DRAFT CABINET PAPER BY THE HON MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE, MR DEMBA A JAWO FOR APPROVAL OF THE DIGITAL BROADCASTING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The global community through the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) agreed to the transition from analogue transmission to digital for broadcasting television (TV) and Radio signals. This migration process called Digital Terrestrial Transition (DTT) was agreed to be completed by 17 June 2015, a deadline emanated from the Regional Radio Communication Conference of 2006 (RRC06) and the Geneva 2006 (GE06) Agreement of ITU.

This global mission is at the centre stage of our regional and sub-regional objectives. To this end, ECOWAS developed a common roadmap and technical specifications to be adopted by Member States. The technical specifications were inspired by the regional standards agreed upon under the auspices of the African Telecommunication Union (ATU), which is a specialized AU Agency.

However, only five (5) African countries met the initial deadline and no ECOWAS Member State was among them. As a result, ECOWAS Member States agreed to extend the deadline to December, 2016, which could not also, be realized. The latest deadline is now targeted for 9 December 2017.

DIGITAL BROADCASTING POLICY

The Information and Communication Act (2009) has enshrined key policy and regulatory requirements for the broadcasting sector. However, there is no specific broadcasting policy in place to guide the provision of broadcasting services in this digital era. Access to Broadcasting has become a necessity in our daily lives and a critical ingredient for the empowerment of our citizenry. The policy would create media pluralism and diversity, encourage media freedom through access to information and freedom of speech and develop a sustainable digital broadcasting ecosystem.

This policy document attached is a requirement of the ITU Agreement signed by The Gambia in 2006 to migrate from analogue to digital transmission mode. The policy considers the financing of the DTT infrastructure to be undertaken by interested stakeholders on their own and/or through a public-private partnership (PPP).

DIGITAL TERRESTRIAL TRANSITION (DTT) INFRASTRUCTURE

It is worthy to mention that an agreement was signed between the GOTG and a Senegalese Company called EXCAF Group to roll out the requisite infrastructure for the Digital Terrestrial Transition (DTT). This was supposed to be completed by the initial deadline of 17 June 2015, which was not possible. Notwithstanding, some infrastructure developments were undertaken and test signals were transmitted. It is pleasing to inform Cabinet that two transmitter sites are completed, which can cover Greater Banjul up to the Lower River and North Bank Regions.
The DTT network will cover the length and breadth of the country with 6 transmitter sites namely: Abuko, Kanilai, Mansa Konko, Kudang, Bansang and Basse.

**SIGNAL DISTRIBUTOR**

The digital migration era will usher in a paradigm shift in the structural organization of the broadcasting sector. The DTT network will be provided by a third party company that would provide services to existing and potential TV stations. This company will become the signal distributor and/or multiplex operator. Its main role will be providing infrastructure services to all content service providers.

It may interest you to know that with digital broadcasting, a single frequency can serve between 15 - 20 TV changes. The Gambia was allocated 4 channels, which could accommodate 80 TV Channels. This provides the opportunity to award many TV licenses once liberalization kicks in through the approval of the Digital Broadcasting Policy (DBP). The DBP has defined a clear policy that would bar any single entity to acquire/hold both a content and infrastructure service provider licenses. This supports the separation of roles to ensure fair play and non-discriminatory actions by the signal distributors.

The signal distributor will be providing equal access to all television channels at same quality and price for the service.

**CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT**

Cabinet is hereby apprised that DTT transition will bring a significant transformation in the reception of TV signals by the citizens. There is need to provide set top boxes (STBs) to enable existing analogue TV sets to receive transmission signals from the digital platforms.

Currently, there are digital TV sets in the market but very expensive for the majority of our populace. The price to acquire STBs are mostly unaffordable to our masses, hence, requires government intervention in the form of subsidies and/or waivers on duty/taxes.

In order to ensure a seamless transition and inclusive participation of all citizens, there is need to create consumer awareness and education.

**DTT STRUCTURE**

The DTT policy creates a separation of infrastructure from content service delivery. In this regard, a content service provider (CSP) license and Infrastructure Service Provider (ISP) license will be provided. **No licensee will be allowed to acquire both licenses.** Particular attention will be given to the restructuring of the Public Broadcaster, GRTS, as their role has to change and adapt to the new environment. Thus, GRTS will become the designated Public Service Broadcaster (PSB) and it is poised to implement the universal service obligation of Government.
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IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP
The Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure has realized the importance of achieving the digital migration by the set deadline of 9 December 2017.

The roadmap plans to provide coverage within the Greater Banjul Area (GBA), North Bank Region (NBR) and the Lower River Region (LRR) by end of July 2017. The rest of the country is expected to be covered not later than 30 October 2017. Once the whole nation is covered, the actual Digital Switch Over (DSO) of signals will be done by 9 December 2017.

As part of the implementation of the roadmap, the National Steering Committee (NSC) will be revived to actively guide the DTT process. The members of the Committee include Ministries of Trade, Finance and Information, the Regulator, Broadcaster, Telecomm Operators, Consumer Representatives and the Private Sector.

CONCLUSION
The Analogue Switch Off (ASO) and Digital Switch Over (DSO) are expected to complete not later than 9 December 2017. Therefore, it is imperative that the policy framework is in place before TV Licenses could be granted. This has also become a matter of urgency, considering the pronouncement made by H E The President that TV licences will be issued by the Government.

The DSO will free up the analogue frequencies for other uses specially 4G mobile services. These frequencies could be assigned to mobile services to generate revenue for government hence the term “digital dividend”.

The digital migration will make The Gambia create its own TV bouquet to be available the world over. The bouquet will include free to air TV channels including GRTS. This would provide economies of scale and make TV channels accessible and affordable to the masses thus, achieving the policy objectives of Government.

The DTT network will be supported by the latest standards in TV broadcasting namely; DVB-T2, Mpeg4 compression technology and high definition (HD) platforms. This will ensure programme enrichment, quality images and efficient delivery of services. The DTT network is expected to reduce operating costs as TV Companies should not be required to put up their own dedicated networks but to connect to the shared infrastructure signal of the distributor.

PRAYERS
Cabinet is hereby requested to adopt the proposed Digital Broadcasting Policy and approve the revival of the National Steering Committee.

Ministry of Information & Communication Infrastructure
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Monday, March 20, 2017