

## ZWELI MOKGATA

MINISTER of Communications Sipiwe Nyanda said the migration of free-to-air television from analogue to digital was well on its way.

But he warned that the R20-million marketing and awareness programme, which is critical to informing people about the change, was not budgeted for.

He was speaking at the launch of the Digital Dzonga, the 14-member advisory council made up of representatives of government, labour and the private sector, including broadcasters and technology manufacturers.

The Dzonga was appointed by the department of communications to oversee the migration process, which was launched in November when Sentech switched on its digital signal for its trial phase involving 3 000 television sets

# Transition to digital television well on track, says Nyanda

around the country.

He said: "The first digital terrestrial television readiness report released by the council, outlining critical factors to be in place and our progress in respect of these factors, was a great reality check.

"I understand that the Bureau of Standards has released a set-top box specification, which is a positive development.

"We therefore urge all parties dealing in software-related issues to conclude their agreements so that manufacturing of set-top boxes can commence in earnest."

Nyanda said the government had

allocated R400-million to subsidise the R700 set-top boxes that 9 million television owners will have to buy to continue watching beyond November 2011, when the analogue signal will be cut off.

An additional R300-million in the current financial year was allocated by the Treasury to support Sentech's additional burden of carrying both analogue and digital signals.

Lara Kantor, chair of the Dzonga, said the broadcasters involved in the process (the SABC, M-Net and e.tv) would be ready with a consumer offering between Jan-

uary and June.

"We're placing it somewhere in the mid-point of that period, around April," Kantor said.

"We've taken into account long lead items, such as the specifications of the software for set-top boxes, so we should be able to be ready by then."

The migration is expected to cost the government billions.

When the digital migration policy was signed by the Cabinet in 2007, the government estimated R2.45-billion for the set-top box subsidy.

About 5 million people are

deemed to be too poor to afford the full R700 for the device, which allows a viewer's television set to pick up the digital signal distributed by Sentech via a radio signal.

Some of the criteria for consumers to qualify for a subsidy include being the recipient of an income grant or a pension.

Nyanda said: "There'll be a 70% discount, but these people will need to be holders of valid TV licences.

"That should contribute to addressing the financial problems that the SABC may be experiencing."

Kantor said 60% of the country was now covered by the newly installed signal distribution equipment.

She said 95% of the country would eventually be covered, with the remaining 5% to be covered by alternative technologies, such as satellite relaying.