

INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION



Project Implementation Report

Supporting and Monitoring of the Transition to Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting in Georgia

April 2015 – February 2016

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Table of Contents

- Introduction 3
- 1. IDFI’s Involvement in the Information Campaign, Support, Assistance and Monitoring 6
- 2. Drafting and Advocating the Implementation of Legislative Changes and Bylaws 8
- 3. Monitoring of License Obligations (Network Building) and Coverage..... 9
- 4. Monitoring Set-Top Box Distribution, Sales and Installation 12
 - 4.1. Subsidized Customers 13
 - 4.2. Non-Subsidized Customers 14
- 5. IDFI Activities Related to Building of Local Multiplex Platforms and Access to Broadcasting 17
- 6. Remaining Problems 21
- 7. Media Coverage 22
- 8. Closing Event of the Project 25

Introduction

Since December 2012 non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) has been involved in support and advocacy process of transition from analog to digital broadcasting in Georgia. IDFI conducts its activities within the frames of the Project of Support and Monitoring of the Digital Switchover Process in Georgia with the support and funding from Open Society Georgian foundation.

IDFI completed monitoring and support process of the digital switchover by the beginning of 2016. According to the assessment of various organizations and entities answerable for the process, the contribution of our organization to the implementation of the model adapted to successful and democratic values is quite substantial. Despite the lack of attention of the government to a number of issues, in general the process was carried out successfully and according to the interests of broadcasters and customers, main actors of the media market.

“Georgian model of the digital switchover” – this is how the transition to the digital broadcasting was called at the 2015 annual OSCE Media Conference¹, one of the main topics of which was the process of transition to the digital broadcasting in South Caucasus. At the conference, which was attended by the representatives of all the states of the region, it was stated clearly that only Georgia managed successful analog switch-off and created its own model of digital broadcasting, which became possible primarily due to the involvement of the civil society in the process².

Despite certain small flaws in the work of the national coverage multiplexes and business sustainability problems facing regional multiplex platforms, overall, as of today, digital broadcasting system in Georgia comprises of 17 small regional, 2 private nationally broadcasted and one state-owned operational national digital networks, which, in a single specific residential area, gives viewers possibility to watch at least 20 and at most 60 free channels while in case of the analog system, it was possible to receive only up 10 channels in a given local territory and often of a very bad quality.

During the implementation of the Project of Support and Monitoring of the Digital Switchover Process in Georgia in the period from April 2015 to February 2016 IDFI carried out the following activities:

- Management of the completion phase of the transition process to the digital broadcasting platform within the planned and “digitalization” strategy-compliant

¹ <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/117220-thbilisshi-samkhreth-kavkasiis-qveynebis-meeqvse-mediakonferencia-chatardeba.html?ar=A>

² <http://www.osce.org/fom/186526>

framework and the utmost reflection of the interests of the operators and broadcasters of the Georgian media market;

- Elimination of the problematic issues and barriers of the technical, legal and economic issues of the digital switchover with active involvement, advocacy and presentation of recommendations;
- Monitoring, detection of the problematic issues, presentation of recommendations and advocacy of the said process with regards to the activities of Georgian National Communications Commission, LEPL Digital Broadcasting Agency, licensees of the digital broadcasting network, Georgian TV and Radio Center Ltd, Georgian Public Broadcaster.

In order to attain the goals of the Project of Support and Monitoring of the Digital Switchover Process in Georgia, IDFI identified the following major vectors:

- Monitoring, analysis of the problematic issues and presentation of recommendations for the activities to be implemented with regards to license terms of Georgian TV and Radio Center Ltd., Stereo+ Ltd and licensees of the local digital broadcasting networks including coverage of the population, allocation of the television programs and other important directions;
- Analysis, involvement in the processes and presentation of recommendations of the digital switchover information campaign strategy implementation, as well as legislative changes and planned activities with regards to LEPL Georgian Public Broadcaster and commercial broadcasters;
- Evaluation of the performance of the information campaign of public support of digital broadcasting, its intensity, effectiveness of communication channels with public and other related topics, determination of the effectiveness of the information campaign and public readiness index, actual assistance with respect to the public awareness;
- Monitoring of the activities providing socially vulnerable customers with the access to services related to the digital switchover process;
- Analysis of the problems and assistance to the local television stations related to the digital switchover;

- Facilitation and advocacy of the implementation process of the recommendations for the transparency of the conditions of placing channels in the digital television network and non-discriminatory and cost-oriented admission conditions;
- Analysis of the problems which occurred during subsidization of the end customers, also during the distribution and installation of the devices for reception of the digital signal, as well as other problems related to the installation of receiver antenna and solving other technical issues;
- Analysis of the broadcasting network development, building timeframes and quality by selecting a trial location.

The digital switchover process consisted of several stages; however, 2015, as the year of analog switch-off, was the most active. This period also revealed flaws which were not reflected in the digital switchover strategy. Yet these flaws were primarily due to the objective that the digital switchover process should have happened in the least possible time with low overhead; in other words, the objective posed on the implementing entities was quite difficult. IDFI, unlike previous years, also faced different goals, namely to monitor the implementation of the adopted strategy and work plan and to support the answerable entities and bodies.

