

## IMS, IPC, Stakeholder Seek Extension of Debt Payment Period By Broadcast Stations



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Stakeholders in the media industry have called on the Federal Government to extend the period for the debt waiver it recently granted the broadcast industry and extend financial support to the print and online media.

The Federal Government recently granted 60 per cent conditional relief to broadcast stations for three months as a result of the economic downturn brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking separately with *The Guardian*, the trio of Dr Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, Professor Ralph Akinfeleye, a teacher in mass communication at the University of Lagos, and the Director of the International Press Centre, IPC, Mr Lanre Arogundade, submitted that the

“According to Dr Akingbulu, the three months grace period for the payment of 40 per cent of the total debts should be extended to six months or more. He said government should also find a way to assist broadcasters financially, adding that print media houses should also benefit from the waiver. The waiver, he reasoned, should also be extended to reputable online platforms like *Premium Times* and *The Cable*.”

government's lifeline would be realistic if the debt waiver period was extended to enable the media cope adequately under the harsh business environment.

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months grace period for the payment of 40 per cent of the total debts should be extended to six months or more. He said government should also find a way to assist broadcasters financially, adding that print media houses should also benefit from the waiver.

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Akinfeleye noted that the duration is a form of unequal exchange. “In order to make the exchange equal, the NBC and Ministry of Information should make broadcast stations pay within six months or one year,” he said.

Prof Akinfeleye, who is also Council Member, World Journalism Education Congress, added that if broadcast stations were asked to pay within three months, it means,

“they are injecting more virus into the system.”

He said government should also do the same for the print and social media.

Mr Arogundade noted that the decision is a welcome development but asked government to do more, adding, “the waiver to be paid by broadcast stations should have been one year.”

According to him, it was expected that government drastically reduced the licensing fee for broadcast stations. The licensing fee, he observed, is too exorbitant.

He said, “Government should also make newsprint for print media and technological equipment for the broadcast media houses duty free.”

It would be recalled that the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, accompanied by the Acting Director General of NBC, Prof. Armstrong Aduku Idachaba, recently, announced that Federal Government would grant debt forgiveness of 60 per cent to broadcast stations in the country whose indebtedness stands at N7.8billion.

**Court Fixes August 10 for Ruling in Trial of Two Journalists**

**J**onathan Ugbal and Jeremiah Archibong, News Editor and Managing Editor of *Cross River Watch*, an online Newspaper based in Cross River State, who were arrested on August 5, 2019 over their alleged involvement in the "revolution now" protest and bailed thereafter, have been handed an August 10, 2020 date by a Chief Magistrate Court in Calabar for ruling on their no-case submission case with number MC/428C/19.

The journalists are facing three count charges bordering on conspiracy, unlawful assembly and conduct causing a breach of public peace preferred against them at the Magistrate court, Moore road, Calabar on August 7, 2019.

Jonathan and Archibong were said to have arrived the venue for the #RevolutionNow protest in the morning of August 5th on their way to report the event but were arrested by the Anti-Cultism and Kidnapping Squad in Calabar.

After several adjournments, the prosecuting police officer, DSP Igini Chukwuma and the investigating police officer, Sergeant Aaron Adie testified before the court.

Chukwuma told the court that he was ordered to arrest anyone who approached the venue of revolution now protest and having seen Jonathan, decided to "take him in." He said he was later ordered to transfer him to the State Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Department which he did and has no knowledge of the investigations after that.

Sergeant Adie in his testimony, denied knowledge of the fact the duo were journalists. He also said he neither knew the source of livelihood of the duo nor their addresses.

Counsel to the defendants, Kehole Enya, proceeded to file a no-case submission which was adopted. He prayed the court to discharge and acquit the duo as the police had failed to prove their case.

**Police Assault The Guardian Reporter for Insisting on COVID-19 Protocol in tricycle**

**A** reporter of *The Guardian* newspaper was last weekend in Lagos assaulted and arrested by officers of the Ago-Okota Division of the Nigeria Police Force for insisting that a tricycle operator complies with the COVID-19 directive of not carrying more than two passengers.

According to the reporter, a tricycle operator was commuting from Taiwo to Century Bus-Stop on the Ago Palace Way, opposite the police station, but on the route, the operator stopped to pick up passengers to make it four persons in the tricycle, including the rider.

