to focus on content development, and train human resources to adopt the new digital broadcasting skills.

The transition from analogue to digital migration is expected to enable broadcasters to carry out simultaneous transmission of a larger number of programmes hence increasing product diversity.

"There is efficiency utilisation of spectrum, whereby a single channel can carry a number of programmes which allow room for spare frequencies to be used for other services," UCC says in a brief about digital migration on its website.

Consumers who have already migrated from analogue to digital broadcasting are already enjoying high quality videos, and audio, from the various pay television service providers who are championing the migration in the country.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

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