On March 10, 2016, Coalition for Media Advocacy held a media conference in partnership with Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) and Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI).

At the conference representatives of various media and other organizations assessed the media environment ahead of parliamentary elections, and discussed the topics of financial stability and transparency of the media, Russian influence on public opinion in Georgia, public broadcaster reform, internet freedom, and regulation of online space. Towards the end of the conference the participants also summarized the digital broadcasting reform.

IDFI representatives summarized the digital broadcasting reform, presented an analysis of the implemented reform, and discussed the state of regional broadcasters during the digital switchover process.

1. IDFI's Involvement in the Information Campaign, Support, Assistance and Monitoring

Digital Broadcasting Agency was vested in by its charter with the responsibility to inform public about the digital switchover process. The Agency began informing the public in January 2015 by means of video clip broadcasting which was followed by the distribution of information flyers. In practically all the meetings IDFI called upon the Agency to conduct more aggressive and timely campaign in order for public to be prepared for the reform. The text in the information leaflets and flyers should have been simple and with specific instruction. Disapproval was caused by an insect selected as a mascot which public could not relate to the process.

IDFI recommended the LELP Digital Broadcasting Agency to employ all possible means of communication in its information campaign, including meetings with the population, participation in various TV shows, etc. The public relations strategy prepared by the agency planned to only use video clips and information flyers as the means of informing the public.

Flyers were distributed to the public in March and May of 2015. Considering the fact that the analog signal was planned to go down on June 17, 2015, providing the public with general information about the required equipment a couple months prior to the shutdown would not ensure the necessary high demand on set-top boxes. All parties involved in the process agreed that a more active information campaign was necessary. As a result, the Digital Broadcasting Agency increased the frequency of its TV adds, while the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development organized face to face meetings with the public. During these meetings the public was provided with a detailed explanation of who would be affected by the reform, and what exactly was necessary to prepare for a smooth transition to digital broadcasting. Regional meetings were attended by the representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Digital Broadcasting Agency, National Communications Commission, IDFI, and Georgian TV and Radio Center.

However, some of the information provided to the public was inaccurate, resulting in some citizens in Rustavi encountering problems with the reception after the switchover. IDFI held a press conference on this issue, after which the Digital Broadcasting Agency issued instructions for correcting the problem.

Recommendation	Implementation
Creation of a video story about the digital broadcasting	Implemented
Creation of a press-release for media about every news story	Implemented
Newspaper advertising	Implemented

Advertising of the website and constant updating	Advertising did not take place, only 3,200 likes
Preparation of the special information for disabled persons and ethnic minorities	Flyers were printed also in the languages of the ethnic minorities
Printing and distribution of instructions for receivers	Instruction on how to set up KONKA set-top boxes was circulated via the Internet
Circulation of information about installation of antennae on roofs, coverage zones and antennae positioning	Information circulation was overdue, only after problems occurred in Rustavi
Systematic supply of information about vendors which manufacture certified set-top boxes	Public institution is not allowed to circulate information about a private company; hence, we were unable to receive information from the customs
In 2015 the Agency should have put together monthly reports on the completed and planned activities	Only two reports were prepared, the second repeating the first one
Phone calls to the information service shall be free of charge for the customers	The hotline was not free
Based on the information received from the importers and retailers, their website shall include information about all the devices compatible with the digital broadcasting platform of Georgia	Information on all set-top boxes available on the market was not published
Website shall include the map showing the location of towers. Website shall also include a section showing broadcasted channels according to the digital zones	Included but was hard to find
The Agency shall publish monthly statistical report on sold receivers and digital TVs by the regions, as well as circulate data on the distribution of receivers for socially vulnerable customers	Not implemented
The Agency shall control the effectiveness of the information campaign and adjust its policy based on the identified flaws	Effectiveness of the campaign was not assessed
A “digitalization” unit with the participation of all the interested parties or a commission for coordination and problem collection and	Not established

In November 2015 Digital Broadcasting Agency due to the completion of the process held a recap event which was attended by the representatives of the executive authorities and EBRD. For support and assistance in the digital switchover process the Agency awarded the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI).

At the closing event of the digital switchover Nino Kubinidze, head of the Agency, handed certificates of appreciation to Ucha Seturi, Nata Dzvelishvili and Natia Kuprashvili, persons involved in the project. Ucha Seturi, together with the Vice Prime Minister / Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, head of the Digital Broadcasting Agency and the chairman of the National Communications Commission, delivered a speech, summarizing the preceding process.

On November 24 IDFI published an interim report assessing process of the digital switchover. The report was received with displeasure by both the Digital Broadcasting Agency and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. The Agency deemed that the report was published with factual inaccuracies. In reply, IDFI sent a letter to the Agency and the written communication continued. In the end it was revealed that the main complaints of the Agency were associated with the identified flaws in the process of the digital switchover.

