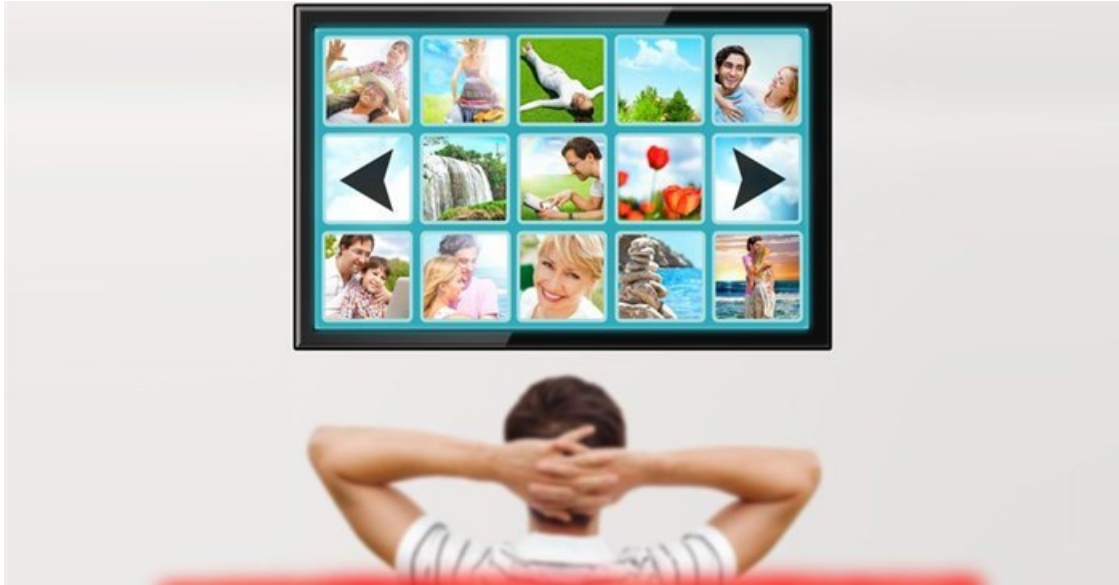


Broadcast digital migration will erode free-to-air TV market

Following remarks on the success of the broadcast digital migration by the Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications this week about the switch-off of analogue television broadcasting in South Africa, Cape Town TV has expressed the opinion that digital migration is not the success claimed by the minister.



Source © Kirill Kedrinski [123rf](#) Cape Town TV has expressed the opinion that digital migration is not the success claimed by the communications minister

The minister stated that the broadcast digital migration has been a success and that this enables her to switch-off analogue broadcasting on 31 March 2023, as she announced in a recent Government Gazette.

“The minister believes that the switch-off will not leave millions of South Africans without access to television, as we have previously warned,” says Cape Town TV.

Eroding the free-to-air market

“The problem is that the Minister is narrowly focused on the roll-out of government subsidised DTT decoders, of which some 1,5 million were manufactured in 2015.

“She completely ignores those television viewers who do not qualify for the free decoders, who are effectively being forced to migrate their television viewing to the pay-TV platform DSTv and StarSat, or e-Media’s commercial OpenView platform which does not carry community TV channels.

“This means that the free-to-air TV market is being eroded,” says Cape Town TV.

As a result it says the future of digital terrestrial transmission (DTT) looks very bleak, with relatively few people having either a digital TV set with built-in DTT tuner or the DTT set-top box.

“This is because the DTT set-top boxes are generally unavailable in retailers, particularly in rural areas, and the relatively high cost of new digital TV sets, which start at around R4,000 - a high cost for poor households.”



Cape Town TV goes digital

7 Sep 2022



The missing middle TV audience

While the Minister says that the remaining number of STBs to be installed was 185,382 in December last year, even if all of the government-supplied decoders are installed the number (1.2 - 1.5 million) represents only around 12% of TV households that currently receive only free-to-air television.

Households with income between R3,500 and R12,000 – what has been termed the “missing middle” TV audience – are forced to pay for their own migration to digital platforms, a scenario which affects some 5.7 million households.

“Consequently we believe that Ntshavheni is misleading the public by focusing only on installed government decoders while ignoring everyone else.

“The SABC has reportedly lost 30-40% of its audience share in those provinces where the SABC analogue signal has been switched off, and this figure is likely to be far larger in the major urban centres where analogue broadcasting is still the norm,” states Cape Town TV.

It adds that while the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) did conduct a public awareness campaign concerning the ASO, this was targeted at getting indigent households to apply for government decoders - it did not attempt to persuade all TV viewers of the benefits of the DTT platform, such as the increased number of channels available and improved picture quality, as envisaged when the campaign was originally mooted.



TV is dead but the SABC refuses to die

Nicholas Woode-Smith 27 Feb 2023



The consultation process not finalised

“Moreover, Ntshavheni claims to have finalised the consultation process that was ordered by the Constitutional Court last year when it ordered her to consult with stakeholders prior to setting a new date for the analogue television switch-off (ASO), in a case brought by e-Media, the SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition and Media Monitoring Africa (MMA).

“But all she has done is simply requested written submissions from broadcasters, declining to hold any discussions or oral presentations.

“While the Minister has said that she will “engage with the affected parties” on this matter, she also says this engagement would simply present her department’s views on their particular concerns rather than engaging in a dialogue with all affected parties, including Sentech and ICASA, to find a solution, which we believe is necessary,” says Cape Town TV.



Analogue to digital switchover in Africa process marooned

15 Dec 2022



Retaining analogue broadcasting under the 700 MHz

Free-to-air broadcasters are already engaging with Sentech and ICASA in positing a solution that retains analogue broadcasting in frequencies under the 700 MHz band which are expressly reserved for television broadcasting.

It explains that this solution will enable those poor households that do not qualify for government decoders to retain their access to all free-to-air channels while not affecting those frequencies that have been sold to cellular operators to widen mobile connectivity.

“Cape Town TV is currently broadcasting on an analogue frequency under 700MHz which is not affected by the frequency auction.

“We believe it is essential that this service be maintained until such time as this frequency is required for the inception of Multiplex 3 in the Western Cape. We look forward to engaging with Minister Ntshavheni, ICASA and Sentech to implement this solution.”

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