Govt observing test licenses given to broadcasters

By Nthambeleni Gabara

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Government is observing the test licences given to broadcasters to see if they will broadcast using Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) or Digital Radio Mundial (DRM), says Communications Minister Faith Muthambi.

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has given test licences to broadcasters to see if they will broadcast using DAB or DRM.

"We are now observing these test licences closely and once ICASA and Sentech have finalised them, together with the Southern African Digital Broadcasting Association (SADIBA), we will engage them together with the public on our policy proposals on Digital Radio," she said.

Asked when the department was going to engage stakeholders on the policy proposals on Digital Radio, Minister Muthambi said: "When we come back from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC-15), we will start to think about the digital policy for Radio.

Image via 123RF

"For now, we are also trying to ensure that our digital migration also encourages broadband roll-out that will benefit all our people, especially those in the rural areas."

ITU WRC-15

The World Radio communication Conference 2015 (WRC-15) will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 2 to 27 November 2015.

WRC are held every three to four years. It is the job of WRC to review, and, if necessary, revise the Radio Regulations, the international treaty governing the use of the radio-frequency spectrum and the geostationary-satellite and non-geostationary-satellite orbits.

Digital Studio

Minister Muthambi, who unveiled a plaque and Umhlobo Wenene FM's new digital studio, during the stations 55th birthday celebrations recently, said the newly built digital studio has a webcam for live streaming.

"This digital studio will provide listeners with an opportunity to see what is happening in the studio at all times and will also assist the station and its on-air personalities to keep up with the ever changing digital world and to remain relevant," she said.

However, Minister Muthambi said this is long overdue and is something that should have been provided to all other 10 public service radio stations sometime back.

"I'm saying this because Metro FM has these facilities for some years now. These stations are not second cousins to any other commercial stations. They serve a key social cohesion and nation building role, so they deserve to be given the best resources as well.

"Even though their worth may not be quantified in economic rands and cents, but their social and cultural worth is priceless," she said.

Bilateral engagements on digital migration

As the department finalises the digital migration policy, Minister Muthambi is currently engaging and coordinating with neighbouring countries, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe with the view of avoiding digital interference beyond the ITU deadline of 17 June 2015.

On Monday, Minister Muthambi was in Manzini, Swaziland, where she had successful bilateral engagements with Minister Dumisani Dlangamandla on cooperation to ease radio frequency spectrum interference at the borderline areas of the two countries.

Following this initiative, South Africa has already signed and concluded agreements with both Botswana and Lesotho on the importance of cooperating in mitigating cross border radio frequency spectrum interference as a result of Digital Migration Programme implementation.

Minister Muthambi is expected to travel to Mozambique next week for this bilateral engagements.

The ITU deadline to migrate from analogue to digital is 17 June 2015.

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 been 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 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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