

'Just dump SA digital TV migration'

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South Africa's adoption of digital terrestrial television (DTT) should be carefully evaluated and perhaps even dumped, says an industry insider.

"Fundamentally, we need to be questioning why we've adopted this policy in the first place," Dominic Cull, regulatory advisor at the Internet Service Providers Association (Ispa) told Fin24.

The move toward DTT in SA has been government policy since at least 2008, but implementation has stalled as analogue broadcasters like the SABC have proved unwilling or unable to migrate their services out of the key spectrum.

As part of the rollout in SA, the Universal Service and Access Agency of SA (Usaasa) announced that all bidders will receive part of the R4.3bn tender for the rollout of five million set top boxes.

In Usaasa's 5 Year Funding Outlook presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Telecommunications and Postal Services, the agency has budgeted R181,160,000 for digital TV migration this year to add to a cumulative pool of R1.048bn.

Redundant technology

However, Cull suggested that terrestrial broadcasting was not as efficient as satellite signal distribution.

"Why have we decided to distribute through terrestrial networks rather than through satellite networks, which by their very nature are far more efficient and far easier to do."



Image via Fotolia

He added that the technology to distribute TV via satellite was commonplace for South Africans.

"You simply need one satellite in geo-stationary orbit above South Africa and it delivers the signal to you. Multichoice has showed us how well that works."

Cull argued that digital video broadcasting technology would not survive long as new technologies make it redundant.

"DVB2 is not expected to have a particularly long lifespan. Estimates are that by eight, nine years down the line this is not a technology that will be widely used."

An Irish consultation paper on spectrum policy in 2005 concluded that terrestrial broadcasting technology would be valid for 20 years.

Open standards

In Australia, the ACMA (Australian Communications and Media Authority) in a discussion paper indicated that the very nature of TV is undergoing change from a content receiving to content exchange platform.

Part of the reason that SA is switching to digital TV is to ensure that spectrum for high speed mobile broadband is freed up, but Cull dismissed DTT as the ideal vehicle to accomplish this.

"Yes, I do need to shift the broadcasters, but this about making the broadcasting delivery more efficient by going over to digital.

"Irrespective of whether we go terrestrial or satellite, I would be clearing that spectrum around 470MHz to 800MHz for use by international mobile telecommunications," he added.

His view has tacit approval from international organisation the GSMA, which argued that technology for mobile broadband should not be specific.

"4G is a technology, similar to 2G and 3G but I don't think we should focus so much on the specific technology. We should focus more on what we're going to do with that technology," Mortimer Hope, director of Spectrum and Public Policy Africa at the GSMA told Fin24.

The move to DTT has also been marred by an e.tv lawsuit against Communications Minister Faith Muthambi over control of set top boxes.

Simple migration policy

The broadcaster ultimately lost that legal battle, but said that it was ready to move to DTT. Cull suggested that it was more simple and cost effective to migrate broadcast services to satellite.

"The question is why are we spending so much time and effort, so much time in court, so much bitter argument, so many delays when there are better ways to do it?"

Source: [Fin24](#) via News24Wire.

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