The reporter protested against this, but one

of the passengers, a police officer attached to the Ago-Okota Division, simply identified as Ayodele, insisted that the tricycle operator carry him and the person accompanying him.

After much argument, the policeman got down from the tricycle, but unknown to the reporter, he was trailed to his destination.

The reporter narrated: "After I alighted at Century Bus-Stop, the officer walked up to me and said: "Do you know I can slap you and mess you up now and nothing would happen?" Then I ask him why? He then slapped me, tore my shirt, and beckoned on his colleagues.

"About four of them bundled me into the station, hitting me with sticks and rubber pipes. On reaching the counter, a lady officer continued slapping me, collected my phone, and said I was lucky that I was still alive. I am not charging you for police assault."

After this, the reporter was detained for over an hour before other officers later released him.

**Taraba NUJ Urges Govt Officials to Stop Harassment of Journalists**

**T**he Taraba chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) has appealed to government officials to stop harassing journalists carrying out their legitimate duties in the state.

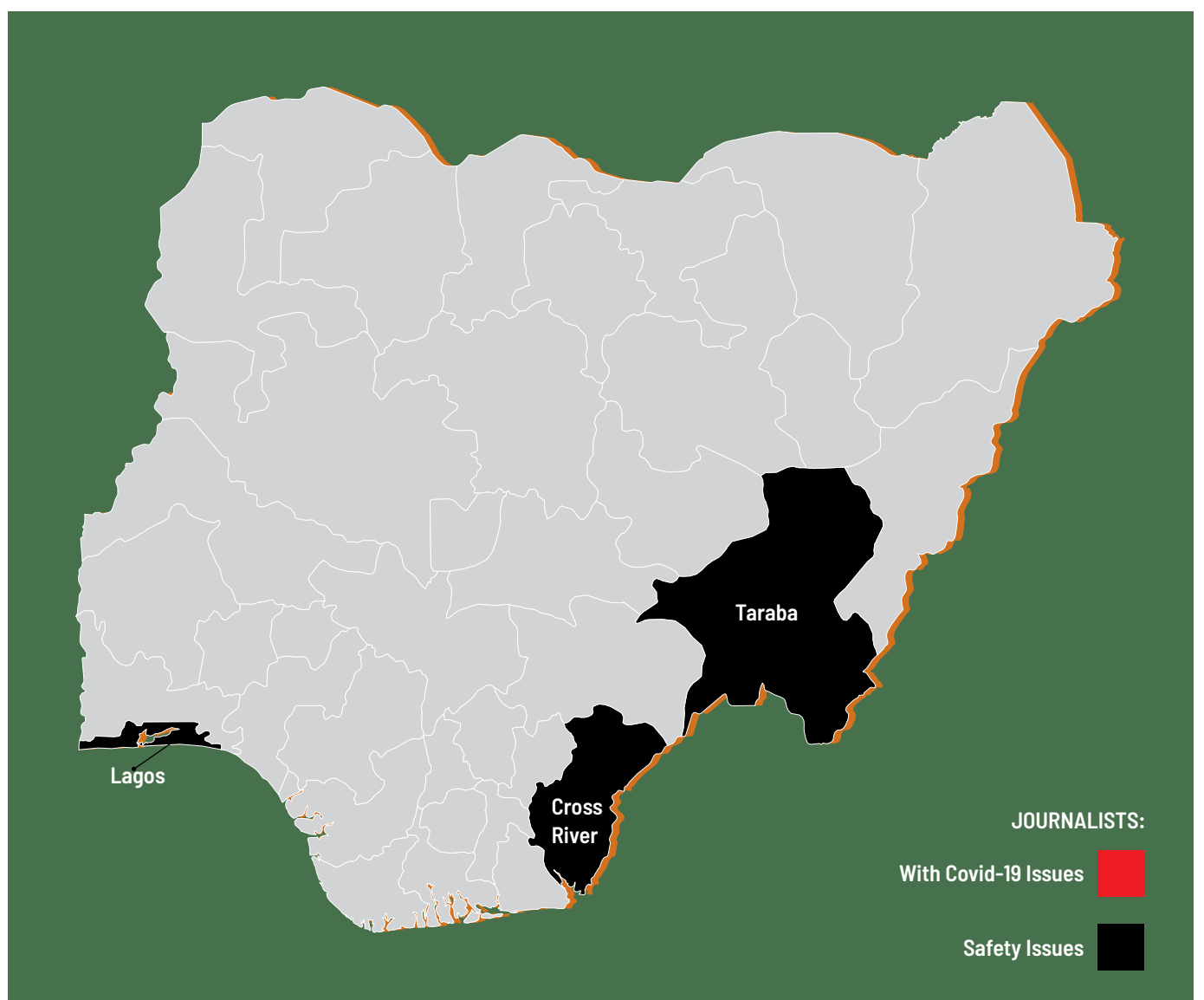
Mr Jovita Shafe, the Chairman of the union made the appeal on Tuesday in Jalingo at the official handing over ceremony to the newly sworn-in executives of the state's Correspondents' Chapel.

