



Digital TV set for April 2010 commercial launch

Wednesday, 22 July 2009, 11:56

Digital television could become a reality for South Africans as early as April next year, with an ambitious implementation plan so far on track. And, while television viewers will have to buy new set-top boxes (STBs) to access the 20 promised free-to-view channels, the cost of these will be maintained at R700.00 or less.

In 2007, cabinet approved the switchover of the country's television network to the digital terrestrial network, with the digital signal having switched on last November and the analogue signal due to be switched off in November 2011.

Yesterday, Minister of Communication Gen Sipiwe Nyanda stressed that there has been no change in that plan and, as far as cabinet is concerned, the full implementation of digital television is still set for November 2011.

However, spokesmen from the Digital Dzonga Advisory Council, which was launched yesterday to oversee the digital migration, hinted that - while major metropolises would receive the digital signal by the deadline - it may take until 2015 for a full roll-out to all areas of the country to take place.

The so-called dual illumination period, which started when the digital signal first went live in November 2008, is being funded by government.

One of the main functions of the Digital Dzonga Advisory Council, apart from ensuring that all stakeholders stay on track during the digital implementation, is to inform and educate consumers on what digital television is and how they can access it.

One of the common misconceptions that the council laid to rest yesterday is that only new, high-definition television sets will be able to receive the digital signal.

On the contrary, all televisions, old or new, will have to be connected to the network via a new set-top box, which will cost about R700.00 to buy.

Once connected, however, televisions will be able to receive an expanded number of free-to-view channels as well as a number of electronic services including some e-government content.

Poor households will qualify for a subsidy on buying their set-top boxes - and all of the television households buying the new device will have to produce a television licence.