2. Drafting and Advocating the Implementation of Legislative Changes and Bylaws

IDFI experts actively participated in the activities and meetings of different format in the process of preparation of the legislative changes to the Georgian Laws on Broadcasting and Electronic Communications by the National Communications Commission. They were also engaged in reviewing changes and amendments to the presented bills. For this purpose, experts Ucha Seturi, Nata Dzvelishvili and Natia Kuprashvili regularly attended conferences and meetings held by the National Communications Commission and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (9 meetings). They also attended private meetings with GNCC (up to ten meetings with the Commission members and staff), during which they analyzed problematic aspects and directions of transition of the legislation related to the digital switchover in Georgia and presented recommendations. Observations of the experts were related to the identification of conditions of terms of access, invitation offers, network coverage, network resource access and other important issues.

This process is not over yet; however, the said persons will participate in the discussion phase of changes to the legislation and will continue advocacy in this respect.

3. Monitoring of License Obligations (Network Building) and Coverage

Frequencies for building of five multiplex were supposed to be granted in an open competition as part of the action plan³ prepared by the government envisaging transition from terrestrial analog broadcasting to terrestrial digital broadcasting. National Communications Commission announced a competition but only one company, Stereo+, applied to win a national coverage MUX and two paid MUX. This company performed building of the network across the whole country.

In 2014 Georgian TV and Radio Center Ltd was granted a frequency resource, free of charge, to broadcast Public Broadcaster. TV and Radio Center, in its turn, contracted Veziri Ltd for technical works. Total cost of the project was up to GEL 11 million; however, TV and Radio Center announced state procurement for so-called “gap fillers”, or additional low-power towers. This procurement budget shall be added to the funds spent by the state for the digital switchover.

Regional broadcasters were granted separate frequencies, free of charge, for building of local multiplexes.

In addition, five Tbilisi-based broadcasters created a partnership called Multiplex Tbilisi and received the right for the utilization of frequency to distribute broadcasting in the Tbilisi zone.

Companies started building network and completed the digital switchover process according to the schedule despite certain problems. The dispute between the parties of Multiplex Tbilisi arisen from the amount of tariff was finished. TV company Kavkasia, one of the partners, deemed that the tariff for access to the network was high which negatively affected not only the interests of multiplex operators but also unlawfully limited availability of the frequency resource for the broadcasters⁴. The Commission requested the partners to recalculate the tariff.

IDFI carried out the monitoring of the digital network pursuant to the schedule approved by the Decree #273 of the Government of Georgia dated June 17, 2015 on terrestrial analog

³ <http://digitaltv.ge/res/docs/2015052816320760654.pdf>

⁴ <http://gncc.ge/ge/legal-acts/commission/solutions/2015-414-16.page>

broadcasting step-by-step switch-off. The analog zone of Tbilisi was switched off at 10 o'clock on the 1st of July, after which IDFI began monitoring of the digital broadcasting network.

Examination was carried out according to the following methodology:

1. Testing using analyzers; this measurements were made by TELEVES H45 analyzer and Delta (311 H) receiver antenna (parameters up to 10 decibels for decimetre frequency band and 1.5 decibels for meter frequency band) at the altitude of up to 5 meters from the surface of the terrain;
2. Testing using devices of the end customer; with this method, TVs and receivers were switched on and all the television channels found in the search mode were displayed using KONKA receivers distributed to the customers and AG receivers available at retailers and Delta (311 H) receiver antenna (parameters up to 10 decibels for decimetre frequency band and 1.5 decibels for meter frequency band) at the altitude of up to 5 meters from the surface of the terrain;

Examination was conducted in 89 locations across Georgia according to the terrestrial analog broadcasting step-by-step switch-off. In Shida Kartli and Imereti, in order to verify the data, examination was carried out for the second time two weeks later.

Examination revealed two problems: reception of non-Georgian channels and insufficient sustainability of the network.

Examination showed that in some region it was possible to receive non-Georgian analog channels which meant that a citizen who was unable to purchase a set-top box or a DVB-T2 television could receive analog broadcast of a foreign country. This was especially problematic in the villages within the proximity of the occupied territories or near the state borders. There is a possibility that the population will be left with no choice but to watch foreign, propagandist media since in the villages in the vicinity of the occupied territories and borderline villages there is a small number of set-top boxes or they are not available at all. Therefore, citizens who use terrestrial broadcasting are not able to receive Georgian channels which is a problem in a modern world where Russians spend substantial amount of money on activating their "soft power".

Problem is equally acute in the borderline villages, e.g. in Samtskhe Javakheti which is populated mainly by non-Georgian inhabitants. Problems of integration already exist in the country and analog switch-off of Georgian channels and availability of only Armenian and Azeri channels will leave the population without Georgian information and encourage more polarization.

Taking into account the said problems, the National Communications Commission during different types of meetings mentioned that eradication of the analog signal of the neighbouring countries would take place. However, monitoring conducted by IDFI revealed that during the examination process analog broadcasting of foreign countries was still available.

Monitoring unveiled availability of Azeri, Armenian and Russian channels in the following locations - **Martkopi, transit highway (Kakheti highway crossing), Zemo Ponichala, Teleti country house settlement, Asureti country house settlement, Marneuli entrance, Gombori police station. Russian channels ORT, RTR Rusia 24 were available in Osiauri, Azeri channels - in Parizi and Shulaveri villages. Turkish channels were received in Kobuleti, Batumi and Tskaltsminda.**

Azeri	Armenian	Russian	Turkish
Martkopi, transit highway (Kakheti highway crossing), Zemo Ponichala, Teleti country house settlement, Asureti country house settlement, Marneuli entrance, Gombori			Kobuleti, Batumi, Tskaltsminda
Parizi village	Marneuli	Osiauri	
Shulaveri	Shulaveri		
Marneuli			
Asureti country house settlement			
Martkopi			
Gombori			

Unfortunately the above-mentioned channels were still available on the 1st of October 2015 in the same locations.

