**Report of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies on the oversight visit to Gauteng and Northern Cape Province, over the period 19 to 21 April 2023, dated 13 June 2023.**

1. **Introduction**

Chapter 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996 and Section 55 in particular outline the powers of the National Assembly, while the Rules of the National Assembly further explicate these powers and functions assigned to Portfolio Committees. The mandate to the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies (PCCDT) to legislate, conduct oversight over the Executive and facilitate public participation is thus derived from these sources. In executing its oversight functions, the Committee oversee the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) and the Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS), as well as all organs of State reporting to the Departments.

Therefore, the oversight approach of the Committee entailed visiting various projects implemented by entities such as the Broadband Infraco (BBI), the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa (USAASA), the State Information Technology Agency (SITA), South African Post Office (SAPO) and Sentech to monitor and oversee the implementation of key national priorities which underpin the NDP The Committee also conducted an extensive engagement with organised labour from the Department and its Entities.

The oversight visit of the Committee was mainly concentrated on the key programmes of DCDT, namely the implementation of the SA Connect Broadband Policy and the Direct-To-Home (DTH) broadcasting, which is a subset of the Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) project. The oversight visit was primarily focused on both the Gauteng and Northern Cape Province.

The above-mentioned programmes are considered priority programmes, and it had become urgent that the Committee witnesses and tracks progress physically to be able to measure whether the Department and its Entities would be able to meet the tight deadlines set by the government. Without proper and acute oversight, it would become increasingly difficult for the Committee to conduct its oversight role diligently. As the President put it, ‘*completion of digital migration is vital to our ability to harness the enormous opportunities presented by technological change effectively.’*

1. **Committee Delegation**
	1. The Delegation from the Portfolio Committee was comprised of seven (7) members and four (4) support staff.

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| **Name** | **Designation** | **Organisation** |
| Mr B Maneli | Chairperson & Delegation Leader | African National Congress (ANC) |
| Mr LE Molala | Member of the Committee | ANC |
| Mr TT Gumbu | Member of the Committee | ANC |
| Ms NJ Kubheka | Member of the Committee | ANC |
| Mr MR Mdakane | Member of the Committee | ANC |
| Ms TK Bodlani  | Member of the Committee | Democratic Alliance (DA) |
| Ms Z Majozi | Member of Committee | Inkatha Freedom Party |
| **Support Staff** |  |  |
| Mr M Erasmus | Committee Assistant | Parliament  |
| Dr J Medupe | Content Advisor | Parliament |
| Mr M Maleka | Content Advisor | Parliament |
| Mr J Molafo | Committee Media Officer | Parliament |

**2.2** The Committee received apologies from the following Members:

1. Ms Mthembu - (ANC)
2. Mr S Tambo – (EFF)
3. **Day One: 19 April 2023: Engagement with DCDT, NEHAWU, PSA, CWU and Un-Unionised Members’ Engagement.**

The Chairperson of the Committee, Honourable Boyce Maneli, introduced the Members of Parliament and called on the Minister for the opening remarks.

The Minister, Mr Mondli Gungubele, made the opening remarks and stated he was excited about the visit of the Committee. He indicated that the Department had recently conducted a meet-and-greet session with organised labour. He further emphasised that it was imperative for the Department not to be perceived as interfering in the engagement between the Committee and the organised labour. The Minister indicated that whenever the Committee decided to meet, different stakeholders, including organised labour, would be allowed space to do so.

The Minister mentioned that the Department had quickly realised the need to unlock the economy through digitalisation. Thus, the Ministry heeded the call to provide leadership on the appropriation of the digital economy for the country. Therefore, one of the important assignments would be to ensure that all the digital dividend spectrum was vacated by the broadcasters and urgently released for the cost-effective rollout of broadband connectivity in the underserviced areas. The Minister highlighted that the Department had committed to the Presidency to roll out 412 Internet connections to the Province of the Eastern Cape in 100 days.

The Minister reiterated that the Department committed to connecting a total of 40 000 sites as part of its broadband rollout. He indicated that Sentech, SITA and BBI, together with the private sector, will play a role in speeding up broadband connectivity. He further reiterated that one of the major concerns was that it was only the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) who were still dominant within the space, and the Department would make sure that the Small, Micro, and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) were included in the procurement value chain of the broadband rollout.

The Minister emphasised the role which will be played by the Electronics Communications Act (ECA) in the universal service implementation of broadband and that the amendment of the bill will need to be processed expeditiously. He further highlighted that the market inquiry on the reduction of the cost of data was in the process of being implemented. The Minister further highlighted that the ECA Amendment Bill was being prioritised, and this would assist in the universal service implementation and coverage as part of the mandate of the Department. He indicated that the national policy on rapid deployment of electronic communications networks and facilities was approved by the Cabinet on 29 March 2023 and was in the process of being implemented.

The Minister further submitted that on 29 March 2023, Cabinet also approved the new Sentech Interim Board and that the Department is busy finalising the SAPO board. He emphasised the importance of the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA) around skills development for an appropriation of the digital economy. The Minister said that India was one good model to be learnt from in terms of the development and exportation of digital expertise and skills.

The Committee appreciated the feedback from the Minister, and it noted the work done to stabilise the various governance structures within the Entities. The Chairperson also appreciated the urgency of filling the Director-General position for the Department. The Committee proceeded to excuse the Executive from the meeting in order to pave the way for the engagement with the unions. He highlighted that the voice of the workers was very important as part of the oversight and that the union needed to speak without any fear of victimisation.

The Delegation held engagements with various unions, including National Education, Health, and Allied Workers (NEHAWU), Public Servant Association (PSA), Communications Workers Union (CWU), and the non-unionised representatives.

* 1. **Day One: Committee Engagement with the Unions**
		1. **NEHAWU’S submission on DCDT**

The representatives of NEHAWU presented the various grievances of its members. One of the issues raised was the ballooned staff structure due to the redundant staff members who were at political appointments but did not move with Executives after the Cabinet reshuffles, and these members were left redundant in the process. The union further submitted that the organisational structure of the Department was approved in 2018, but that there were still a number of critical positions that needed to be filled. Notably, the following critical positions were yet to be filled: Director-General, Chief Financial Officer, and Deputy Director General – Policy.