Shafe stressed the need for the government to engage media practitioners in a robust partnership to enhance public awareness on government programmes in the state. He said that henceforth, "the media would not tolerate unwholesome attitude of government officials towards the media practitioners in the state."

The union leader urged the new chapel leadership to embrace all members and ensure harmony among them. Shafe also advised the leaders to conduct themselves within the code of ethics governing the union in particular and the profession in general. In his response, Alhaji Sadiq Adamu, the new Chairman of the Correspondent Chapel, warned against undue interference by politicians into affairs of journalists in the state.

Adamu noted that media practice was a noble profession and would not subject itself to whims and caprices of non-practitioners. He however, called on members to work in harmony with government at all levels. He appealed to the NUJ leadership not to relent in playing its fatherly roles for the chapel. Adamu equally assured of carrying all members of the union along.

Seven members of the executive council recently emerged from the chapel's election and were sworn in immediately.







**Mr. Babatunde Irukera**  
CEO of Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

## Why Pay-As-You-Go May Not Apply In Pay TV Industry, Says Consumer Protection Boss, Irukera

Nigerians expecting the Pay-As-You-Go billing mode used in telecommunications service to apply in the Pay-TV industry are being unrealistic, the Chief Executive of the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), Mr. Babatunde Irukera has said.

He said that this was so because broadcast content must have been paid for and customers only pay for access unlike in telecommunications where the subscriber only pays when the timer starts.

Irukera, who is a lawyer, gave the explanation Friday in an appearance on *Channel Television's* programme, *Sunrise Daily*.

The FCCPC boss said that subscribers demanding pay-as-you go billing mode for pay television were acting based on an erroneous premise.

He revealed that the commission had been getting requests from Pay-TV subscribers urging it to compel the service providers to adopt Pay-As-You-Go billing.

Irukera said this was outside the FCCPC's purview.

He said: "Our role is to make sure that consumers get the best possible from a consumer protection standpoint; from the competition standpoint, to make that the playing field is level. And we don't impose business models on operators. They choose what they want to do and the price is something that is negotiated between consumers and sellers. But if we see that there is a business model that is more profitable, beneficial to consumers, we will certainly advance that.

"My challenge with what sometimes is the discussion around pay-as-you-go in pay TV is that there is a disconnection and we've been through this.

He said the Commission had conducted some investigations and surveys in different parts of the world and came to the conclusion that the pay-as-you-go model in telecommunications is not necessarily applicable.

"Pay-per-view is not that you pay for what you view from the point of when you turn your television on.

"It is primarily that there are certain programmes, maybe a boxing match, a soccer match or some movies that are still in the cinemas that some of the pay TV operators have bought and you can literally request instead of going to a stadium or going to a cinema to watch, you can watch it in your home and pay for that view.

"That is pay-per-view, but we confuse it with pay-as-you-go.

According to him, what people are asking for in pay-

as-you-go is "when you turn on your television and you are watching, you pay. When you turn off your television and you are not watching, you don't pay.

"It is difficult because the content has been created, what you are paying for is access. "How you use the access is entirely discretionary and up to you.

"Unlike the telephone where the clock starts and the airtime goes down, you have paid for content."

## StarTimes Adjusts Tariff As Naira Falls In Value



StarTimes has hiked tariff following the fall in value of naira against the dollar and hike in Value Added Tax (VAT) by the Federal Government, which has impacted the business adversely.

Coming on the heels of the increase in tariff by its competitor, Pay TV service provider, StarTimes, at the weekend, said it has been compelled to adjust its tariff to reflect its cost, adding that over the last three or four months, it has had to absorb the extra cost occasioned by the hike in VAT.