IDFI's examination revealed that the network is not sustainable in a number of locations. During the examination period none of the multiplexes were available in the following locations: Ateni, Tashiskari, Terjola, Tskaltsminda (only Turkish channel was available here), Zetaponi entrance (Shorapani), Legva village, Khelvachauri.

In some areas of Terjola the multiplex signal was available but in some areas no multiplexes were available.

Multiplexes built by TV and Radio Center did not cover the following territories – Kumisi, Poti, Khobi, Kobuleti center, Shuakhevi entrance, Samtredia. Stereo+'s national multiplex signal did not cover Senaki and Samtredia.

In January and February of 2016 IDFI carried out additional monitoring in the same locations. In western Georgia, monitoring revealed problems only in the following areas: the network of TV and Radio Center was not operational and only one one MUX of Stereo+ was operational (January 20, 4pm) in Terjola; no local MUX was broadcasted in Khoni (examination time 6pm) and not a single transmitter was switched on in Ubisa village (14:00). In eastern Georgia problems were found only in Akhalkalaki where, according to the local population, cut-offs are common. High-quality digital signal from Azerbaijan and Armenia is still widespread in Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli (Marneuli, Dedoplistskaro and Lagodekhi regions). It needs to be mentioned that the transmitter of local MUX operator in Lagodekhi is not switched on. Timeline of commencement of operations was different for regional multiplex platforms and national MUX building. However, March 1 was the deadline for all the parties.

4. Monitoring Set-Top Box Distribution, Sales and Installation

Advocacy with regards to the set-top boxes within the project of the digital switchover was divided into two elements:

- **Process of standardization, financing, tender procedures and distribution of the set-top boxes subsidized by the state;**
- **Price, sales and concentration dynamics of non-subsidized set-top boxes. In this respect, the organization paid attention to the simplicity of the language menu and perception, interface versatility, existence of cables and other related matters.**

Customer monitoring activities did not cover only monitoring of technical device concentration and distribution. This process also included commercial retail market of set-top boxes and TVs. Complaints received from the customers during the monitoring process was primarily related to the connection cables and their adaptability to TVs and receivers. There were certain problems with old roofs and home antennae. Within the project the organization on a number of occasions studied the concentration of receiving antennae and their prices on the market. The data on the issues raised in this respect was placed in the weekly information booklet of the

organization which was updated on a monthly basis and was available online. Our organization spoke about this topic during the meetings with the Digital Broadcasting Agency and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, as well as in the television and radio interview in addition to the meetings in the regions carried out by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development in the region, where the information was distributed to the village heads.

4.1. Subsidized Customers

The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development partially shared the initiative of our organization to support socially vulnerable population by funding purchase, distribution and installation of the set-top boxes for them during the process of the digital switchover. We also proposed the state to supply small-screen DVB-T2 TVs for the most disadvantaged families instead of the set-top boxes.

The table below shows the issues proposed by IDFI and their implementation by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development.

IDFI proposals	Implementation
Subsidy for all the families registered in the socially vulnerable family list the rating points of which was below 200,000	Implemented partially
Full subsidy of the set-top boxes for the families below 100,000 rating points	Implemented only for the families up to 70 000 rating points
Subsidy with a voucher⁵	Was not implemented. Set-top boxes distribution took place by the Georgian Post Ltd under LEPL Digital Broadcasting Agency supervision
Subsidy with a 50% discount voucher for the families within 100,000-200,000 rating points	Not implemented
Purchase of the set-top boxes neutral to all program support	Implemented

⁵ Remark: the basis of our approach was encouragement of retail sales of set-top boxes and availability of choice for socially vulnerable population during use of vouchers. This would increase the competition and demand for set-top boxes and decrease prices.

Subsidy of set-top box installation within GEL 30 limit	Not implemented
Installation of set-top boxes for disabled persons by the state representatives	Implemented
Delivery of subsidized receivers to homes of disabled persons	Implemented

The above list does not include miscellaneous less important issues and the ongoing communication which took place with the Ministry of Economy, National Communications Commission, LEPL Digital Broadcasting Agency of Georgia and TV and Radio Center of Georgia Ltd.

According to the data of LEPL Digital Broadcasting Agency, majority of the set-top boxes were distributed before the analog switch-off while the rest of them were distributed before the end of the step-by-step digital switchover, i.e. September 2015.

4.2. Non-Subsidized Customers

Set-top boxes appeared on Georgian market at the end of March-beginning of April, which, in IDFI's view, was late. Organization called upon the Digital Broadcasting Agency from the beginning of the year to carry out an active information campaign and communicate actively with the importers in order to create demand for the devices earlier and accordingly, import devices to the market in advance. It was necessary to start taking care of the import of commercial set-top boxes. Communication with the distributors should have begun with the procurement of subsidized set-top boxes. But the Agency started communication with them in October 2014.

