

Quarterly Report on Cable Television Service



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བརྒྱུ་སྟེན་དཔྱད་པའི་འཇམ་ལོ་ན།

Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority
Royal Government of Bhutan

(July - September, 2024)

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1. Samuh Video-On-Demand

Samuh, the pioneering Over-the-Top (OTT) platform in Bhutan, continues to play a significant role in the development of the country's digital entertainment landscape. In an effort to extend its reach and offer more accessible entertainment options to Bhutanese households, Samuh recently launched a Video on Demand (VoD) service in collaboration with Netcom Bhutan Limited, one of the leading Multi-Service Operators (MSO) in the country.

The Samuh VoD service was officially introduced on June 2, 2024, through Netcom's cable television network. As part of the launch strategy, a two-day promotional period was offered, during which subscribers were able to access the VoD content free of charge. This period enabled users to familiarize themselves with the platform's wide array of content, which includes a mix of Bhutanese films, documentaries, and other cultural productions. Following this promotional phase, the full paid service was activated on July 1, 2024.

This initiative marks a significant advancement in Bhutan's cable television ecosystem, as it brings OTT services directly into households through the existing cable infrastructure. The collaboration with Netcom Bhutan Limited has allowed Samuh to integrate its digital content offering into a traditional television framework, thereby making its services available to a broader segment of the population.

The introduction of Samuh Video on Demand on the CATV network also signals a step forward in the diversification of content delivery methods within Bhutan. By offering local and international content through a subscription model, Samuh is contributing to the enhancement of the country's media industry while simultaneously promoting Bhutanese culture and creativity.

Moreover, this service launch underscores the growing convergence of digital platforms and conventional broadcast media, setting a precedent for future collaborations between OTT providers and cable operators. Samuh's VoD initiative, backed by Netcom Bhutan Limited, is expected to boost local content consumption while providing an important revenue stream for both the platform and its partner.



Figure 1: Samuh on Demand Channel.

2. Monitoring Visit

The Authority regularly undertakes monitoring, inspection, and verification visits for cable television services across Dzongkhags and Gewogs. In this quarter, the team from InfoComm and Infrastructure Division and Media and Content Division conducted a field visit to Sarpang, Gelephu, Chukha, and Samtse from August 20th - 7th September, 2024, primarily focusing to monitor and verify the discontinuation of Direct-to-Home (DTH) services in areas where cable services are already available. In collaboration with local cable operators, the team inspected various regions to ensure compliance with the regulatory mandate aimed at phasing out DTH services and promoting digitized cable systems.

Additionally, the team from InfoCom and Infrastructure Division visited Guma Gewog, Punakha Dzongkhag and Daga Gewog, WangduePhodrang Dzongkhag. The visit focused on monitoring and verifying a complaint lodged against Buddha Cable Services and included a site verification of a new CATV service setup in Daga Gewog, Wangdue Dzongkhag from September 13th - 15th, 2024.

The main objective of these monitoring tours was to ensure that local cable operators adhere to the established guidelines and meet the quality standards set by the Authority. During the visits, the team engaged with LCOs and their technical teams to review the progress of CATV digitization. Key discussions centered around policy compliance, addressing technical challenges, and improving service quality for consumers moving forward.

The team emphasized that the transition to a cable-based system aligns with national interests. A digitized cable system helps boost the local economy by supporting Local Cable Operators (LCOs), who in turn reinvest in infrastructure and services within the community. By moving away from DTH, which often channels revenue outside the country, the switch promotes greater economic circulation within Bhutan, benefiting both the nation and its citizens. The awareness campaign focused on the long-term advantages, encouraging people to make the shift for the collective benefit of consumers, LCOs, and the country as a whole.

During the entire tour, the team met with the LCOs including their technical team and conducted the monitoring tour to check the households who still use the DTH. The discussion mainly focused on advocating policy, rules and regulations, technical issues, and way forward to providing the best services to the customers.

2.1 Monitoring the use of DTH in Chukha Dzongkhag

- The team visited Darla, Pasakha, and Phuentsholing Town areas.
- In Darla, residents displayed a positive attitude toward the regulatory directive to phase out DTH services. Almost all households expressed their willingness to switch to cable services and remove their existing DTH setups. This was largely due to increased awareness of the benefits of the digitized cable system, including better service quality and local channel availability.
- Most residents were not aware of the regulatory requirement to discontinue DTH services in areas where cable services are available. The advantages of using Cable Services provided by LCO over the use of DTH service were mentioned in the conversation.
- The cable network infrastructure in Darla is already well-established, making it easy for residents to make the switch. Local cable operators reported that they are ready to provide the services to new subscribers as households transition from DTH to cable.



Figure 2: Dish TV user at Darla

- Several households in Pasakha were found to be using DTH that were no longer in use but had not been physically removed. The DTH were inactive, as they no longer received a signal, but residents had not yet removed the DTH equipment while some have already availed cable services.
- Households that were present during the inspection showed a willingness to switch to cable services. Residents were receptive to the information provided by the inspection team, particularly regarding the benefits of digitized cable systems.