The company's Marketing Manager, Viki Liu, who spoke during a virtual media interaction, however, said the firm has refreshed its content offerings, bringing more sought-after content to its subscribers at the most affordable rate in the market.

Speaking on the challenges facing the firm in its quest to provide entertainment to subscribers Liu recalled that earlier this year, the Federal Government increased VAT from five per cent to 7.5 per cent.

She said: "This increase did have an effect on our cost but in consideration of our customers' plight, we continued to bear that extra cost.

"More recently, the impact of the foreign exchange rate has had an overwhelming adverse effect on our business. Our business is not exempted from the effect of the naira depreciation affecting all businesses in the country.

"All of our foreign content is bought in dollars and to continually serve our subscribers the best content we have been constrained to make some slight review on our subscription rates. The decision to make this review is based on compelling external factors beyond our control.

"By this review which will take effect from August 1, for our DTT (antenna) users: basic bouquet subscribers will now pay N1700 as against N1300 monthly to enjoy close to 80 exciting channels; Classic bouquet subscribers will pay N2500 as against N1,900 monthly to keep enjoying close to 100 channels while Nova bouquet remains unchanged at N900 with over 43 exciting channels.

"For DTH (Dish) users: Smart bouquet

subscribers will pay N2200 as against N1900 monthly; Super Bouquet subscribers will pay N4200 as against N3800 monthly while Nova bouquet remains unchanged at N900. DTH has close to 200 exciting channels.

"We hope our customers understand as we are not known for incessant price increase. Rather, StarTimes' subscription prices had on different occasions been reduced in order to make digital TV affordable for every Nigerian."

Liu assured subscribers that as a business, the brand would continue to make it a priority to broaden its content offerings to meet a variety of their interests without compromising affordability.

"Despite the price adjustment, we shall continue to delight our subscribers with more value at the best cost in the Pay-TV market.

Consumer's interests are duly taken care of with these flexible subscription options which give them access to pay for what they watch as low as N90 daily," she said.

She said a new blockbuster Hollywood movie channel and two premium sports rights are coming on the platform.

StarTimes said it pioneered and remains the only player in the market offering flexible subscription options – daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly, allowing people to subscribe according to their needs and means.

Liu said due to StarTimes' giant stride to make digital TV affordable to all families, the price of pay-TV has been greatly lowered, from average \$50 per month to between \$3 to \$5 per month.

She noted that the pay-as-you-go options are available for all bouquets; and whether a customer subscribes daily, weekly or monthly to a bouquet, he will have access to the same channels and services, adding that flexible billing systems are reasonable for people who do not spend reasonable time watching television after subscription.

Viki said although the sharp drop in naira has forced the brand to adjust some of its bouquet prices upwards from August 1, subscribers will get more value for what they are paying, without compromising affordability.

"Over the last couple of months, StarTimes has been adding new and exciting channels, great local and international channels for the viewing pleasure of our teeming subscribers without an additional charge.

These channels, including other existing flagship channels and content, were acquired at a cost which StarTimes has continued to bear to cushion the economic pressure on subscribers."

"For sports lovers, StarTimes offers varieties of international football tournaments for the entertainment of our teeming subscribers. Europa League, Bundesliga and Coppa Italia are exclusive on StarTimes. We also air English FA Cup, Copa Del Rey among others.

"We also brought back FOX; FOX LIFE; National Geographic; Nat Geo Wild; ESPN; ESPN 2 and BABY TV. We will very soon also be including a new Hollywood blockbuster movie channel on our list of entertainment content," she said.



## ECOWAS Court To FG: Repeal Cybercrime Law

The Federal Government of Nigeria has been directed by the ECOWA Court of Justice to repeal or amend the provision of its cybercrimes law on the grounds that it violates citizens' right of expression.

Delivering the judgment of the three-man panel of the court, Justice Januaria Costa ordered the Nigerian government to make the law to align with its obligation under Citing Article 1 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Justice Januaria Costa who delivered the three-man panel of the court sitting in Abuja, on Friday, ordered the Nigerian government to accommodate its laws with the Article." Other members on the panel are Justices Dupe Atoki (presiding) and Keikura Bangura.

