



**SUBMISSION TO THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ZAMBIA
COMMITTEE ON MEDIA, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY**

TOPIC: REVIEW OF DIGITAL MIGRATION IN ZAMBIA

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1. ABOUT WITNESSES

BLOGGERS OF ZAMBIA

The Bloggers of Zambia is an independent organisation and our work is based on the following themes; Digital Rights, Press Freedom, Civic Tech, Media and Information Literacy. Our organisation does this work through advocacy and campaigning, trainings, research, regional and local multi-stakeholder convenings.

Mission

An open society where digital rights and the rights-based offline and online media platforms are guaranteed and protected

Motto: Our motto is, ‘**Keeping Online Spaces Open**’.

2. INTRODUCTION

Television and radio have remained a popular source of information and media for information, education and entertainment. The analogue and digital technologies comprise the two forms of television broadcasting. Analogue technology has been in existence since the onset of television broadcasting in the world. Digital migration arose as a result of global breakthrough revolutions in broadcasting facilitated by technology.

Digital migration is the process in which traditional analogue broadcasting services are replaced with digital networks. The efficient benefits of digital broadcasting extend to consumers, broadcasters as well as service providers. With digitalization comes the potential to offer openness coupled with diversity to the broadcast sector by developing multiple new channels, through downsizing of the amount of frequencies necessary for one station’s broadcast ¹.

Zambia is a member of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Digital migration arose as a result of global revolutions in broadcasting. At the Geneva 2006 Agreement of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), it was agreed that all ITU Member States should embrace new technology in broadcasting and, as such, migrate from analogue to digital television broadcasting by June 2015. However, due to financial constraints, Zambia and many other African countries were unable to meet the deadline.

In October 2015, the Zambia National Digital TV Migration Project was officially started, including the construction of the national digital TV center and the transmission network platform, the digitalization of the state TV station of Zambia, the digitalization of the provincial radio and TV buildings and TV stations, the construction of the state operation center and business hall and the digitalization of all terminal receiving systems, etc ².

¹ Digital Migration And Access to Information: Impact on Marginalised Communities in Southern Africa. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/20191.pdf>

² Thursday, 25 October, 2018 1 Ministerial Statement On Digital Migration Project Implementation By Minister Of Information And Broadcasting. National Assembly of Zambia. https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/images/publication_docs/MINISTERIAL%20STATEMENT%20BY%20THE%20HON.%20MINISTER%20OF%20INFORMATION%2C%20MS%20SILIYA%2C%20MP%2C%20ON%20DIGITAL%20MIGRATION%20PROJECT%20IMPLEMENTATION_0.pdf

In 2016, the Government allocated US\$9.5 million to Phase I of the Digital Terrestrial Television Migration Project, which installed 10 transmitters from Livingstone to Chililabombwe to create a digital network. In the same year, the Government decided to accelerate the digital migration to the rest of the country by acquiring a US \$273 million loan through the ZNBC from the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of China.

3. OVERVIEW

The digitalisation (transition or switch from analogue broadcasting to digital broadcasting) was necessitated because of several factors such as efficiency, quality and cost in addition to opportunities on expanded frequency spectrums in comparison to digital technology. Digital opens up new vistas and possibilities. Terrestrial digital television allows for an increase in the programmes available, improves quality and accessibility and creates new media services. Digital radio offers improved sound and reception and new multimedia functions. For instance, receivers can be equipped with screens to broadcast images and texts.

Digital is also more cost-effective and offers limitless frequencies across all broadcasting spectrums, allowing a wider range of citizens and interest groups access to broadcasting frequencies. It gives broadcasters and content creators a wider choice of frequencies, which means more players can enter the market. It gives the voiceless a voice, enhancing and strengthening access to information and human rights. Arguably the most important benefit of this digital migration is providing access to information³.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that migration from analogue to digital benefits the people and leads to more services and broader coverage. Digital broadcasting enables utilisation of the scarce frequency spectrum far more efficiently than analogue technologies and therefore the first benefit of digital migration is the freeing up of valuable radio frequency spectrum that is currently used for analogue television transmission⁴.

One of the sectors identified by the Government as having potential to contribute to economic growth and job creation is the ICT sector. Hence increasing access to information and ICT services through infrastructure roll-out will definitely help in reducing the cost of doing business, promote small business development (entrepreneurship) and enhance job creation. Access to government information and services is fundamentally important in poverty reduction efforts. Through the effective application and use of ICTs by the government (e-government), opportunities such as the efficient management of information to the citizens and better service delivery are created.

The migration to digital broadcasting was pursued to create opportunities for the development, use and wide dissemination of local content. Also to advance the expression and the efficient communication of the knowledge and experience of all communities and the country as a whole.

