

KENYA DTT brief

Mr. Ambani of Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) gave a brief update on the status of transition from analogue to digital broadcasting in Kenya.

A national digital migration taskforce was established in March 2007 by the Minister of Information & Communications to prepare the country for a smooth transition from analogue to digital broadcasting. The taskforce comprised of broadcasting experts and representatives drawn from the following stakeholders:

- Ministry of Information & Communications
- National Communications Secretariat
- Communications Commission of Kenya
- Media Owners Association
- Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
- Media Council of Kenya
- Association of Practitioners in Advertising (APA)

The scope of work of the Taskforce was to give recommendations that would contribute to the development of a national strategy for the switchover of broadcasting systems from analogue to digital broadcasting in Kenya.

The taskforce concluded its work in September 2007 and submitted its final report to the Minister in charge of Information & Communications in October 2007.

The Taskforce recommended that the government in consultation with the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) should establish a Digital Transition Committee to manage the migration process within a specified timetable and develop an appropriate switchover strategy. It also recommended that government funds the migration process, simulcast period of three years ending in 2012, existing analogue TV broadcasters be accommodated on digital platform free of charge during simulcast period, only one signal distributor be licensed during simulcast period among others. The switch off of analogue broadcasting was recommended to commence by July 2012.

The Government adopted Taskforce recommendations and established Digital Transition Committee (DTC) which was officially constituted by the Minister of Information & Communications in February 2008 to implement the recommendations of the taskforce. Members of the DTC were drawn from CCK, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, Ministry of Information & Communications, National Communications Secretariat, Media Owners Association among others. The DTC has three active sub-committees that deal with digital transition issues related to technical, policy & regulatory and consumer awareness & education.

CCK was designated to also act as the secretariat of the DTC, providing logistical, technical, budgetary and secretarial services.

Kenya has adopted DVB-T2, MPEG 4 standards while the analogue switchover deadline is 2012 in accordance with the EACO deadline. The existing and new DTT infrastructure are expected to comply with DVB-T2 standard while set top boxes and other digital terrestrial receivers are required to comply with published minimum DVB-T2 specifications for purposes of type approval. A digital migration logo dubbed 'DigitalKenya' has been developed to be used during the consumer awareness campaigns.

The national public broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) was authorized to be the first broadcast signal distributor responsible for setting up the digital multiplexing platform and transmission infrastructure. KBC is finalizing setting up a subsidiary known as SIGNET that shall be responsible for the digital broadcasting signal distribution business. The transmission of the digital signal was launched by H.E the president of Kenya in December 2009 with two DVB-T transmitters covering Nairobi and environs. All existing analogue TV signals in Nairobi are accommodated on the platform free of charge during the three year simulcast period. In September 2011, the first pilot DVB-T2 transmitter was launched in Nairobi carrying pay TV service. The existing DVB-T transmitters are to be upgraded to DVB-T2 standard and any further deployments must be DVB-T2 compliant.

In October 2011, CCK licensed a second digital broadcast signal distributor MS Pan African Networks Group (K) Co. Ltd through a tendering process in order to compete with KBC and fast track the digital infrastructure rollout and introduce competition. The signal distributor, who has been issued with a 15-year licence is expected to roll out in 12 sites within the first year of operation.

There is provision to have a third broadcast digital signal distributor in future.

The Consumer awareness campaigns to educate the public on digital migration shall be fully funded by CCK and is slated to kick off in early 2012 when rollout of the DVB-T2 infrastructure is expected to be expanded outside Nairobi. In the meantime, there has been limited publicity on digital migration due to limited coverage of the digital signal at the moment. The Government is committed to providing the required budgets to enable KBC to roll out the digital infrastructure.

The transition to digital broadcasting in Kenya faces a number of challenges namely

- Availability of timely and adequate funding for digital network rollout and operating expenses
- affordability and availability of DVB-T2 set top boxes/digital receivers
- availability of appropriate local content to populate the channels
- ensuring adequate consumer education on digital transition.
- Lack of mains electricity in the rural areas

- Slowdown on uptake of set top boxes by consumers and vendors following change from DVB-T to DVB-T2
- Lack of tax incentives such as zero rating of taxes on digital receivers
- Standardization of multi-vendor set top boxes in the light of pay TV and FTA
- Offsetting financial burden imposed on KBC in view of directive to accommodate on its digital platform all existing analogue TV broadcasters free of charge during simulcast period