NEHAWU further submitted that junior staff members were not considered whenever there were vacant positions. The union highlighted that the Department needed a formal succession planning strategy. One of the major concerns raised by the union was that the employment equity report indicated that the department was ageing.

* + 1. **NEHAWU’S submission on Film and Publications Board (FPB)**

NEHAWU submitted that one of the major problems was that salary negotiations were always delayed due to the time it takes for the FPB Council to engage organised labour. This was exacerbated by the fact that the leadership needed to be more consultative and needed to have a better attitude towards the staff, and this led to the staff's low morale. The Entity had failed on numerous instances to pay performance bonuses despite the number of clean audits. No one was prepared to take responsibility between Executive Management and the Council. The union further mentioned that there needed to be more alignment between the funding of the tertiary studies and the skill sets needed at the Entity. NEHAWU also indicated there had been several international study trips which did not benefit the rest of the staff members and that these trips were only applicable to a small group.

The union further highlighted that there had been a continuous change of management structure without formal consultation with staff and labour. There was also a complaint about the FPB Council's interference in operational matters. The union also submitted that there had been a lack of transparency from the entity and that there had been a number of investigations on the overpayment of certain staff members, but the final report back is never shared with labour.

* + 1. **NEHAWU’S submission on ICASA**

NEHAWU submitted that the delayed appointment of the ICASA Chairperson was creating instability in the organisation. One of the issues raised is that the revenue collected from the spectrum sale goes to the national fiscus and hardly benefits the Entity or the staff. The issue of the appointment of the former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and ICASA Chairperson by the private sector was also concerning, as this was perceived as a direct conflict based on their previous roles at the regulator.

* + 1. **Committee Observations on nehawu’s Presentation**

The Delegation noted:

* the general low staff morale at DCDT and its Entities;
* that the general staff members were likely to be more disgruntled given that the union members displayed many frustrations across the entities;
* that the old DCDT structure remains a serious concern, and there was an urgent need to fill all vacant funded posts;
* that there is no succession planning in the Department;
* that the issue of the staff linked to the ministerial handbook needs to be addressed as staff members get left redundant when there is a change of Executive;
* the lack of job and performance evaluation at DCDT;
* the concerns around the bloated structure and the duplication of positions and roles at FPB;
* that ICASA should utilise bargaining avenues for remuneration issues and performance bonuses at the Entity;
* that the funding model on ICASA needs to be revisited;
* the concerns about lack of restraint of trade and a cool-off period for Entities' senior management when they join the private sector with a possible conflict of interest;
* the concerns with the salary structure at ICASA, where the total cost to the company is a major challenge when it comes to the recruitment of the relevant skill sets; and
* that the victimisation of staff by management is likely to lead to some of them to leave the Entity.
	+ 1. **Committee Recommendations on nehawu’s presentation**

The Committee recommends:

* that DCDT address the staff morale at the Department and its Entities;
* that DCDT deal with the issue around the organisational structure and ensure that all the funded posts are filled;
* that DCDT look at the issue of succession planning in the Department;
* that DCDT deal with the issue of the staff who were linked to the ministerial handbook and have been left behind after the Ministers have been reshuffled;
* that DCDT must ensure that job and performance assessments processes are in place and conducted regularly;
* that the DCDT look at the FPB’s bloated structure and duplication of positions;
* that the DCDT look at the funding model at ICASA;
* that DCDT look at the restraint of trade across all the Entities for all the senior management after leaving the organisations;
* that ICASA look at the salary structure on the total cost to the company, which remains a serious challenge to address the relevant skill sets due to its non-competitiveness to the market; and
* that the DCDT look at the victimisation of staff who raised grievances across all the Entities.
	+ 1. **Committee Engagement with PSA**

The representative from Public Service Administration (PSA), Mr Kagiso Kagiso, appreciated the opportunity to be heard by the Delegation of the Committee. The union highlighted that it had similar concerns as those raised by NEHAWU. He submitted that they had a few issues related to the Department as it had a very small representation within DCDT. The only major concern was the proposed organisational structure within the Department, which needed to be more balanced. The structure, which was yet to be approved, had seven DDGs before it was rescinded. The union indicated that DCDT had always consulted in bad faith. PSA further highlighted the high vacancy rate in the department and indicated that there was a total of 150 000 vacancy rate in the public service, and the Department was also contributing to that. The union commended the Department for the finalisation of the policy on sexual harassment.

* + 1. **Committee Observations on PSA**

The Delegation noted:

* the presentation and expressed appreciation for the submission by PSA;
* that there was a bloated structure in the Department;
* with concern to the number of vacant positions within the Department; and
* a need for a commitment to further engagement with PSA and the rest of the unions.
	+ 1. **Committee Recommendations on PSA**

The Committee recommends:

* that the Committee will ensure a follow-up discussion with the PSA and the rest of the unions.
	+ 1. **Committee engagement with the Communications Workers Union (CWU)**

The representative from CWU, Mr Tshabalala, appreciated the audience of the Committee. The union raised some concerns about the limited time allocated to the Committee, given the number of labour issues which the sector was faced with. The union further highlighted that the issue of SAPO was rather becoming too volatile, and three staff members were assassinated recently in Bizana, in the Eastern Cape. The workers were targeted at SAPO due to non-payment of grants of R350. The union also raised a major concern that SAPO had been closing retail outlets in a number of areas, and citizens had to pay more for transportation to access other outlets for grant payments.

The union submitted that there should be a financial audit on SAPO before the bailout was finalised. It submitted that the biggest fear was another misappropriation of the latest bailouts due to the misallocation of the funds. The union further indicated that there were a number of ghost workers at SAPO, and there is an urgent need for a skills audit. The union indicated that due to the financial constraints at SAPO, there was a huge challenge in the payment of voluntary severance packages, including pension payouts.