³ An Analysis of the Challenges and Benefits of Digital Migration in Zambia. American Journal of Networks and Communications. Chimanga & Mumba, 2020

⁴ Independent Broadcasting Authority. Digital Migration Policy. 2014

On November 8, 2024, the Chief Government Spokesperson, Mr. Cornelius Mweetwa disclosed that Zambia's digital migration program remains incomplete, with around 10% of the project still outstanding. Mweetwa provided this update during questions for oral answer in the National Assembly of Zambia, where he outlined the total costs and funding sources of the project, where he added that the program, costing a total of \$273,154,281, was funded by the Zambian government through a loan from the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of China, amounting to \$231,181,138, alongside self-raised funding totaling \$40,972,142⁵.

4. REVIEW OF DIGITAL MIGRATION

- **Adequacy of the Policy and Regulatory Frameworks under which Digital Migration was Implemented and whether policy reforms were undertaken as required by Digital Migration policy**

At the beginning of the implementation, an adequate assessment of the policy and regulatory environment was done. However most of the legal environment has changed immensely seeing the review and amendments in some cases of laws such as the Electronic Communications and Transactions, Information and Communications Technology and others. The policy therefore, fell prey to gaps in legislation considering new and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and Internet of Things. These have created challenges and digital disruption. The policy requires reviewing to take into account new developments such as online broadcasting through podcasts but also cyber legislation that came into effect at the close of the year 2021.

In terms of the Legal Framework, the policy was implemented with the guidance of the Republican Constitution and international commitments such as the ITU itself. In addition, there are specific laws that constitute the legal framework. The following are the specific laws that facilitated the implementation of the Policy⁶:

- a) Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation Act Cap. 154 of the Laws of Zambia
- b) Copyright and Performance Rights Act Cap No. 44 of 1994 and No. 25 of 2010
- c) Theatres and Cinematography Exhibition Act Cap158
- d) Independent Broadcasting Authority Act Cap No.17 of 2002 and as amended in Act No. 26 of 2010
- e) Electronic Communications and Transactions Act No. 21 of 2009
- f) Information and Communication Technology Act No.15 of 2009

additionally, for smooth implementation of the policy, the following laws were supposed to be reviewed according to the policy document:

- a) The Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation Cap 154 to provide for the creation of a National Public Content Service Provider separate from the Public Signal Distributor
- b) The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act No.17 of 2002 and as amended in Act No. 26 of 2010 to enhance content regulation in the digital broadcasting platform. This review is going on currently, but there are observations that the proposed bill focuses more on online content control, rather than broadcasting regulation in the digital age.
- c) The Information and Communication Technology Act 2009 to provide for regulation of signal distribution and operation of signal distributors.
- d) Electronic Communications and Transactions Act No. 21 of 2009

⁵ Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation. 2024. <https://znbco.zm/news/mweetwa-gives-update-on-digital-migration/>

⁶ Independent Broadcasting Authority. Digital Migration Policy. 2014

In order to achieve the objectives set out in this policy framework, Government instituted the following policy measures:

- a) **Digital Broadcasting Environment.** The broadcasting environment was supposed to be reviewed to reflect the new realities of digital broadcasting. This involved reviewing the frequency licenses, developing signal distributor and content service provider regulations, reviewing the operations of ZNBC as a public broadcaster in line with the new business model in the digital environment and so on.
 - b) **National Technical Standards for Transmission and Compression.** The policy promoted the adoption of common technical standards and that ensured consumer protection.
 - c) **Market Structure and Licensing Framework.** The broadcasting licensing framework was to be transformed into two broad licensing categories namely; content service provider licence and signal distributor licence. In addition no single entity was to hold both types of licenses at the same time. These licenses were not issued to political parties, organizations affiliated to political parties and an individual holding political office.
 - d) **Content Service Provision:** Content Service Provision was to be undertaken by Content Service Providers.
 - e) **Signal Distribution:** Signal distribution was to be undertaken by signal distributors.
 - f) **Digital Terrestrial Television Set Top Boxes and Consumer Protection.** Government was to ensure protection of the consumer and guarantee access to information.
- **The Status of Digital Migration and whether it was Implemented According to Stipulations of the Policy**

According to a statement read in parliament by the Minister of Information and Media Mr. Cornelius Mweetwa, the process is at 90% done. Implementation was halted for about 3 years due to national debt assessment processes. According to the statement, over 192 Million dollars have been paid to the contractor for the digital migration since the beginning of the project to date. An additional 27 Million dollars is needed to complete the remaining phases of the project.

