

Digital Broadcasting in the Commonwealth

The African Challenge

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According to data published in August 2013 by the Digital Video Broadcasting Project (DVB), an industry consortium including TV broadcasters, manufacturers, network operators and regulators from around the world, over 170 countries are likely to adopt or deploy digital terrestrial broadcasting (DTT) networks using DVB-T or DVB-T2 standards. Of the 46 DVB-T/T2 Commonwealth countries, 18 are sub-Saharan African countries.

These sub-Saharan African countries have adopted and started deploying DTT services at different pace, but overall, their DTT progress has been slow. Interest in spectrum dividends to result from the switching off of analogue transmissions has seemed far more pronounced in policy fora in the region than the prospects of DTT services themselves.

Today, eight African Commonwealth countries are so significantly behind with their preparations for switching off analogue TV transmissions that they are almost certain to miss the agreed switchover deadline of June 2015: Cameroon, The Gambia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, and Swaziland. These countries

are yet to deploy DTT networks, including trials, according to DVB's data. Countries such as South Africa and Mauritius have made significant progress, but they have also had to delay their analogue switchover, and are likely to have both analogue and digital transmission networks running beyond June 2015. Although South Africa was not able to meet its initial target to complete this process by 2008, significant progress has nevertheless been made. Mauritius is in a similar position. The African exception, Botswana, who has adopted the ISDB-T standard, is likely to be on target.

Turning off analogue transmissions is only half the battle. Policy and regulatory frameworks for DTT are also required, and these are yet to be in place in most African Commonwealth countries, despite the progress being made by some. Mauritius, which was the first of these countries to introduce DTT in 2005, is yet to have a clear DTT regulatory framework in place.

Besides technical, policy and regulatory gaps, many in sub-Saharan Africa believe that content availability will remain an issue in the region, a view expressed during the CTO's *Digital Broadcasting Switchover Africa Forum* (DBSF) held in South Africa earlier this year.

Launched in 2005 as an annual event, DBSF has helped the Organisation's member countries in the region progress towards DTT migration. The next event, to be held on 10 – 12 February 2014 in Tanzania is expected to provide in-depth discussions on DTT policy options and regulatory environments in the region. In addition, the Organisation continues to assist its members through bilateral workshops and consultancy services.

For more information about CTO's services in DTT, write to programmes@cto.int.