The union also submitted that there had been a trend where every two years, there have been retrenchments at Telkom and that there was a deterioration at the organisation. The Company had been reporting profit over the years, but recurring retrenchments were still being implemented. The union was also concerned that a reported rampant corruption at Telkom was being covered up and that Telkom had challenged the recent Special Investigating Units (SIU) report.

The union further submitted that the Over-The-Top (OTT) services were negatively affecting the SABC bottom line with serious concern that profits accumulated by these OTTs do not remain in the country, and that these were also not their revenue is not being subjected to company taxation. This exacerbated the pressing need for more regulations on OTTs.

The union also raised the delayed merger between Sentech and Broadband Infraco, which had negatively affected the morale of the workers. The union added that the corruption allegation around the Sentech Nasrec building was yet to be finalised, and this was worrying greatly as the matter had been dragging since the 2010 World Cup.

* + 1. **Committee observations on CWU**

The Delegation noted:

* and appreciated the submission by CWU;
* the issues raised on corruption and the killing of staff at SAPO in Bizana;
* that there should be a full financial audit on SAPO before the bail-out process is completed;
* that there is a suspected number of ghost employees at SAPO;
* that there is a challenge with the payment of voluntary severance packages due to the lack of funds at SAPO;
* the union’s concerns on the reporting line of Telkom, where the entity is not accountable to any Department and the Committee is unable to conduct an oversight role on the organisation;
* the concern of the union on the selling of the State assets, including the planned sale of Telkom;
* that there has been recurring retrenchment at Telkom even though the company has been reporting profits over the years;
* the concerns around the OTTs and their impact on SABC sustainability;
* that the merger of Sentech and BBI is referred to as an acquisition, and this has added to the confusion;
* DCDT has operated for a long time without a revised organisational structure;
* concerns on the elimination of whistle-blowers in public service;
* the issue around the challenge of the unpaid pensions at SAPO, even for those employees who have passed on; and
* encouraged CWU to collate all the related information on unpaid pensions by SAPO on affected employees.
	+ 1. **Committee recommendations on CWU**

The Committee recommends:

* that DCDT look into the issue of staff safety at SAPO after the killings in Bizana at the Eastern Cape;
* that DCDT look at the allegations of ghost workers and deal with the reported corruption at SAPO;
* that DCDT look into financial sustainability at SAPO, including the lack of funds for the payment of voluntary severance packages;
* that DCDT look at the reporting line of Telkom and the oversight role played by the government as one of the shareholders in the organisation;
* that DCDT scrutinise the reported deal on the selling of part of Telkom;
* that DCDT look at the ongoing retrenchments at Telkom to safeguard further job losses at the organisation;
* that DCDT comes up with the legislation and intervention to minimise the impact of the OTT on the sustainability of the SABC;
* that DCDT ensure that the whistle-blowers are protected;
* that SAPO attend to the outstanding pension funds of the employees who have passed on; and
* that CWU submits the rest of the information on labour matters to the Committee.

The Department must report back to the Committee on all matters, including those raised by the unions, before the end of the 6th Parliament.

The Committee Delegation concluded the business of the day and proceeded to the Airport *enroute* to Northern Cape Province.

1. **Day two: 20 April 2023: Committee oversight at Hopetown (Thembelihle Local Municipality)**
	1. **Briefing by the Acting Director General**

The Acting Director General (ADG), Ms Nonkqubela Jordan-Dyani, briefed the Delegation on the programme for the oversight in the Northern Cape. She highlighted that the Pixie Ka Seme District was one of the eight chosen for the National Health Insurance (NHI) project, and that was what informed the rollout of the SA Connect programme in the District. The ADG indicated that the programme had only enough funds to maintain the implemented sites under Phase 1. She further submitted that the Phase 2 funding application, including financial analysis for an amount of R2.5 billion, had been submitted to the National Treasury for consideration and approval. She indicated that the BDM Policy implementation was unique in the Northern Cape due to the implementation of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) and that Direct-To-Home (DTH) was implemented to minimise interference. She indicated that in Hopetown, there were an estimated 1 324 indigent households, and the registration for Set-Top Boxes (STBs) was 834 households, and these have been connected. In Douglas, under the Siyancuma Local Municipality, there were 2 144 households and 1 400 turnouts to register, with 1 044 migrated to BDM. The ADG indicated that there was a post-implementation network support structure with Sentech running the call centre for the first line of support. The Delegation proceeded to the next site.

* 1. **Committee visit at Steynville Primary School – SA-Connect**

The Executive Mayor of Thembelihle Local Municipality, Honourable Leonard Makena, made opening remarks and appreciated the visit by the Committee to Thembelihle. The Mayor appreciated that the school and community were benefiting from the Wi-Fi connectivity. However, he complained about the reliability of the service as the network availability was very poor most of the time. The school was connected by both BBI, providing the backhauling, and SITA, which provided the backhaul and the end-user equipment. The biggest problem was attributed to the poor quality of service provided by SITA. The Mayor submitted that the network failure was 90 per cent of the time in any given month.

The Acting Deputy Principal, who was also a grade one teacher, made some remarks on the benefits of having internet services. She indicated that in the morning, the children could go on the Internet and check the weather services for the day, and this assisted with better planning for the day.

The subject advisor to the Department of Basic Education, Mr Caven Vries, indicated that he had been part of the broadband project from its inception. He indicated that the connectivity was intended to benefit the learners for research and learning purposes. He highlighted that the network throughput was at 10Mb p/s. He further highlighted that there were two APs (access points) to the network, one dedicated to the learners and the other one for guests, where the guest access point was at the speed of 2Mb p/s.