As the date of the analog switch-off was getting close (the 17th of June), IDFI started market study. As a result it became clear that the public was not informed about the planned changes and also concentration of the set-top boxes on the market was very small – only 5 thousand receivers had been sold by that time. This means that the public was not ready for changes, which would cause its discontent and they would not receive broadcasting. Besides this, the organization deemed that it was necessary to diversify manufacturers of the receivers in order for the public to have a choice and for the prices to be low.

Consequently, on May 27 IDFI organized a roundtable and invited all the parties involved in the process. During discussions the parties shared IDFI’s thoughts about non-readiness of the public. This is why they decided that it would be better to postpone the analog switch-off to a later date. Besides, it was advisable for the analog switch-off to happen not at once (as it was planned) but gradually, by regions. On June 28 Ucha Seturi, head of IDFI’s media and telecommunications unit, conveyed this initiative to the sectoral committee on economy of the Parliament and explained deputies about the problems existing in this process.

In the beginning of June IDFI employees personally visited device stores and markets and also met the set-top box distribution companies. They also purchased devices and tested them at the retailers’ locations. Monitoring primarily covered Tbilisi. However, IDFI also collected information in other large cities with the help of the Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters.

IDFI permanently published information on the concentration of set-top boxes before the digital switchover.

As of June 2, 2015 three types of set-top boxes were made available by the retailers – Eurostar, Sven and TV Star. After it was decided that the analog switch-off would be gradual, the organization circulated this information according to the switch-off schedule region-by-region and this caused big publicity. Throughout the days many people called IDFI office and asked for consultation and assistance for the set-top box purchase and installation. Customers mentioned that they could not reach the digital broadcasting hotline and due to this reason IDFI asked the Agency to increase the number of the operators. The Agency took the request into the account and tripled the number of operators.

By June 24, when the second stage of set-top box testing took place, their concentration on the market was relatively increased and upon the analog switch-off the customers had the opportunity to purchase devices in almost all of the large electronics stores of the capital and the regions. Receivers, produced by Georgian-Azeri company AG Telekom also appeared on the market and their price was GEL 64. Price included RCA cable.

Gradually more set-top boxes penetrated the regions and they became more available for local population. It was clear that the gradual analog switch-off was justified and necessary because before the switch-off retailers had the time to make devices available and the public purchased them in time.

Date	Number of STPs on the market (approximate)	STP model	Price
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May 28	5,000 (sold)	TV Star	55-70
		Eurostar	65
		Sven	95
June 24	30,000 (distributed)	TV Star	52-80
		Eurostar	65
		Sven	95
		AG Telekom	64
July 29	130,000	TV Star	50-60
		Eurostar	70
		AG Telekom	64-75
		Youmax	70
		Superbox	70
September 11	200,000	TV Star	50- 80
		Youmax	60
		AG Telekom	65
		Sven	89
		Star Track	75
		World Vision T37	70

Besides receivers, an important issue was concentration of DVB-T2 TVs. IDFI sent letters to the large stores asking how many TVs of this type were sold. Some of the stores replied that starting from April of that year they had been importing only DVB-T2 TVs and more than 90% of sales accounted for TVs supporting this standard. Companies refrained from stating specific number of units sold. However, from actual inspection of stores it can be said that at that stage

primarily DVB-T2 were sold on the market. In rare cases DVB-T TVs were accompanied by digital receiver as a gift.

In order to inform the public about the set-top boxes, the following materials were published on the website:

- Digital broadcasting in Achara – analog signal will be switched off in Achara on July 30 | July 29, 2015
- Where can set-top box be purchased in Kartli? | July 8, 2015
- In order to receive a stronger digital signal it is better to place an antenna on the roof | July 3, 2015
- Concentration of the set-top boxes on the market one week before the analog switch-off | July 26, 2015
- Analog signal will be switched off in Tbilisi and its surroundings on July 1 | June 25, 2015
- What shall we know about the digital switchover? | June 25, 2015
- Where can you purchase the set-top boxes? | June 15, 2015
- Digital broadcasting receivers in the retail market | June 12, 2015
- Digital broadcasting set-top boxes on Georgian market | June 9, 2015

This information was supplemented by information in social network both in text and infographics. During the period in question IDFI consulted more than 300 citizens which had addressed the organization via various means of communications.

5. IDFI Activities Related to Building of Local Multiplex Platforms and Access to Broadcasting

The digital switchover process, due to material-technical difficulties associated with the reform, posed threat of market exit firstly to the small regional broadcasters. This is why during program implementation IDFI identified support of small broadcasters as one of its main priorities.

Upon invitation from the regulator, organization was involved in the dispute over Tbilisi MUX as a mediator. As part of negotiations lasting for a month, organization proposed parties, broadcasters Musicbox and TV and Radio company Kavkasia on one side and Evrika and Obiektivi on the other, an optimal model for resolution of their issues. Despite the fact that the result was not accomplished, parties still managed to identify the problems of their cooperation clearly and advance in the process.