The works include construction of eight provincial television studios, transmission sites as well as building of the National Operation Centre which is already at 90 percent.

The suspension of the project has greatly delayed progress. It is urgent that the government seeks an amicable solution to resolve and complete this process as this is over 10 years after the call for countries to digitise their broadcasting by ITU.

- **The intended benefits of Digital Migration and how many so far have been achieved**

The implementation of the Policy is anchored on pillars to improve access to information, enhance broadcast quality and support economic and social development, which are crucial pillars for Zambia's development. This has resulted in some economic and social benefits for the people. Digital broadcasting makes efficient use of the available spectrum, freeing up bandwidth for other important services. It has given broadcasters and content creators a wider choice of frequencies, which means more players can enter the market.

In Zambia, the digital migration project has made significant progress. As of August 2024, 90% of the project was complete, with the government pledging to finalize the remaining 10%.

The benefits of digital migration include improved Broadcasting Services, where the migration has led to better transmission quality and content delivery, enhancing viewer satisfaction. While these achievements are notable, challenges such as infrastructure limitations and funding constraints have delayed full realization of all benefits.

- Challenges in Implementation of the Digital Migration Programme

Implementing the Digital Migration Programme in Zambia has faced several challenges including;

- Infrastructure limitations: Inadequate access to electricity and internet connectivity, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, hampers the deployment of digital broadcasting services.
- Financial constraints: High costs associated with acquiring set-top boxes and compatible television sets pose affordability issues for many households.
- Policy and regulatory challenges: Delays in establishing clear and harmonized laws, policies and regulatory frameworks have constrained smooth implementation.
- Public awareness and education: Limited public understanding of digital migration benefits and requirements has led to resistance and even slowing adoption, where citizens do not see the benefits of the transition, but rather view it as an imposed government condition.
- Technical Expertise: A shortage of skilled personnel to manage and maintain digital broadcasting infrastructure affects service quality and reliability.
- Content production and diversity: The need for increased local content production to meet digital platform demands presents challenges in quality and quantity.

The delayed review of the broadcasting environment to reflect new realities of digital broadcasting to align with the policy, to separate content service provisioning and signal distribution. Further evaluation of the digital migration policy reviewed that the switch on date of 31st September, 2014 for Phase I (one) along the line of rail, Phase II (two) provincial centre 31st December, 2014 and Phase III (three) remote sites 30th April, 2015 were not adhered to.

The consequence of the country 's failure to meet the ITU deadline of 17th June, 2015 means that Zambia risks not having a claim for protection from any frequency assignments in conformity with the agreement with the neighbouring countries. There is also a challenge in Capacity to facilitate the digital migration process. This process must be escalated and completed within 2 years' time and with fewer challenges but also alongside awareness raising campaigns.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The progress made thus far on digital migration is acknowledged amidst the challenges and shortcomings. The government needs to be more deliberate to ensure adequate funding and political will to the process.

We therefore recommend the following,

- Enhance infrastructure development to expand digital transmission infrastructure to ensure nationwide coverage, especially in rural, peri-urban and other under-served areas.
- Investment in alternative energy: Invest in renewable energy solutions to address electricity challenges in remote locations.

- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning: Develop a robust framework to assess the effectiveness of digital migration policies and initiatives and conduct periodic reviews to identify gaps and implement corrective measures promptly.
- Strengthen policy and regulation: Update the digital migration policy to address emerging challenges and align with global best practices to establish clear guidelines for spectrum management and licensing to optimize usage and generate revenue.
- Promote continuous public awareness and education: Continue with the nationwide campaigns to inform and educate the public about the benefits and requirements of digital migration. Provide targeted information for rural communities and low-income households to ensure inclusivity.
- Improve accessibility and affordability: Introduce subsidies or tax incentives for affordable set-top boxes and compatible televisions by for instance, collaborating with private sector stakeholders to reduce the cost of digital broadcasting equipment and services.
- Build local capacity: Offer training programs to develop technical expertise in digital broadcasting systems and support local content creators to produce diverse, high-quality programming for digital platforms.
- Foster collaboration: Encourage partnerships between the government, private sector and international organizations to pool resources and expertise and establish a multi-stakeholder task force to monitor and evaluate the progress of digital migration.

6. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The review of digital migration in Zambia presents an opportunity to address existing challenges and fully harness the benefits of digital broadcasting for national development. While commendable progress has been made, gaps in infrastructure, accessibility, affordability, and public awareness continue to hinder the realization of its full potential.

By prioritizing policy reforms, investing in infrastructure, fostering public-private partnerships and promoting inclusivity, Zambia can create a robust digital broadcasting ecosystem that enhances communication, supports local content creation and drives socio-economic development.

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