* 1. **Committee observations on the visit to Steynville Primary School**

The Delegation noted:

* that SITA network downtime was concerning and implored that this be resolved speedily;
* with concern to the slow speed and throughput of the Internet connectivity;
* the need for training of the end-users to have the basic knowledge of troubleshooting network failures for speedy fault resolutions;
* the lack of a clear fault reporting mechanism for quicker response from SITA and BBI;
* a need for Internet access to be provided to the surrounding communities for broader benefits; and
* that the Internet connectivity was adding value to the school.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to Steynville Primary School**

The Committee recommends:

* that SITA should ensure that the network availability is maintained with a clear fault escalation process during the network failure;
* that BBI, SITA and USAASA should ensure that the end-users are trained with basic skills for network troubleshooting to resolve minor faults as first-line support before escalations to the second level support; and
* that the implementing Entities should ensure that the surrounding communities benefit from Internet connectivity surrounding the school facility.

The Department must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to Hopetown Clinic – SA-Connect**

The Portfolio Committee Chairperson, Honourable Maneli, introduced the Members of the Delegation and indicated that this is a Committee from the National Assembly (NA) constituted by a multi-party system. He indicated that the Committee needed to come and make an assessment of the implemented services and get feedback on the user experience of the services. The Chairperson highlighted that the Committee was there to do two things, to hear how were the performance of the service and the assessment of the network functionality.

The senior nurse at the clinic indicated that the connectivity has been working fine since inception, but the only problem was the Health Patient Records System (HPRS), which is a Department of Health solution. HPRS is currently inaccessible, and the clinic was unable to retrieve the patients' records. The clinic also indicated that the connectivity assists the patients in communicating with their family members during their stay at the clinic.

The technical representative from SITA, Mr Thulani Mavusi, Technical Manager, indicated that this was one of the sites where SITA was expected to provide the Local Area Network and WIFI connectivity, with BBI providing the backhaul connectivity. SITA would then install several Access Points (APs) depending on the size of the site. SITA also conducted handover training for the end-users on how the systems work.

One of the major problems was that there were longer outages on the network due to the time it took for the faults to be reported back to the SITA Network Operations Centre. The primary reason was that as the staff came and went into the clinic, there needed to be a proper handover which resulted in the new staff battling to log faults on time with SITA due to wrong contacts. This was very critical for first-line support for SITA, where a person would need to be onsite for basic troubleshooting before the problem could get escalated to second-line support, where a field technician would have to be dispatched to the affected site. There were also equipment warranties with the service providers where faulty equipment could be replaced whenever there was a major failure.

The technical representative from BBI, Mr Peter Magafane, Acting Chief Technical Officer, highlighted that the feedback has been positive. BBI provided a physical connection which was layer 2 of the network. The SMMEs were utilised to provide the base stations, which were part of the points of presence before the local area networks. Important to highlight that the SLA on fault resolution required that the network was restored within fourteen hours for all the major faults. The connectivity was tested, and Members were given a first-hand experience of the performance of the network. One of the major challenges is vandalism on the equipment, and this was worse during COVID, but the network has protection where there is redundancy.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to the Hopetown Clinic**

The Delegation noted:

* that fault logging and escalation were major problems due to a lack of updated contacts for the onsite support; and
* that vandalism remains a major problem as it exacerbates network downtime and poor Quality of Service.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to the Hopetown Clinic**

The Committee recommends:

* that BBI and SITA should ensure that the fault logging and escalation processes are refined and that contact details are regularly updated; and
* that DCDT ensures that all the State’s assets are safeguarded from theft and vandalism.

The Department must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to the Community Hall and Youth Centre – SA Connect**

The representative from the youth centre received the Delegation and highlighted that this is a public WIFI site. The connectivity is funded by USAASA and implemented by BBI. USAASA is in the process of connecting additional access points as there was vandalism, and the additional APs will be installed for better and wider coverage.

The Chairperson of the Committee emphasised the importance of sites such as this public facility where the community is benefiting directly. This is what the essence of community development is all about.

The USAASA Acting CEO, Ms Cwayita Madikizela, indicated that there were ongoing discussions with NEMISA and . ZADNA to ensure that there was full access to services offered by other government entities. She emphasised that this was very important to ensure that not only connectivity is provided, but other ICT auxiliary services can be accessed. This would address the issue of skilling through these entities. The Chairperson highlighted that the local members of Parliament through their constituencies would have to be brought on board to keep abreast with the development, and this would serve as ongoing oversight where parliament will be kept updated on further developments around these communities.

Members were also taken to the youth centre, which needed more resources to be fully functional. The youth centre needed the funding and budget to ensure that the centre was fully operational. One of the major concerns was the lack of enough space to accommodate the infrastructure, and security remained a major concern due to vandalism.

The Executive Mayor indicated that the facility was sponsored by Vodacom, and the people who used to work for the centre have since left. Vodacom donated about ten laptops, but the people who used to work for the centre did not return the laptops after they had left. The Executive Mayor committed that a strategic place will be identified to relocate the centre.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to the Community Hall and Youth Centre**

The Delegation noted:

* that there was vandalism of the installed equipment and limitation on the community access to WIFI due to the number of installed APs.
* that there is a plan to install additional Access Points (Aps) for improved coverage and efficiency;
* that there are plans to bring other entities such as NEMISA and. ZADNA on board for digital skills training for the youth and ensure that the connectivity is of economic benefit for the youth and communities;
* with concern that the youth centre is not functional due to vandalism and theft;
* that the current site for the youth centre must be relocated to a secured site before further investment could be made to ensure a functional facility providing services to the youths; and
* that the Executive Mayor has committed that the municipality will ensure that the youth centre is relocated to a secure and functional site.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to the Community Hall and Youth Centre**

The Committee recommends:

* That USAASA should ensure that additional APs are installed for wider coverage for the benefit of surrounding communities;
* that DCDT ensures that there is collaboration amongst its Entities, such as NEMISA, .ZADNA, BBI, USAASA and SITA for wider uptake of installed connectivity infrastructure; and
* that DCDT follows up on (i) the relocation of the dysfunctional Youth Centre to a new and secured location; and (ii) remedial actions to minimise theft of infrastructure such as the laptops invested by the State and private sector.

