

Free to air satellite TV vital

By [Albert Nhamoyebonde](#)

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Reports that millions of viewers of free to air satellite television will not be able to watch their favourite programmes are very disturbing.

It is not true that viewers do not like to watch the local television programmes but the truth of the matter is that, we now live in a global village where knowledge should be accessed free of charge.

It is of paramount importance that developing countries with resources, such as, South Africa, could market themselves through free to air television broadcasts. South Africa is getting a lot of business by allowing its national broadcasting unit, [SABC](#) [South African Broadcasting Corporation] , to market the country throughout Africa especially its products that are now sold everywhere.

Sometime back, a former president of South Africa remarked that Zimbabwean shoppers were spending about US\$250 000 a month even before the introduction of the multi-currency system.

Now, shoppers from Zimbabwe are spending millions of dollars on South African products through cross-border trade and by importing products sold in most shops and supermarkets throughout the country and in other countries in Africa.

What SABC should do is to charge viable rates for advertising these products. Maybe, the South African embassies in African countries could intervene on behalf of the viewers in these African countries to allow the free to air programmes to be made available.

It is very expensive to subscribe to normal satellite television marketed by private business concerns. For example, the charges for satellite television in Zimbabwe range from US\$25 to about US\$72 a month. How many people can afford to part with such kind of money these days when workers earn low salaries?

One option if the free to air satellite broadcasts were to be discontinued, is for SABC to register and be licenced by various African countries to show their programmes. South Africa is benefiting commercially from the free to air showing of SABC programmes.

The legal proceedings in Botswana against the SABC broadcasts which are being shown or pirated into African countries, were very unfortunate. The banning of these programmes would inflict a major blow to the human right to access information and entertainment.

The local ZTV programmes are quite limited as to offer an alternative to satellite broadcasts. It is not a secret that ZTV is under capitalised. Commercially, the national broadcasting unit is struggling from lack of advertising revenue because the economy has still to recover to make it viable to advertise locally produced products.

In some political circles, the demise of SABC broadcasts would be most welcome. Many politicians see an underhand in the South African media with the net result that it is being perceived as a vehicle for regime change and also used to discredit the building of a non-racial economic way of life.

It is not just entertainment that many viewers may be subjected to through satellite television broadcasts but, sometimes, a subtle message to project a different political concept especially through the packaging of news, interviews etc.

While, as they often say, the devil is in the details, Africa has a large percentage of impressionable young minds which are likely to succumb to different philosophies alien to the host countries of satellite television.

A case in point is the view that is being peddled in Arab and other African countries that Al Jazeera satellite television is fuelling revolts in many countries. But it is difficult to see SABC playing the same role in African countries.

SABC is just there to market South Africa together with its problems, which it faces in building a viable democracy like what many African experienced after independence from colonial rule.

One thing that stands out for South Africa is its economic development, which could play a major role in other African countries. There is no doubt that its penetration of African economic markets has brought much needed trading opportunities for its companies.

Surely, allowing SABC broadcasts in these African countries will actually enhance its economic influence far and beyond its borders. Companies in South Africa could benefit a lot from improved trade balances.

Source: allAfrica.com

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