Location of transmission station		Broadcaster
1.	Lagodekhi	Ekomi Ltd
2.	Gurjaani	TV company Gurjaani Ltd
3.	Telavi	TV company Tanamgzavri Ltd
4.	Sagarejo	TV and Radio company Tvali
5.	Rustavi	JSC Kvemo Kartli TV and Radio company
6.	Marneuli	JSC Kvemo Kartli TV and Radio company
7.	Bolnisi	JSC Kvemo Kartli TV and Radio company
8.	Manglisi	Omega Ltd
9.	Gori	TV and Radio company Trialeti Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Civic Education Foundation
10.	Khashuri	TV company Dia Ltd
11.	Sachkhere	Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Civic Education Foundation
12.	Borjomi	TV and Radio company Borjomi Ltd
13.	Chiatura	Broadcasting company Imervizia Ltd
14.	Zestaponi	TV and Radio corporation Inpormkavshiri Televizia Argo Ltd Kvetenadze and Company Solidary Liability Company
15.	Akhaltzikhe	Imperia Ltd
16.	Kutaisi	TV and Radio company Rioni Ltd

		Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Civic Education Foundation
17.	Khoni	Independent TV company Mega-TV Ltd
18.	Samtredia	TV and Radio press-company Zari
19.	Chkhorotsku	Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Media Center for open Abkhazia
20.	Tsalenjikha	Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Media Center for open Abkhazia
21.	Senaki	Independent TV company Egrisi Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Civic Education Foundation
22.	Ozurgeti	Independent broadcasting company Guria Ltd
23.	Zugdidi	Independent TV and radio company Odishi Ltd
24.	Batumi	TV channel 25 Ltd Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Civic Education Foundation
25.	Poti	Broadcasting company Channel 9 Ltd

IDFI's activities to maintain the above-mentioned channels and in general to support them were carried out in several directions, which made it possible to maintain not only the companies in the table above but also to establish local broadcasting network in respective broadcasting zone with the help of which it is possible to broadcast several channels.

Even during the analog broadcasting, many so-called "untapped zones" existed in Georgia, where local broadcasters did not function (Racha-Lechkhumi, Upper Svaneti, Khevsureti, etc.). It is important that the National Communications Commission, in the process of reviewing the issue, openly shared IDFI's recommendation during open meeting and stated that in case of interest, it is ready to announce bidding for available frequency resource in order to establish small local multiplexes.

The readiness of the Commission to allocate additional radio frequency resource is also important in covering existing shadow zones (villages and townships previously not covered).

Pursuant to the strategy, distribution of the local frequency bands by local broadcasters for utilization of the frequency resource of digital broadcasting was made possible only after the analog switch-off, which created a so-called “window” effect on local channels during the digital switchover. However, impossibility of parallel broadcasting for regional television stations substantially decreased the costs of the digital switchover.

Attention needs to be paid to the deadline of establishment of the local digital networks. The local operator is obliged to establish a local terrestrial broadcasting network/multiplex platform by March 1, 2016 which, unlike the national networks, gives local networks more time for the implementation of the reform.

In order to practically implement the results attained by the digital broadcasting strategy for local broadcasters, IDFI’s main goal became analysis of the digital migration for the local channels and planning support. For this purpose, in partnership with GARB, many meetings, presentation-seminars and trainings were held on the topic of establishment of the digital multiplexes and technical parameters, which raised the knowledge of the managers of the regional television stations. It was important to share experience among the regional broadcasters as well, by doing which the regional channels were able to prepare scope of work and finally steer works for the establishment of the multiplex.

The Committee of Ministers of the European Union, with regards to funding of broadcasters and network operators of digital broadcasting, gives recommendation to the European Union member states to reflect economic and legal issues in their regulation, the goal of which is media pluralism as well as availability of the large number of high-quality programs to the society⁶. The state shall protect and if necessary, shall take special measures for protection of media pluralism. IDFI’s recommendation to support regional channels was based precisely on this type of approach, reflected in the following recommendations:

IDFI recommendation	Implementation
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⁶ Recommendation R (2003)9 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on measures to promote the democratic and social contribution of digital broadcasting.

For encouragement of regional and local broadcasters, establishment of favourable or zero regulatory fee during the digital switchover transition period	Not implemented
Tax exemption during the transition period	Not implemented
Direct subsidy or low-interest loans system for purchase of certain transmission devices	Not implemented
Cash rebate of advance payments for analog broadcasting	Implemented

In the end, the state took into account the last recommendation above and as a result, more than GEL 1 million (1,073,076.68) was refunded both to the regional and national broadcasters in the beginning of July 2015.

6. Remaining Problems

As of today, the active working process which began in December 2014, is in its conclusion stage. Current state of the digital broadcasting network building and operation is satisfactory; however, problems remain e.g. on network level when often times the population is left without a broadcasting signal. Installation works of so-called “gap fillers” need to be completed. Operators also name substantial glitches in the electricity supply during winter of 2015 and 2016⁷. Problems also included “intrusion” of the digital broadcasting from neighbouring

⁷ In February 2016, IDFI requested help on this issue from the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC), Energo-Pro Georgia, and Kakheti Distribution Network, which resulted in a meeting with the representatives of Stereo + Ltd. and Georgian TV and Radio Center Ltd. During the meeting, we

countries, primarily Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as from occupied territories in analog format.

