

The Operations team is ready to support the Digital Terrestrial Television network

By Sihle Ngcobo



Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, had confirmed 30 June 2022 as the official date when analogue television (ATV) will be switched off (ASO) countrywide, before the ConCourt ruling delaying ASO date to allow further consultations. This would have officially ended dual illumination in South Africa, and all households relying on terrestrial television would only receive digital terrestrial television (DTT). It would have ended the process that started in 2008. The ASO process is mainly being driven by SENTECH team as focus is on STB installations, under the guidance of our COO, Tebogo Leshope, as the BDM project leader appointed by the minister.

Although the country is only now switching off ATV, SENTECH has been running the DTT network commercially since 2017 when six sites were piloted by MultiChoice. The pilot enabled operational teams to test the transmission equipment in a live environment, develop standard operational procedures, deploy operational support systems, and test the network from end to end (ie, from the studio to a viewer at home). After an industry-wide service level agreement (SLA) was signed between broadcasters and SENTECH as a network operator in 2017, MultiChoice switched off its ATV network and migrated to DTT with 50 commercial sites. Teams within Operations, supported by the Technology team have been supporting the DTT network since 2018.

There have been challenges operational teams had to overcome in supporting this network, mainly relating to the ageing of

equipment, interference with analogue television services and optimising single frequency networks. Operational teams worked relentlessly, even during the initial stages of the hard lockdown period, to ensure the DTT network was ready for all broadcasters as the SABC started to switch to ATV services in 2020. Today, all ATV services have been switched off in the Free State, Northern Cape, North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. Teams in operational centres in these provinces have been running the DTT network successfully and providing services to millions of households. This augurs well for the rest of the country.

SENTECH has played an important role in successfully implementing this project entrusted to us by DCDT and serving the country. The next step is ensuring the country reaps the benefits of digital migration, to name a few; more channels for audiences, excellent signal quality and efficient use of spectrum. This requires all of us to be ambassadors of this project, spread the word about its benefits, ensure indigent people within our communities access set-top boxes, and report any deviations to operations teams supporting the network.

We have a network management centre that is operational 24/7, with regional centres across the country ready to ensure service continuity and minimal disruptions to our customers and audiences. SENTECH's website provides more information on digital migration that colleagues can access to educate the public.