

# Uganda: Information minister roots for local television content



By [Walter Wafula](#)

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Uganda's minister of information has urged domestic pay television companies to increase local programming to be more relevant to viewers.



"We don't mind foreign content, but we should also have local content. We hope you are bringing a wholesome package that one can sit and watch with the family," said information minister Mary Okurut at the launch of Zuku Television in the country last week.

Zuku is a pay television service offered by the Wananchi Group in Kenya. The company becomes the seventh service provider in the market that is dominated by MultiChoice Africa's DStv followed by StarTimes of Star DTV's, and Pearl Digital TV.

## Content for urban youth

Most of their content is largely imported and suitable for the urban youth. Their main focus is on foreign sport programmes like the English Premier League, Hollywood movies, music and soap operas. Zuku launched 80 channels in Uganda but with a few local channels.

However, Patrick Bitature, the CEO of Simba Telecom, a local mobile phone services and payments provider, said Zuku was set to invest heavily in programming to respond to the minister's call. The company is ready to buy content from domestic producers to be aired on specific Zuku channels. "Our content is to be relevant to local people. We coming to the ground so that we can customise our content," Bitature said. On June 15, Simba signed a distribution deal with Wananchi to market Zuku TV products and services in Uganda.

Richard Bell, the CEO of Wananchi Group told journalists that Zuku Programming the company's production division was

ready to absorb locally produced films.

In 2010, the government waived taxes from film production equipment to encourage companies and independent film producers to create more content for the television industry at a lower cost, according to Okurut.

## Strengthen local programming

Charles Hamya the general manager of MultiChoice noted that the entry of Zuku would strengthen local programming and increase competition which is good for the industry. "We think it's good for the production industry in Uganda. People will have a channel to sell their productions and customers will have more choice," Hamya said in an interview last week.

This year, MultiChoice and Smart TV moved to beef up their programming by signing sponsorship deals with the Federation of Uganda Football Association.

Okurut also encouraged Wananchi to eliminate the wide gap between the rural and urban communities in Uganda, when it comes to accessing television. Uganda has an estimated one million television sets but less than a quarter of these have access to pay television and are in rural Uganda. This is because of the low penetration of electricity in the country and the high cost of pay television services. But there is a growth in uptake in line with the general economic growth of the country.

"We hope that with the coming of Zuku, this can be narrowed," she said. Besides widening its reach, the minister also called for relevant and local content from Wananchi to cater for interests of Ugandan TV viewers.

## ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

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