Justice Januaria who presided over the sitting said the court of the regional body would hold "the Nigerian government liable for the violation of the right to freedom of expression with the enactment of section 24 of the Cybercrime Act, 2015," adding that the said section 24 of the law, criminalises sending from computer messages considered to be among others, "grossly offensive, pornographic or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character or causes any such message or matter to be so sent", or that the person "knows to be false, for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill will or needless anxiety to another or causes such a message to be sent".

The ruling followed a suit ECW/CCJ/APP/53/18 filed by a civil society group, Laws and Rights Awareness Initiative, through its counsel Mr Chukwudi Ajaegbo, on November 6, 2018, claiming among others, that its members' freedom of expression on the internet or in the use of computer devices was limited/breached by Section 24 of the Cybercrime Act enacted by the Nigerian government.

The plaintiff further claimed that nine of its partners were arrested and detained in connection with the enforcement of the provision of Section 24 of the Cybercrime Act in violation of Articles 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and 39 of Nigeria's Constitution.

In its argument, plaintiff argued that Section 24 contained vague concepts that allowed for arbitrary interpretation and application, and that the restrictions it imposes were not reasonably justifiable as they did not pursue legitimate objectives, necessary nor proportional.

The Nigerian government opposed the suit by arguing that section 24 of the Cybercrime (Prohibition and Prevention) Act 2015 was adopted as a legislative measure to give effect to freedom of expression as provided in Article 9(2) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and was in accordance with provisions of Section 39(3) of the country's 1999 Constitution.

Although the court upheld the plaintiff's prayer

seeking the striking down of section 24 of the cybercrime law, it dismissed other claims of the plaintiffs contained in the suit for lack of evidence.

## NBC Rolls Out Guidelines for Community Broadcasting



In a bid to strengthen broadcasting across the country, the media regulator, National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, has rolled out new guidelines for the smooth operation of community broadcasting.

A statement on the commission's official website announced the contents of 'Operations 9.6.2 of the sixth edition of the broadcasting code which is expected to serve as guidelines for broadcasters across the country.'

According to the commission, "the community broadcaster shall; (a) not abdicate its editorial and scheduling responsibilities to any other party, (b) ensure that a minimum of 70 percent of its production is done by the community, (c) operate for the social benefit of the community.

Community radio stations were launched by the NBC in 2019 to drive information to the grassroots where there are difficulties in accessing information.

It is also believed that the novelty would further strengthen the coverage of broadcasting, as well as enable locals to air more of their views to listeners.

## Minister: National Theatre Restoration To Provide First Class Facilities For Creative Industry

The Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, has said the planned restoration and upgrade of the iconic National Theatre will provide first class facilities for Nigeria's creative industry and generate about 10,000 jobs during and after the restoration.

The Minister stated this during the formal handover of the edifice and the adjoining 134-hectare fallow land to the Central Bank

## Policy and Regulation

of Nigeria and the Bankers' Committee in Lagos on Sunday

Highlights of the first phase include the upgrade of the theatres (the main halls and cinema halls, conference and banquet halls, press hall and the bar); installation of new seats, upgrade of the sanitary facilities, installation of lifts, acoustics and specialist lightings, as well as replacement of the air-conditioning, lighting and plumbing.

Phase II will involve the development of purpose-built clusters to provide world class facilities for Nigeria's Creative Industry, with the clusters having four hubs: Fashion, Music, Film and Information and Technology (IT) hubs.

The creative clusters will be supported by other facilities, including multi-storey parking to accommodate 1,000 cars, a Visitors' Welcome Centre which will house commercial and retail facilities, as well as administration and management offices.

He said "Please permit me to start off by making a clarification: this iconic National Theatre remains a national heritage and will not be ceded to any person or group, as some have chosen to frame what we are doing here today. What we are here to do is to hand over the National Theatre for restoration and upgrade and the fallow land within the premises to the Central Bank and the Bankers' Committee for development.

The handover ceremony was witnessed by Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos and his Deputy, Dr. Obafemi Hamzat; the Minister of Youth and Sports Development, Mr Sunday Dare; the CBN Governor, Mr. Godwin Emeziele; the Chairman of the Committee of Banks' CEOs, Mr. Herbert Wigwe, and the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information and Culture, Deaconess Grace Isu Gekpe, among others.

Alhaji Mohammed said the 25-billion-Naira project, tagged the Lagos Creative and Entertainment Centre Project, is a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) that will be executed in two phases, with Phase 1 being the restoration and upgrade of the National Theatre to its glory days at a cost of 7 billion Naira, and Phase II the development of the adjoining fallow land at a cost of 18 billion Naira.