The Department must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to DTH households for spot checks**

The Delegation conducted spot checks to assess the challenges on the rollout of the BDM programme, which are mainly DTH platforms. There were several households that migrated to DTH that were visited. One of the common observations was that households chose to install more than one television service. One household that was visited had three satellite services which are Multichoice, OpenView and DTH. The owner of the home indicated that he was happy with the connectivity and that there were no challenges. He indicated that he uses DTH mainly to watch sports in his bedroom. The community member further complained that he was unable to pay for his television license due to SABC services which are never available in Kimberly.

The Members raised concerns that during the briefing of the ADG, there was an indication that there was a total of 834 community members migrated to DTH from a total of 1 324 qualifying households and walking around, it took a bit of time for the Delegation to come across households who were connected. The Members highlighted that the numbers shared by the ADG might need to be verified for validation purposes as there was a discrepancy.

The Delegation raised further concerns about how communities are reliant on Multichoice as a primary source for receiving broadcasted content, bringing into question the value of government provision of DTH services. The issue is not necessarily the quality but is more related to premium content choices.

The Chairperson elaborated that one of the reasons why people prefer the Multichoice service over the DTH services provided by the government was because the former was able to commission a certain type of content that viewers prefer. The fact that all the SABC channels were available on the DTH platforms and yet people are still loyal to the Multichoice service was further proof that ‘*Content is King’*. The Chairperson highlighted that this called for greater collaboration amongst the various infrastructure and content providers in order to avoid duplication of services.

The ADG indicated that the ability of the SABC to compete for premium content had been a major concern for the government and that SABC had previously indicated the risks associated with the restrictions on the PFMA. The SABC was always required to fulfil certain PFMA rules in order to source premium content. The rules were an impediment to the multinational companies that were selling premium content. The deviation from the PFMA was required for the SABC to source competitive and relevant content.

The relaxation of the PFMA rules in content acquisition could ensure that the SABC sourced content from other community television stations in order to attract viewership. For example, the Soweto TV station, which was quickly snatched by Multichoice due to the slow process of acquiring such services by the public broadcaster, could ensure an increased viewership on the SABC platform and help drive advertising revenues.

The ADG indicated that there was definitely a need for the rollout of the DTH as some households depended on DTT as the only source of television.

* 1. **Committee observations on household spot checks for DTH services.**

The Delegation noted:

* with concern that some households have three satellite dishes installed with different service providers due to the limitation of the content offered on some of the platforms, particularly the SABC DTH platform;
* with concern that the total number of 844 DTH-migrated households, as was reported by the Department, does not reconcile with the evidence gathered by the Committee Delegation during the oversight in Northern Cape;
* that there is a need for consolidation and sharing of infrastructure by the various broadcasting service providers in order to avoid duplication of hardware installed in households on the basis of content variation; and
* with greater concern that the SABC is unable to acquire new content for the DTH platform due to the stringent PFMA and National Treasury rules.
	1. **Committee recommendations on household spot-checks for DTH Services.**

The Committee recommends:

* that the SABC should look into the development and acquiring relevant content to ensure uptake of DTH services provided by the public broadcaster;
* that the DCDT should explore the possibility of collaboration with other broadcasters such as Multichoice and the ETV Group in order to minimise duplication of infrastructure such as the satellite dishes and ensure optimisation of resources; and
* that the DCDT should urgently review, consult and make recommendations to relevant authorities on how to ease PFMA regulations, which impede the SABC from being competitive in acquiring premium content. The Committee should be appraised on developments before the end of the 6th Parliament.

The Department must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to Hopetown Community Health Centre**

The Members visited Community Health Centre, where positive feedback was received that the service has been working to date. The Health Centre also indicated that the fault resolution process has been effective and helpful.

The infrastructure is funded by USAASA and implemented by BBI. USAASA also highlighted that there are three APs connected throughout the hospital and that there were plans to move one of the APs to the nurses’ homes for access to systems after-hours.

* 1. **Committee observations on Hopetown Community Health Centre**

The Delegation noted:

* that the connectivity is fully functional and the response time on fault resolutions is commendable; and
* that USAASA has committed to moving one of the three APs connected at the health centre to the nurses’ home to ensure after-hours access to Internet services.
	1. **Committee recommendations on Hopetown Community Health Centre**

The Committee recommends:

* That USAASA should ensure that an additional AP is installed at the nurse’s home for coverage during after-hours.

The Department must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to Hopetown Magistrate Office**

The Acting Chairperson introduced the Members and requested that the court official present the user experience. BBI indicated that this was one of the new projects with about 112 facilities connected in Pixie Ka Seme District. Ms R May, Court Manager, welcomed the Delegation and indicated that the service is working fine, however it is not accessible from outside of the court building. The Delegation noted that the court does not provide online court services, perhaps because it is a new installation.

BBI further indicated that the reason why the service was not accessible from outside the court was that there were no APs installed outside the court, and this was due to the limitation on the scope of the project and that extending the original scope has cost implications. USAASA also indicated that the configuration of the services was by design to work only inside the court. BBI and USAASA will review the original scope in order to accommodate outside-of-the-Court coverage.

The ADG also committed that all the issues raised will be followed up and communicated back to the client. The Delegation emphasised the importance of ensuring that the service is all-inclusive and positively impacts the broader community in the vicinity of the Magistrate Court building.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to Hopetown Magistrate Court**

The Delegation noted:

* that the service is working properly and always accessible;
* that coverage is limited to the inside of the court building;
* that BBI and USAASA will look into the feasibility of extending the service to the outside of the court building; and
* with concern that the court does not provide online court services yet.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to Hopetown Magistrate Court**

The Committee recommends:

* that BBI and USAASA should ensure that (i) there is also connectivity outside the court to ensure access by the public in the proximity of the court; and (ii) online court services are deployed.

The Department must report back to the Committee before the end of 6th Parliament.

The Committee Delegation concluded the business of the day and returned to the Hotel in Kimberly.

