

SADC vows to meet 2016 DTT deadline

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WALVIS BAY, NAMIBIA: The Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries that are still using the analogue broadcasting signal are committed to migrate to digital broadcasting by June 2016...

On Friday, a SADC Communications, Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) and Postal Services Ministers meeting was held in Walvis Bay, Namibia.

"I want to congratulate SADC countries that managed to meet the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) June 17 deadline to migrate from analogue to digital broadcasting system. Some of us may have missed the ITU deadline, but I'm sure we will hit the June 17, 2016 SADC deadline, ... let's keep the momentum," said Chair of the SADC Council of Ministers responsible for ICT and Postal Services, Supa Mandiwanzira.

Mandiwanzira, who is also Zimbabwe's Minister of ICT Postal and Courier Services, said the region cannot ignore ICT as a tool of fostering fruitful and sustainable economic cooperation.



He said the SADC Communications' Ministers have a mammoth task of ensuring full regional integration through harmonised development of ICTs aimed at attaining universal communication services.

The Chair of SADC Council said it was time to ensure affordable, reliable and secure broadband connectivity across the region including those in the remote areas and landlocked countries.

"We are here to map the way forward in our efforts towards the attainment of our Digital 2027 Goal.

"As Ministers responsible for Communications, ICT and Postal Services, let's gear ourselves for milestone-decisions on the Regional Infrastructure Development Plan; SADC Home and Away roaming; the SADC TV Bouquet; SADC Roadmap on Digital Broadcasting Migration; Memorandum of Understanding on cross border frequency coordination; regional and national integration of broadband networks; SADC conformity and interoperability test centres and postal policy," he said.

Namibia's Communications and ICT Minister Tjekero Tweya said: "We are proud to announce that we've successfully switched off our analogue broadcasting signal and we also want to congratulate Malawi, Tanzania and Mauritius for meeting the ITU deadline.

"We are equally encouraged that other countries have their foot at the door step of successful migration".

However, Tweya said one of the immediate challenges of the region as a result of digital migration will be the availability of appropriate content to fill in more channels created as a result of the digitalisation.

"I'm happy that the region is now looking at filling this gap through the SADC TV Bouquet and Namibia remains committed and ready to host the SADC TV Bouquet. There is also a need to establish a regional content hub where our content providers can interact for continued enhanced content provision," he said.

Tweya also emphasised the importance of ensuring access to affordable communications services through the SADC Home and Away roaming initiative.

The Namibian Minister said the region should move away from deliberating about ICT without action. "No document should be shelved to be revisited at the meeting. Our next meeting must receive progress reports on tangible results, there can be no business as usual, that era is over now," he said.

South African Communications Minister Faith Muthambi, who also attended the meeting, said South Africa is committed to digital migration, transformation in the media landscape, as well as inclusive communications services that are affordable and reliable.

"We are committed to be part of the programme to move the SADC region forward in terms of ICT in order to ensure that we remain far ahead of other African regions if not the world."

Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT)

DTT is a reliable and much cost efficient means to distribute linear television content and has many advantages over the old, analogue broadcasting that is still in use today.

Digital migration refers to the switch from an analogue broadcasting system to a digital broadcasting system and this has been a world-wide move which is being driven by the ITU.

In order to view digital television signals on an ordinary analogue television set, consumers will need a so-called Set-Top-Box. The purpose of the Set-Top-Box is to convert the DTT signal for reception on an ordinary analogue television set.

If consumers haven't acquired a set top box by analogue switch-off, they will no longer be able to view the existing terrestrial television broadcasting services

The South African Communications Department anticipates the rollout of Set-Top-Boxes to be completed in the coming 18-24 months so that South Africans can switch off analogue signal and begin to realise the benefits of digital dividend to allow for the rollout of Wireless Broadband Services.

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