7. Media Coverage

Local media actively covered IDFI's support and monitoring of the digital switchover. More than thirty reports or stories were broadcasted with participation of IDFI representatives; many radio programs were prepared and several dozens of print publications were released.

Ucha Seturi, IDFI's media expert participated in the 12th OSCE South Caucasus Media Conference. He made a presentation on "Georgia's digital switchover and its influence on media pluralism". TV company Ertsulovneba prepared a story⁸ about the Conference.

On July 1, when the analog switch-off took place in Tbilisi and its surroundings, Rustavi 2 broadcasted a story⁹ which reported absence of accurate information as to how many families were unable to watch Georgian channels. On July 3, Rustavi 2 covered problems associated with reception of the digital signal. In this very story¹⁰ Ucha Seturi mentioned that it is important for the population to be prepared for the analog switch-off across the country.

Rustavi 2, before the switch-off in Gori, covered meeting with the population¹¹. On August 25, analog switch-off took place in Mtskheta-Mtianeti. This was the topic of the meeting which took place in the region with the participation of Nata Dzvelishvili, IDFI analyst. In Rustavi 2 story¹² she mentions that this type of meeting for informing the population turned out to be the most effective communication mechanism.

Nata Dzvelishvili was invited as a guest in GDS Shuadze program¹³ where she explained who was affected by the digital switchover and who needed purchase of additional devices, set-top boxes. Soon after, in the same program¹⁴ Ucha Seturi spoke about the availability of set-top boxes in the market.

exchanged the contact information of responsible persons, and agreed on a plan to identify and eliminate problems related to power supply.

⁸ <http://www.myvideo.ge/tv/ertsulovneba&seekTime=30-09-2015%2019:03>

⁹ <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/20188>

¹⁰ <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/20319>

¹¹ http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2599065

¹² http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2623607

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWvp5tH2_Y8

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FamJm1mTCWA&index=344&list=PLvH9znMEyNxGZlKdIPRN8YS-g60CcRLYy>

TV company Imedi prepared a story¹⁵ before the analog switch-off in which IDFI's media expert spoke about anticipated obstacles resulting from the analog switch-off. On the Imedi air¹⁶ Ucha Seturi also spoke about certain flaws in the digital switchover process and later focused on newly-emerged problems in the story prepared after the analog switch-off¹⁷. TV company Imedi also covered the meeting which took place in Mtskheta-Mtianeti on the topic of the digital switchover. Nata Dzvelishvili spoke about the details of the meeting in the story¹⁸.

In a story¹⁹ of Maestro's Sakmiani Dila Nata Dzvelishvili, IDFI analyst, spoke about the negative aspects of the information campaign carried out by the Digital Broadcasting Agency. On the same channel, when the digital switchover was postponed by two weeks from June 17 to July 1, Ucha Seturi advised population²⁰ to make use of this period for purchase of the set-top boxes. The same television station, also on August 25, a day before the digital switchover, prepared a story²¹ about the meeting²² which took place in Tianeti.

The story²³ broadcasted by Public Broadcaster on May 12 discussed the flaws in the information campaign. TV company invited Ucha Seturi on a number of occasions. On the air of Ekonometri²⁴ he talked about the features of the receivers, awareness of the population and expected timeline of the analog switch-off across the country. Public Broadcaster also covered the stories after the analog switch-off in Tbilisi. On July 6 Public Broadcaster covered a story²⁵ of a pre-switch-off information meeting in Shida Kartli.

On July 7 Nata Dzvelishvili, IDFI's analyst, spoke on the air of Public Broadcaster²⁶. She mentioned that there were no problems observed neither on the market nor in terms of the network sustainability. Afterwards, on July 8, after the switch-off, Ucha Seturi presented practical recommendations to the public on the air of Public Broadcaster²⁷. IDFI's visit to the regions related to the digital switchover, together with the representatives of the Digital Broadcasting Agency and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development was also covered by Public Broadcaster. Meetings took place in Poti²⁸ and Zestaponi²⁹ and were

¹⁵ <http://imedi.ge/index.php?pg=nws&id=49487>

¹⁶ <http://imedi.ge/index.php?pg=nws&id=50759>

¹⁷ <http://imedi.ge/index.php?pg=nws&id=51935>

¹⁸ http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2623609

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxpnSlfTJIA>

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWy8lgx5A3g>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3ymOTus5gl>

²² http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2623605

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4bHJq4yd2w>

²⁴ <http://www.2tv.ge/ge/videos/view/147721.html>

²⁵ http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2599066

²⁶ <http://1tv.ge/ge/news/view/title/103931.html>

²⁷ <http://1tv.ge/ge/news/view/103307.html>

²⁸ http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2605366

²⁹ <http://zestaphoni.com/1573--.html>

attended by Nata Dzvelishvili. On August 25 Public Broadcaster also prepared a story³⁰ of a meeting in Mtskheta-Mtianeti on the analog switch-off which was attended by Nata Dzvelishvili, IDFI analyst.

Meeting in Gori was covered by TV Dia. In a story³¹ of the said television company, Nata Dzvelishvili once again reminded population and attendees the need for the set-top boxes and where they were available for purchase.