1. **Day three: 21 April 2023: Committee oversight to Douglas (Siyancuma Local Municipality)**
	1. **Committee visit to Radio Taemaneng**

The Acting Chairperson, Honourable Molala, introduced the Committee Delegation and its support team. The Station Programme Manager, Mr Winston Mosimanyane, stated that the station was one of the seven community radio stations in the Northern Cape. The station was the first in the Province and was established in 1993. The station was established during multiple stakeholder engagements, including civil society. The station went on air on 1 May 1995. The management structure was made up of five members with a total of 19 radio presenters.

The presenters were a mixture of part-time and full-time. The station was first given six hours on air based on the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) regulations when the license was first acquired. The station was originally based at the building where Sol Plaatjie University is located before relocating to the current building. The station was now accommodated by the Griqualand Rugby team, with the current 10-year lease about to expire. There was some engagement with the university with the possibility of being the tenant of Sol Plaatjie University.

Getting a permanent building for the station had been a major challenge because of affordability. The station had also approached the Provincial government for intervention. There were also offers to move to the Sol Plaatjie Municipality, which is likely to result in a conflict of interest as we are supposed to be an independent entity, a station.

Mr Mosimanyane indicated that there was a governing structure in place, but its term had expired, and the station was in the process of calling an Annual General Meeting (AGM) to appoint a new board. The station was also in the process of renewing the license, which expires in August 2023, and the application document has been processed and sent to the regulator for a decision. He further submitted that one of the major consistent challenges was the governance and had always been related to tensions between the board and management.

Mr Mosimanyane further submitted that it was the expectation that all persons serving on the boards of Community Radio Stations (CRS) served selflessly without expectation of financial reward. It was common knowledge that CRS experience generally has financial constraints due to the nature of the business model, which limits modes of source of income.

The public generally needed to be made aware that Community Radio Stations were like diamond mines. There had been a recommendation with the Regulator Regional Office to educate those in governance structures of CRS on the legislative mandate and what was expected from the CRS governance structure. He further highlighted that the bulk of the work in the station had been on the shoulder of management and, in some instances, with little support from the board over the years.

The Programme Manager indicated that the current studio equipment was funded by the MDDA. The Agency also assisted the radio with the bail-out during Covid-19. The station does not have any donors, and ninety per cent of its revenue is derived from advertising. The bulk of the station revenue goes to paying staff and the rest of the operations.

In terms of coverage, it was the license conditions that dictated coverage of the station. However, Radio Taemaneng only covered a radius of 100 kilometres, just under the required radius, due to cost constraints. The station recently tried to apply for additional funding with the MDDA, but due to non-compliance with governance, the application could not be processed.

One of the other challenges has been load-shedding because the station normally uses a small generator to power the studio. There was a challenge to remain on-air and be able to sustain the station for long periods without incurring additional costs. Management was in the process of looking into the possibility of procuring a more-powered generator, which costs about R100 000. This would ensure that the whole operation of the station was not affected by power cuts. The station is self-providing for signal distribution because tariffs from Sentech were quite unaffordable.

The station had produced a number of media personalities, such as Ms Mercedes Besent, Ms Mokopi Molebatsi from Motsweding FM and Ms Crystal Arnold from Supersport. Currently, gender balance was an issue, the station only had four women on air out of 19 presenters. The trend had been that women who come to the station did not last and this matter was being addressed in order to ascertain the actual reason behind less representation of women at the station. The station had made some attempts to recruit across the racial divide, but that had yet to be successful.

* 1. **Committee observations on the visit to Radio Taemaneng**

The Delegation noted:

* and appreciated the presentation by the Programme Manager and that he was articulate on the important matters affecting the station because of his long-serving years at all structures of the CRS since its inception;
* with appreciation that the station has produced some well-known media personalities;
* that Taemaneng FM is an exemplary model for the sustainability of Community Radio Stations, given its twenty-seven years of existence;
* that over the years, station management has been mostly responsible for sustaining Taemaneng FM when compared to various boards who served the station and failed to play their fiduciary roles in growing the station;
* with great concern that the station has only four women on air out of 19 presenters;
* that it is the responsibility of the government to support Community Radio Stations so that our citizens can have a plurality of voices as annotated in the Constitution of the Republic;
* with concern that the station is struggling secure permanent accommodation but that there is an engagement with the Provincial Government for urgent intervention;
* that a new board is yet to be appointed however that the process is underway;
* with concern that the station is negatively impacted by load-shedding and unable to procure backup power which costs in the region of R100 000, a predicament that might be a reflection of all other Community media;
* that the station is self-providing on signal distribution due to the unaffordable tariffs quoted by Sentech; and
* with concern that the station is being sustained on a hand to mouth basis, and is likely to impact on the future sustainability and/or existence of the station.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to Radio Taemaneng**

The Committee recommends:

* that Ministers and relevant Departments of GCIS and DCDT solidify corporation for the benefit and sustainability of community media in general;
* that the Minister, GCIS and relevant Entities should ensure that there is a gender balance in all structures of Community Media projects, including of radio presenters;
* that the GCIS, together with relevant Entities, should (i) urgently facilitate between the station and Municipality in finding a permanent location for Radio Taemaneng because the current lease is close to expiry; and (ii) sustain and growing services and relations with the Municipality;
* that there is a board at the station adequately empowered to maintain and grow community broadcasting services as well as upholding democratic values;
* that the GCIS, together with relevant Entities, should corporate and develop a plan to minimise the impact of load-shedding on Community media in general;
* that the Minister, GCIS and relevant Entities should collaborate to continuously educate CRS about governance and legislative mandate of serving in community media, including differentiation between executive and non-executive roles;
* that DCDT and ICASA should review the license conditions such that geographic proximity of CRS is less encouraged. This will ensure that CRS attracts increased listenership and more advertisement, ultimately contributing to the financial sustainability of CRS; and
* the GCIS must provide an audit on the status of Community media per province, including an audit of governance and financial status.

