

New deadline for TV digitalisation

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Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries have agreed on a deadline to switch off the analogue television transmissions to digital platforms.

The Financial Gazette can reveal that SADC has moved the date for compliance by 12 months to June next year.

A complete switch over to television digital platform was expected on June 17 this year but SADC realised that most countries had not complied with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) deadline.

Only four countries -- Namibia, Malawi, Tanzania and Mauritius -- had completed the migration to digital broadcasting within the agreed deadline, with Zambia switching on a few weeks ago.



Image via [123RF](#)

Obert Muganyura, the chief executive officer of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), confirmed the new target.

"SADC ministers of information and communications technology met soon after the June 17 deadline to discuss migration issues," said Muganyura.

"After realising that only four countries (Namibia, Malawi, Tanzania and Mauritius) had complied, the region agreed on the new target which is June next year by which time the remaining countries are expected to comply.

"The SADC countries will review the situation in December next year."

Muganyura said Zimbabwe was committed to completing the migration by March next year, all things being equal.

Transmedia Corporation, a State-owned company with the mandate to provide broadcasting signals in the country, is the implementing agent and contractor for the project.

It sourced digital equipment from a Germany company, Rhodhe & Schwarz, a world market leader in a range of broadcasting transmission equipment. It established 24 backbone transmission sites which should be digitalised, as stipulated by ITU.

However, Zimbabwe's migration process faced numerous challenges relating to funding, delivery of digital equipment and the delays in implementation of civil works for the installation of the transmission network.

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Muganyura said the funding issue was resolved after BAZ signed a funding deal with Huawei International early this year. The analogue platform can only accommodate one frequency that carries one transmitter and one broadcaster, whereas the digital platform accommodates several television channels in a single frequency which needs only one transmitter.

This makes very efficient use of resources. Under this dispensation, viewers also have a variety of programmes to choose from and it also offers better quality pictures as well as access to interactive services.

Once the television network digitalisation project has been rolled out, government is expected to gain financially under what is referred to as 'digital dividend'.

The dividend literally means more frequencies would be freed and government can sell some of the frequencies to television operators in the country for other activities.

Currently, there are no independent television broadcasters in Zimbabwe. There are only two television services, Zimbabwe Television (ZTV1) and ZTV2, which are run by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings and the transmission coverage stands at 70 percent for the two television stations.

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