

Radio conference a platform to exchange ideas

Deputy Minister of Communications Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams says the Radio Days Africa conference, which is currently taking place in Johannesburg, provides a useful platform to exchange ideas, information and experiences about the issues facing radio.

Hosted by the Wits Radio Academy, the three-day conference has brought together 50 top international speakers, over 200 delegates from public, commercial and community radio, producers, managers, on-air talent as well as sales and marketing staff to grapple with issues facing the radio in a changing environment.

Among the topics under the spotlight include international insights on making social media work for radio programmers, the challenge of implementing needletime, how to build a successful radio advertising campaign, the role of audio in building brands and the enabling radio's digital future.

Addressing the delegates on Thursday, Deputy Minister of Communication, Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams said the conference takes place less than a month after the deadline to migrate from analogue to digital broadcasting passed.

Emphasising that South Africa was not the only country that did not meet the deadline, the Deputy Minister attributed the missed deadline to factors that were beyond government's control, including court cases filed by media houses over the set-top-box controls.



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"The good news though is that the recent judgement in favour of government by the North Gauteng High Court will enable us to speed up the process of digital migration," she said, adding that migration is going to happen within the next two years.

"Digital migration must happen because it is in line with the National Development Plan to create a robust, reliable, secure and affordable ICT infrastructure."

The NDP calls for a National ICT policy that supports the needs of the economy and the migration from analogue will promote industrial development, job creation and access to information.

Despite not meeting the deadline, Deputy Minister Ndabeni-Abrahams told delegates that government is implementing plans to minimise the potential radio frequency interference as a result of migrating from an analogue to a digital broadcasting system.

This has seen South Africa signing several bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Botswana and Mozambique in order to minimise cross-border radio frequency spectrum interference.

The purpose of these agreements, according to the Deputy Minister, is to harmonise the use of radio frequency spectrum to ensure that there is no interference.

They also include the sharing of migration plans, processes to handle frequency spectrum interference and the release of digital dividends timing.

Government was also taking concrete steps to introduce digital radio broadcasting.

Detailing some of the advantages and benefits associated with digital radio broadcasting, Deputy Minister Ndabeni-Abrahams said it will among other things, open the airwaves to more radio stations as the current analogue FM signal is already crowded, especially in Gauteng.

It will also lead to improved audio quality and enable services such as weather, traffic and news to be displayed on radio screens, especially in cars. Other benefits include improved power consumption and lower maintenance costs.

Government has also made steady progress towards making digital radio broadcasting a reality through the state-owned broadcasting signal distributor Sentech and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa) which are working with the broadcasting industry to develop a regulatory framework and commercial model for digital radio in South Africa.

To ensure that government understands operational issues and test technical functionality Sentech has, in partnership with various stakeholders like the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and Southern African Digital Broadcasting Association (SADIBA), conducted digital radio trials to evaluate the Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB+) and Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM).

They have given test licences to broadcasters to see if they will be able to broadcast using DAB or DRM.

DAB+ is meant to replace the analogue FM band while DRM will replace the medium-wave or AM band.

The trial on DAB+ started in November last year and comprises of 40 public, commercial and community radio stations in both Johannesburg and Pretoria. The trial, which runs for twelve months, will come to an end in October.

The trial on DRM, which is the technology standard used for mediumwave and shortwave transmissions, began in July last year and has been conducted with Radio Pulpit.

Sentech will in partnership with various stakeholders provide Icasa with the joint technical report based on the outcomes of the trials.

"This report will help us determine what has worked and what has not. It will enable us to develop a roadmap for a regulatory

framework, policy proposals and commercial model for digital radio in the country," said the Deputy Minister.

Government will start engaging various stakeholders on the policy proposals after the conclusion of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) World Radio Communication Conference (WRC-15).

The conference, which is held every three to four years, will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, in November.

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