The Department and relevant Entities must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to Ikageng Intermediate School**

The Principal of the School, Ms Marie Ximena, welcomed the Delegation of the Committee. The Chairperson introduced the rest of the Delegation and made opening remarks that the oversight visit is on behalf of a National Assembly Committee in order to check the extent of service delivery that is provided to communities on behalf of the Portfolio.

The ADG briefed the Committee on the work done at the School by the various Entities reporting to the Department. She indicated that this was a multidisciplinary project within the Department in order to ensure broadband access. The school is one of the 69 sites of the targeted Schools in the Province. USAASA CEO, Ms Cwayita Madikizela, emphasised that in the Northern Cape, there were 112 sites earmarked for broadband connectivity. She indicated that this is one of the new sites and has two APs installed, one for the administration block and the other one for the staff room and computer room. The Agency had also indicated that an additional AP is needed for the back office, and this was due to be connected in a week. The need for an additional AP was due to the size of the school, and the additional AP will also be able to provide connectivity to the surrounding communities. The BBI CEO, Mr Gift Zowa, highlighted that for any technical problems, BBI would be the first point of call. BBI has 13 regional offices in all the provinces, including the Northern Cape.

The Principal indicated that the school appreciates the service and it's quite helpful for the school and community alike, given its location in a farming community and connectivity is a major challenge. She indicated that another major challenge is that during load-shedding, there is no connectivity, sometimes for up to 4 hours, and that connectivity only extends to the library. The school has password control in a place where only the teachers have access to the Internet. She indicated that the speed of the network is acceptable.

The Provincial Department of Economic Development and Tourism also indicated their appreciation for the connectivity and that this will further ensure economic development in the immediate area, the Province and the country at large.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to Ikageng Intermediate School**

The Delegation noted:

* that there is a need for additional APs for broader coverage, including the library;
* with appreciation that the solution services the poorest of our communities in a farming community;
* with concern that load-shedding remains a major problem to service availability;
* that service providers will have to ensure that the learners are safeguarded from the dangerous content;
* that the computer lab has the equipment yet is not functional;
* that the new model of the SA Connect also depended on collaboration with other departments for sustainability and to minimise maintenance costs;
* that engagements with other Entities to be on board are ongoing in order to ensure many benefits, including uptake of the government services and economic development;
* with appreciation that the Provincial Department of Finance, Economic Development and Tourism has committed to assist the school to have the University of Sol Plaatjie conduct the outreach programmes to the school on courses offered and the programs such as in Programming and Coding;
* that the DCDT, together with NEMISA, are planning coding camps for schools where Internet access has been provided; and

that there are free online courses offered through NEMISA, which the school can access, granted there is reliable Internet connectivity.

* 1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to Ikageng Intermediate School**

The Committee recommends:

* that BBI and USAASA should ensure that an additional AP is installed to cover the school’s library and the surrounds of the school, among others;
* that the DCDT should ensure that the Internet connection is safe, secure and reliable and does not expose learners to dangers associated with the Internet;
* that the Minister, together with the Department and all stakeholders, corporate in order to ensure that children, in particular, are safeguarded from illicit content such as pornographic material and misinformation practices;
* that the DCDT ensures continued training around cyber safety and security for all recipients of the SA-Connect programme;
* that the DCDT addresses the issue of a dysfunctional computer lab at the school by ensuring that there is secured Internet and services to complement the successful education of pupils; and
* that the DCDT ensures that Entities reporting to the Department, such as NEMISA and .ZADNA are brought on board to encourage and complement the uptake of the network infrastructure.

The Department and relevant Entities must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to Siyancuma Local Municipality**

The Speaker of Council, Mrs Lemfvia van Niekerk, welcomed the Members of the Committee and indicated that the Executive Mayor was unable to attend due to the late notification of the visit from the Department. She requested further engagement with the Committee after lunch as there were a number of issues with the protocol which needed to be done correctly. She was of the view that a complete contingent of the Municipality was supposed to be in attendance but due to miscommunication, this could not be done.

The Acting Chairperson of the Committee, Honourable Molala, made opening remarks and apologised to Council that Members were delayed due to prior engagements which took longer than was expected. The Acting Chairperson tendered an apology on behalf of the Chairperson of the Committee, Honourable Boyce Maneli, because there was an emergency requiring his attention.

The ADG briefed the Municipality on the purpose of the visit and indicated that the oversight visit purpose was to validate work done by the Department physically. She highlighted that eight District Municipalities had been identified for the broadband connectivity project and to facilitate, among others, the NHI programme. The SA-Connect mainly covers Internet connectivity to schools and clinics, including the SAPS and magistrate offices. She indicated that there is now Phase 2 of the SA-Connect programme, which will cover 48 municipalities as well as the 8 metros across the country.

The Municipality wanted to understand how the locals were empowered to assist with the installation work on the BDM project. One of the Councillors, Mr Patrick Jacobus McKlein, indicated that there was a list of installers which were put together and wanted to know how many of those had been used for the installations. The Municipality submitted that the communication on the running of the project could have been better and coordinated properly. The Municipality was also in the process of further amplifying communication channels to its constituency regarding those who qualify and education on how to apply for the Set-Top boxes and migration DTT. The issue around the misalignment between the local and national policy on how indigent households were defined would need to be clarified for the purposes of the rollout of the BDM Policy.

The ADG clarified that the DTT registration process for indigent households was yet to be closed, and the Department was busy finalising households that had previously registered but were yet to receive the service. The indigent households who were not yet registered were still eligible for registration for allocation of Set-Top-Boxes and ultimate migration to DTH.

She committed that the Department will provide a list to the municipality of all the households who have registered to reconcile with its database and against those who qualify but are yet to register. The ADG also highlighted that there was a full engagement with Provincial DGs and that Municipalities are critical for the reconciliation of databases for the identification and registrations of indigent households.

While discrepancies exist, local beneficiation was a key part of the implementation of the BDM Policy and the Department endeavoured to be consistent in ensuring local communities benefited from the BDM value chain.

