

TVAfrica provides education solution for Africa

For two weeks starting on March 13, TVAfrica (trade name for Africa Media Group) tested a world-first" broadcast. Two schools, one in Tanzania and one in Botswana, phoned into tele-educator William Smith and his Learning Channel team during separate hours and had their mat science and English curriculum questions answered live on television. Nowhere else in the world has first-class technology been put to use to create a live transnational broadcast to 10 countries. It happened in Africa.

Technical execution during the two-week trial period, which made use of mobile phones, microwave links and satellite transmission, successfully brought educational lessons free to a broadcast area covering 30 million television viewers in Eastern and Southern Africa. The project was made possible through the cooperation of the Ministries of Education in Botswana and Tanzania. The live broadcasts resumed on a long-term basis on 24 June 2002, once the FIFA World Cup, also being broadcast on TVAfrica, entered its semi-finals.

Feedback from education authorities, teachers, students and the local broadcasters in the two countries has been overwhelmingly positive. Hamza Kassongo, Programmes Consultant for DTV in Tanzania, reported, "The [live educational] programme has been sensational. Both the teaching staff within the school [which participated in the live broadcast] and those from others were thrilled about the method of teaching via TV. The teachers were busy taking notes!" Mr. Kassongo said that other schools immediately began signing up with DTV for their turn to be live on-air.

Mr. Choto, Headmaster of St Josephs College, Gaborone, Botswana, said "Both the students and the teachers were pleased to have had the opportunity to experience such advanced technology first hand. It is good to know that it is this development that has made it possible for such services to stretch across the borders for the benefit of our students. The students themselves were excited by the fact that they were learning in a different way to the normal classroom situation."

Mr. Menyatso, Physics Teacher at Naledi Secondary School, Gaborone, Botswana, added "A right step in the right direction."

TVAfrica has been broadcasting the Learning Channel's pre-recorded education material to Africa since late 1998, beginning with Uganda and slowly expanding to other countries as TVAfrica's network expanded. Today, 12 countries receive the pre-recorded programming. The Live education broadcasts bring an exciting new element to the educational broadcasts.

One Tanzanian student commented, "I prefer this method of teaching because, like in the movies, we concentrate more."

"We have been able to put our full expertise gained over 12 years into this project," says William Smith, "plus the excellent skill of the Learning Channel's educators. It is incredible that we have been as successful as this [during the two week trial period] at the start of such a complex project, which speaks well for its future. This is African education, done by Africans for Africans in the most advanced manner in the world."

The African Learning Channel broadcasts weekdays on TVAfrica's Southern and Eastern affiliates beginning

at 9:00am local time with pre-recorded material. The live programming will follow from 10:30 to 11:30 am local time. Pre-recorded material will be repeated in the afternoon from 2:00 to 3:30 pm local time.

Each day of the week will have a particular subject focus: Monday - Biology, Tuesday - Physics, Wednesday - Chemistry, Thursday - Mathematics and Friday - English. The lessons will be designed to help students pass their matriculation exams by following the curriculum of the countries where the live broadcasts take place. The countries rotated and started with Botswana and Uganda on June 24.

TVAfrica views this project as a milestone in broadcasting history on the African continent. They are the first broadcaster to take advantage of new state of the art digital satellite technology enabling high quality educational programming to be viewed by millions of children in classrooms across Africa. Thanks to the excellent teamwork involving educational authorities, affiliates and sponsors throughout Africa, the Learning Channel has now brought the reality of interactive education to the entire continent."

The African Learning Channel on TVAfrica is an added resource for secondary schools, students and the general public. Anyone with access to a television set (be that in a private or public venue) in the coverage area of TVAfrica's local affiliate can watch the programming for free. Initially, ten TV stations in Southern and Eastern Africa reaching approximately 30 million television viewers will broadcast the African Learning Channel. TVAfrica expects to expand coverage of the programming to include 20 countries and 100 million people by next year at this time.

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