

# SABC viewers displeased with old content, repeats, news bias

Leadership problems and the SABC's lack of investment in content may finally be catching up with the public broadcaster.



There is an uptick in viewers inquiring about cancelling their TV licences... why pay for poor content and biased news coverage?

The SABC has confirmed that the constant negative publicity it received had resulted in many households inquiring about cancelling their TV licences.

In a presentation to Parliament on Friday, the broadcaster highlighted declining audiences as a major concern, saying the recent spree of negative publicity had led many households to consider cancelling TV licences.

According to the SABC's annual report presented to Parliament last year, the broadcaster's share of television audience declined from 57% in 2011-12 to 53% in 2012-13. This trend was expected to be confirmed by the annual report due this year.

The broadcaster has been constantly in the news over leadership squabbles.

SABC acting CE Tian Olivier told MPs that the broadcaster was aiming to retain and grow audience share by meeting the needs and expectations of multicultural mass and niche audiences in all official languages. The corporation had increased spending on content by about R250m in the current financial year, he said.

## Viewers don't like to pay for old shows, repeats - and biased news

"It is recommended that a budget of R1.2bn (for investment in local and foreign television programmes) be allowed. Failure to improve the quality of content on television will result in further audience losses once competitors launch their (digital terrestrial television) TV channels," Olivier said.

He referred to planned changes aimed at strengthening the product offering, targeting local content on SABC 1, 2, and 3 "to deliver better value to our audiences". Olivier also told MPs the broadcaster would apply to Communications Minister Faith Muthambi for annual tariff increases, in a bid to boost revenue from TV licence fees.

Revenue from TV licence fees was expected to grow by R130m (14%) as a result of the increase effected in the 2013-14 financial year. "However, the recent negative publicity on SABC matters has resulted in many households enquiring about the cancellation of their TV licences," he said. But TV advertising was also expected to improve owing to a revised schedule and content strategy.

Democratic Alliance communications spokesman Gavin Davis yesterday blamed declining audiences at the SABC on the public perception of bias in its news offerings.

"This was the finding of Project Kindle, which was commissioned by the SABC to analyse declining viewership since 2009," said Davis. "This perception was unlikely to have shifted since that study. Since then we have seen opposition party TV adverts banned and attacks on media freedom from chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng."

There was a growing perception that political pressure prevented the SABC from carrying out the public protector's recommendation to remove Motsoeneng, said Davis.

Source: *Business Day*, via I-Net Bridge

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