Another possible reason for the discrepancy in the indigent statistics was that there were instances where installers were unable to have access to the registered households either because the person had either passed away or there was no access to the household due to people being away at work. In that instance, installers would then leave the contact details for the installers to be contacted whenever the people were available. ADG indicated that pensioners qualified by default as being indigent, given their income bracket.

There were 33 000 sites across the country which would be connected as part of Phase 2. The government would also focus on public Wi-Fi hot spots and zero-rated content to be used for services relating to education and health websites. Many rural areas would be covered through satellite because of the sparsity of households. Restriction on high-bandwidth content such as video download and streaming would be prohibited so as to protect the learners from harmful online content.

Lastly, the Council indicated that there was an attempt to also apply for a Community Radio Station and would like to get some guidance on the process.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to Siyancuma Local Municipality**

The Delegation noted:

* that Karrikama High School was out of the designed route of the oversight, and the Chairperson recommended that this will need to be visited during the next oversight;
* with concern the poor communication between national and local governments, which negatively impacts on coordination and rollout of the BDM Policy;
* with concern to the use of different statistical definitions and metrics for ‘indigent households’ between national and local government;
* with concern on how the installers are appointed and that the criteria are not clearly defined nor is the information equally shared; and
* that the municipality has reservations about the uptake of the BDM programme in the area as the numbers shared do not match when compared to their database.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to Siyancuma Local Municipality**

The Committee recommends:

* that DCDT should ensure that in future, communication of its programmes is adequately addressed with all the relevant stakeholders, such as the Provincial and Local Government and that relevant leadership is informed timeously, especially on Committee oversight visits;
* that DCDT reviews the definition and classification of ‘indigent’ households; and
* that DCDT coordinates with local municipalities and provides them with audited lists of connected households in order to benchmark service delivery and resolve challenges encountered by different municipalities around household statistics and definitions of indigent households;

The Department and relevant Entities must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to Douglas Post Office**

The Delegation was received by the staff from the Post Office. SAPO addressed the issue around the projections versus the registration of 1 400 indigent households. The projections are based on the registration in 2015, and this was information received from Statistics South Africa, including the definition. In 2016, the registration process was intensified, and this was during the switch-on of the SKA. In 2021 there was an extensive registration process where the district coordinators were appointed by USAASA. These coordinators were conducting door-to-door registration and working closely with the local councillors.

One of the reasons for the low numbers against the projections was that some of the households already had satellite dishes and showed no interest in other television services as they already subscribed to Multichoice. Some of the households were identified and connected through the help of the local Councillors and traditional leadership.

The campaign about the registration drive was also sent to the SABC to encourage households to register for Set-Top Boxes. SITA also developed an online registration platform for those who had smartphones. It was further highlighted that the warehouse storage was fully funded by USAASA, and all the payments were up to date.

The use of local installers as per the policy directive was being implemented. There was also knowledge impartation to assist with the operations, logistics and maintenance of the service. The Committee indicated that the matter around liquidation was being addressed, and the National Treasury appropriated an R2.4 billion bailout to turn around SAPO.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to the Douglas Post Office**

The Delegation noted:

* that there are discrepancies between the registrations and successfully connected households, there is a lesser number of connected compared to registered households;
* that while some households did not qualify as indigent in 2015 when the BDM Policy registration process was commenced, might now be indigent in 2023;
* that good communication relations between National, Provincial and Local governments will be important to the success of the implementation of the BDM programme; and
* that improved coordination between the Department and the local government structures will reconcile the registration and qualification of indigent households for Set-Top Boxes.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to the Douglas Post Office**

The Committee recommends:

* that the Minister ensure that there was improved communication and coordination between the Department, Provincial and local government to the benefit of some of its programmes;
* that the DCDT should consider economic conditions impacting household income to resolve the discrepancies in the definition and statistics of households;
* that DCDT strengthens its coordination with the Local government in order to encourage new registrations and conclusion of the implementation of the BDM Policy; and
* that the DCDT reconciles all identified discrepancies between the registrations and successfully connected households in all Provinces.

The Department and relevant Entities must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

* 1. **Committee visit to the Breipal Clinic**

A nurse at the clinic, Sister Bester, received the Delegation and indicated that the Wi-Fi installation was working properly and greatly complemented the work of the clinic. The nurse further highlighted that, previously, the clinic used to rely on regular data purchases, but the installation of the broadband network had greatly improved the efficiency of the clinic in delivering services to the community.

For example, the clinic was now able to remotely conduct tracing and tracking of blood samples of patients from laboratories. There were instances where the results used to take days before they reached the clinic, but with the introduction of the Internet, the clinic obtained results within a short space of time. However, a major challenge was attributed to the downtime due to load-shedding.

The nurse further indicated that since the installation of infrastructure and activation of service in March 2023, all the staff members had access to the network, and the feedback had been encouraging and positive. The connectivity was provided by BBI with funding provided by USAASA. The internet service was also accessible by the public and had been of great assistance to the learners in the surrounding area with their school assignments. The solution also made it easy for the capturing of data and updating of the patient's records.

Members welcomed the positive feedback and were then given a tour of the server room, including all related network equipment. The clinic indicated that the Department of Health had procured a standby generator, but there was a problem with the supply of diesel. The Committee was of the view that improved communication and relations between local Councillors, the clinic, the Provincial Government and other stakeholders were critical for successful service delivery.

* 1. **Committee observations on a visit to Breipal Clinic**

The Delegation noted:

* with appreciation that SA-Connect is fully realised at the clinic and servicing both the clinic as well as the surrounding community;
* with concern that load-shedding remains a major challenge to service delivery objectives; and
* with concern that while there is a standby generator, it is not used due to a lack of diesel supply.
	1. **Committee recommendations on a visit to Breipal Clinic**

The Committee recommends:

* that DCDT liaise with the relevant stakeholders on possible and viable solutions to ensure that the generator is supplied with diesel in order to maintain Internet connectivity; and
* that the Department endeavours to improve communication relations between National, Provincial and Local government and other stakeholders with interest.

The Department and relevant Entities must report back to the Committee before the end of the 6th Parliament.

**Report to be considered.**