

Uganda: MultiChoice pleads for signal distribution deal

 By [Walter Wafula](#)

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MultiChoice Uganda, the DSTV service provider in the country has asked the government to allow it to play a major role in Uganda's analogue to digital broadcasting exodus. According to Steven Musoke, the chairman of MultiChoice Uganda, the company has the technical capacity that can facilitate the transition in a period of eight months.



"We beg that the cabinet recognises that we are also in existence and operate throughout Africa. Whenever there is a new policy we should be involved," Musoke said at Forum on Digital Broadcasting Migration in Kampala on 22 July 2011. "Let everybody be involved and the transition will be clear," he added.

Musoke's comments came amidst a row over the appointment of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) as the sole digital signal distributor in the country over the next five years.

UBC handed the deal

The deal was handed to UBC in April this year, following the approval of the digital migration policy by the cabinet. As a signal distributor, UBC will be charged with creating a company that will carry television and radio signals of most private companies in the country. It means the company will have to set up and manage the infrastructure on which to deliver the signals besides providing its content as UBC TV and radio.

MultiChoice says it has the capacity to play this role because it has invested up to US\$200 million in Africa and therefore has the ability to carry out any task. The firm wants the government to make a provision for two categories of signal distribution including Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and satellite transmission.

Last week, Capt. Francis Babu, the chairman the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) said his members were opposed to UBC's being that privileged company because it is an industry competitor. "We have no problem with UBC being part of the signal distribution but we think that it should be an independent company. All members should be part of this company," he said at the forum. Private broadcasters are also opposed to UBC's selection because of its inefficiency

and the exorbitant fees it charges competitors.

"As a country, we risk having one signal distributor. If you have one signal distributor, in the event of failure you will have a very big problem," said Charles Hamya, general manager, MultiChoice.

MultiChoice ready to switch on digital platform

Unlike other broadcasters whose digital migration will be determined by UBC's actions, MultiChoice is ready to switch on its digital platform according to Musoke. The company will kick off its migrating next month, starting with Kampala and Entebbe districts.

"We are migrating in 15 countries in Africa," he said. The transition is part of the global movement to digital broadcasting by 31 December 2015. The deadline was agreed upon by member states of the International Telecommunications Union in 2006. However, East African states including; Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania set 31 December 2012, as their switchover deadline.

Last week, it emerged that Uganda was unlikely to hit the regional deadline because of the pace of the UBC. The company does not have the US\$74 million it needs to invest in the digital transition platform. Worse still, the government has suspended a deal the corporation signed with Huawei the Chinese technology company to construct the necessary infrastructure required to complete the transition. The deal was stopped over abuse of procurement procedures according to the *New Vision* newspaper. The Chinese government is willing to provide the resources if Huawei is to implement the project.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

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