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Experiences of the community television sector in the migration to digital terrestrial television in South Africa 2007 - 2014

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has a nascent community television sector, which is legislated as a tier of broadcasting. This sector is important in deepening democracy, creating access to information, giving communities the space to share information, and expanding media ownership to communities beyond the public and commercial television broadcasting sectors. Since 2007, when Soweto TV was the first community television station to be licensed, the processes towards migrating analogue to digital terrestrial television have been beset with delays and the experience of the community TV sector with respect to this migration have been not well understood.

The conceptual-analytical framework for this historical study of the period 2007 to 2014 drew on the key themes of sector and institutional governance including the effectiveness of policy and regulation, technological advancement, content and services. Using a constructivist methodology the key documents pertaining to broadcast digital migration were reviewed and interviews were conducted with three community TV stations, Soweto TV, Bay TV and Cape Town TV, as well as with the policy-maker, the regulator and sector experts.

The findings revealed that the community television (CTV) sector was faced with problems of sector and institutional governance not being effectively addressed in legislation and regulation, stagnation as a result of lack of spectrum in the analogue television-broadcasting dispensation and limitations on content provision. Using McConnell's 2010 framework, analysis of the data led to the conclusion that the DTTM programme has failed with respect to the community TV sector. Advances for the CTV sector will require revision to legislation and future regulation to guide the governance of the CTV sector and the digital terrestrial television migration should be concluded without further delay, in order to enable the sector to grow. Although CTV stations are providing content to communities, the opportunity for them to make a greater impact, if digital terrestrial television (DTT) is finally launched, should be prioritised as the new technology can provide them with the scope to expand their content offerings.