The Minister described the handover of the facility as a 'historic day in the annals of the Creative Industry in Nigeria', saying the project is a win-win for all involved

"As you know, this is the hub of the Creative Industry in Nigeria. The National Theatre was established to encourage the advancement of the performing arts throughout the country; to create opportunities for performing artists of the country as well as to aid the promotion of social development and the improvement of the quality of life. In its present state, it is not living to its billing," he said. The project would be completed in 18 months.

## Editor's Note

The loan waiver the Federal Government recently granted the depressed broadcast industry has continued to generate comments, suggestions and criticisms among stakeholders. We bring you a broad, balanced viewpoint from stakeholders in the field and academia.

Journalists by their profession are supposed to be respected, if not honoured by the rest of us for whom they act as guardians of the society in the course of performing their professional duties of daily reportage and coverage of events. But no day passes without them being faced with one form of harassment or the other. Even the attempt to assist the police enforce COVID-19 protocol attracts maltreatment. Read our inside page stories to find out about this development.

Just when Nigerians thought they had fought a winning battle over hike in tariffs by Pay-TV, here comes the hard news of a hike in fees by StarTimes, which many had looked up to as alternative to the offending MultiChoice Nigeria.

According to the company, the devalued Naira and price war by competitors had forced them to raise the fees. Their story looks convincing but you have to find out for yourself in the detailed report we have included in this edition.

In the same vein, pay-per-view and pay-as-you go billing systems may look similar but they are actually different when it comes to their application to different media. The Nigeria Consumer Protection Commission boss, Mr Babatunde Irukera has made a useful explanation on this in a story we feature in one of the pages. Reading it will clear the confusion that had clouded the whole argument for and against high tariffs by Pay-TV.

Just when the dust raised by the new NBC's code is yet to settle, with stakeholders still calling for a reconsideration of salient aspects of the code, the Commission has issued new guidelines on community broadcasting in the country. The details are spelt out for your reading, hoping that they would be well received by various interests groups in the country so that the industry can begin to enjoy some form of reforms.


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### NCDC Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by State, July 17, 2020

States Affected	No. of Cases (Lab Confirmed)	No. of Cases (on admission)	No. Discharged	No. of Deaths
Lagos	13,097	10,973	1,948	176
FCT	2,761	1,882	840	39
Oyo	1,989	959	1,011	19
Edo	1,874	662	1,150	62
Rivers	1,480	469	964	47
Delta	1,404	784	585	35
Kano	1,331	243	1,035	53
Ogun	1,146	347	777	22
Kaduna	1,087	331	744	12
Ondo	865	705	139	21
Katsina	669	205	441	23
Ebonyi	646	104	532	10
Plateau	595	319	260	16
Borno	593	94	464	35
Enugu	560	214	330	16
Gombe	537	40	475	22
Bauchi	522	4	505	13
Abia	456	88	365	3
Kwara	422	229	179	14
Imo	420	333	78	9
Osun	328	235	84	9
Jigawa	322	3	308	11
Bayelsa	318	136	163	19
Nasarawa	254	133	113	8
Akwa Ibom	162	47	112	3
Sokoto	153	0	137	16
Niger	145	30	108	7
Benue	143	95	42	6
Anambra	118	41	67	10
Adamawa	111	20	83	8
Kebbi	88	7	74	7
Zamfara	76	0	71	5
Ekiti	72	30	40	2
Yobe	63	4	51	8
Taraba	30	19	11	0
Cross River	12	8	3	1
Kogi	5	0	3	2

#### Highlights

- On the 16th of July 2020, 595 new confirmed cases and 9 deaths were recorded in Nigeria.
- No new state has reported a case in the last 24 hours.
- Till date, 34,854 cases have been confirmed, 14,292 cases have been discharged and 769 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.
- The 595 new cases are reported from 24 states - Lagos (156), Ondo (95), Rivers (53), Abia (43), Oyo (38), Enugu (29), Edo (24), FCT(23), Kaduna (20), Akwa Ibom (17), Anambra (17), Osun (17), Ogun (14), Kano (13), Imo (11), Delta (6), Ekiti (5), Gombe (4), Plateau (4), Cross River (2), Adamawa (1), Bauchi (1), Jigawa (1), Yobe (1)