The digital switchover was also covered by Channel Two. Ucha Seturi was a guest in “Argumentebis Dro” program³² where he discussed all the details related to the digital switchover and emphasized involvement of the state in the process.

TV company Kavkasia informed³³ population that even before July 1 the digital signal was switched on and they could already purchase the set-top boxes.

On April 30 Nata Dzvelishvili spoke about activities carried out by the institute in radio Fortuna’s Rakursi program³⁴ and she expressed hope that the digital switchover would happen in a timely manner.

The digital switchover was also covered by print media. Many articles were published on the websites of different media: Liberali.ge, Netgazeti.ge, newspress.ge, gurianews.ge, Radiotavisufleba.ge, Epn.ge, etc.

Based on the request of IDFI, Georgian National Communications Committee applied sanctions to R.B.J. Ltd, re-broadcaster of ORT’s programs. News.ge³⁵ and apsny.ge³⁶ prepared stories about this event.

On June 22 Liberali.ge³⁷ published an extensive article on a new date of the digital switchover. Article includes Ucha Seturi’s broad comments on the readiness of the network for digital signal broadcasting.

Netgazeti.ge³⁸ prepared an article after the analog switch-off and paid attention to the fact that the residents of Rustavi experienced certain problems with reception of the digital signal. Editori.ge³⁹ spoke to Ucha Seturi about the same incident.

³⁰ http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=2623606

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=76&v=BI0hBH8beuE>

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFfeacO2R2E>

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHaGeWS7cms>

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bz5GongBp8>

³⁵ <http://news.ge/ge/news/story/158149-idfi-m-maregulirebel-komisias-ort-s-programebis-retranslatoris-shps-r.b.j.-s-sanqtsirebis-miznit-mimarta>

³⁶ <http://www.apsny.ge/2015/soc/1446601054.php>

³⁷ <http://www.liberali.ge/ge/liberali/articles/126357/>

Information found and published by IDFI about where to purchase set-top boxes, their prices and addresses turned out to be very useful for the public. Bpn.ge⁴⁰ and ambebi.ge⁴¹ cited this in July. Prepared materials were used by Facebook pages of electronics stores and others.

Newspress.ge⁴² wrote about the cooperation among the Digital Broadcasting Agency, IDFI and National Commission and published information about the digital switchover in Shida Kartli.

In the Radiotavisupleba.ge⁴³ article Ucha Seturi explained once again the advantages of the digital broadcasting.

“IDFI carried out the monitoring of the set-top boxes available on the Georgia market” – writes Epn.ge⁴⁴ in an article which covers the monitoring results in detail.

8. Closing Event of the Project

On March 10, the Media Advocacy Coalition held a media conference in partnership with Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) and the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). The conference summarized IDFI activities within the digital broadcasting project. At the conference, representatives of various media and other organizations assessed the media environment ahead of parliamentary elections, and discussed the topics of financial situation and transparency of the media, Russia’s influence on public opinion in Georgia, reform of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), internet freedom, and tendencies of online space regulation. The conference concluded with participants summarizing the digital broadcasting reform.

The presentation by Levan Avalishvili (IDFI board chairman) on the anti-western narrative and Russia's influence on public opinion in Georgia sparked heating a discussion. Conference participants noted that a large segment of the Georgian society regularly watches Russian entertainment programs, which are the main carriers of anti-western messages. After the presentation, conference participants also recalled the case of sanctioning of a company that had broadcasted programs of a Russian channel ORT. Other important issued discussed during

³⁸ <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/Technology/47382/>

³⁹ <http://editori.ge/?p=26393>

⁴⁰ <http://www.bpn.ge/biznesi/13182-sad-da-ra-fasad-iyideba-qset-top-boqsebiq-da-romeli-garthuli-arkhebis-yureba-sheedzleba-mosakhleobas.html?lang=ka-GE>

⁴¹ <http://www.ambebi.ge/sazogadoeba/135526-sad-da-ra-fasad-iyideba-qset-top-boqsebiq-da-romeli-garthuli-arkhebis-yureba-sheedzleba-mosakhleobas.html>

⁴² <http://www.newspress.ge/sazogadoeba/70143-shida-garthli-khvalidan-cifrul-mautsyeblobaze-gadadis.html>

⁴³ <http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/tsipruli-mautskebloba-sakartveloshi/27104500.html>

⁴⁴ <http://epn.ge/?id=7252>

the 5 panels of the conference were: disputes around the Rustavi 2 and Maestro television companies, GPB reform, contraction of the advertising market, and the existence of two TV ad counting services. Zurab Gumberidze (representing Intermedia Plus) stated that the advertising market contracted by 20% in the first three quarters of 2015, which is linked to the introduction of new advertising regulations for television companies. A GPB representative Tinatin Berdenishvili presented the changes planned within the GPB reform. Finally, the media and communications expert and project manager from IDFI Ucha Seturi, the director of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics and IDFI project analyst Nata Dzelishvili, and head of the Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB) and IDFI project analyst Natia Kuprashvili summarized the digital broadcasting reform, presented an analysis of reform implementation, and discussed the state of regional broadcasters during the digital switchover.