Figure 3: DTH User in Pasakha

- In Phuentsholing, several households, both Indian nationals and Bhutanese citizens, were still found using DTH services despite the availability of cable services.
- Indian nationals residing in flats purchased within Bhutan were predominantly using DTH, which contravenes regulations. The Indian nationals in Phuentsholing appeared to be unaware of the regulations prohibiting the use of DTH in areas where cable is available. This created a challenge in enforcing compliance, as they were unfamiliar with Bhutanese laws. The advantages of using Cable Services provided by LCO over the use of DTH service were mentioned in the conversation.
- Some Bhutanese citizens were also using DTH services, citing convenience and better access to international channels and needing to pay only once after the purchase of DTH.
- Despite the presence of DTH systems, cable infrastructure is fully established in Phuentsholing Town, making it feasible for households to switch to cable services at any time. Local cable operators are ready to assist in this transition, but greater enforcement of the regulatory mandate is required.



Figure 4: DTH user at Phuentsholing Town

2.2 Monitoring the use of DTH in Samtse Dzongkhag

- The team went for monitoring in multiple Gewogs, including Tendu, Kuchen Thang, Pemaling, Sangcholing, Yoeseltse, Ugyentse, Norbugang, Gomtu, Samtse Town, Dorokha, Denchukha and Tading. The primary objective was to assess the ongoing usage of Direct-to-Home (DTH) services in areas where cable networks are available and to evaluate compliance with the regulatory mandate for transitioning to digitized cable systems.
- During the monitoring it was found that some households have installed Wi-Fi and are utilizing free DTH services to watch TV without incurring additional costs. This practice has contributed to the continued use of DTH in areas where cable services are available.
- Preference for DTH is due to its availability of Nepali channels (Dhangal 1 and 2 Channel), which are not offered by the cable services. This specific content has been a major factor for households choosing to retain the use of DTH as most of the people are Lhotsampas and prefer watching Nepali content.
- Residents have recommended including BBS Lhotsampa Radio and other BBS Radio channels in the cable service offerings. These channels, which are available on free DTH, are valued by the community, and their absence from cable services has influenced the preference for DTH.
- DTH services provide detailed program listings and schedules, which allow viewers to plan their TV watching in advance. This feature is appreciated by many users and is not currently available with cable services, influencing their choice to stick with DTH.
- The team have informed the advantages of using Cable Services provided by LCO over the use of DTH service were mentioned in the conversation. It has been observed that people are willing to switch to Cable systems and recommend better services so that they don't regret switching from DTH to Cable services.
- People were unaware on whom to complain if they are not able to get better services, the team briefed the people on how they can lodge complaints and the necessary actions which will be taken by the Authority.



Figure 5: DTH user in Samtse Dzongkhag

2.3 Monitoring the use of DTH at Sarpang Dzongkhag

- The team also went for monitoring in multiple Gewogs, including Tashiphu, Chuzaygang, Pemathang, Jigmeling, Pelrithang, Sarpang, Dargaythang, Dekiling, Jigmecholing, Samtenling,
- During the inspection, it was found that many households in the rural parts of Gelephu continued to rely on free DTH services. A key reason for this was the lack of awareness about the discontinuation of DTH services in areas where cable networks are already established. Residents expressed that they were not adequately informed about the regulation, and many were unaware of the benefits of switching to cable services, such as enhanced local content, better picture quality, and more reliable customer service.
- In several areas, households using DTH were found to be operating both cable and DTH systems simultaneously, indicating a partial transition. In such cases, residents often cited specific channel preferences or a desire for better international programming as reasons for continuing DTH use.
- Additionally, some households reported that they switched to DTH due to dissatisfaction with cable services in the past (analog system). Poor service quality, frequent outages, and inadequate customer support had driven them to DTH systems. However, after being informed about the improvements made to digitized cable systems, many residents expressed interest in transitioning back to cable, provided the service quality is significantly better than before.



Figure 6: DTH user in Sarpang Dzongkhag

Observations and Findings

- The team observed that people switched to DTH mainly due to non-payment of monthly subscription fee as it is free and they can avail various channels.
- There is a mixed level of compliance with the directive to phase out DTH services in favor of digitized cable systems. While some areas show a strong willingness to switch to cable services, others still exhibit significant use of DTH due to various reasons.
- People are not aware of Analog and Digitalised CATV systems and generalize this as the same.
- In most areas visited, the cable infrastructure is well-established and capable of accommodating new subscribers. However, the perceived quality and range of services provided by cable operators need to be enhanced to compete with the perceived benefits of DTH.
- There are gaps in the cable service offerings that contribute to the continued use of DTH. For example, the absence of certain channels and features has been a significant factor in peoples' decision to retain DTH.
- There is a general lack of awareness among residents about how to lodge complaints or address service issues with cable providers.
- Paid DTH and Free DTH are available in the areas where cable has been reached. DTH that are used by the people are TataSky, Videocon, Free Dish Solid, Tata Play, Reliance, and Lungta.

2.4 Monitoring visit at Punakha Dzongkhag

2.4.1 Buddha Cable Service, Khuruthang, Punakha.

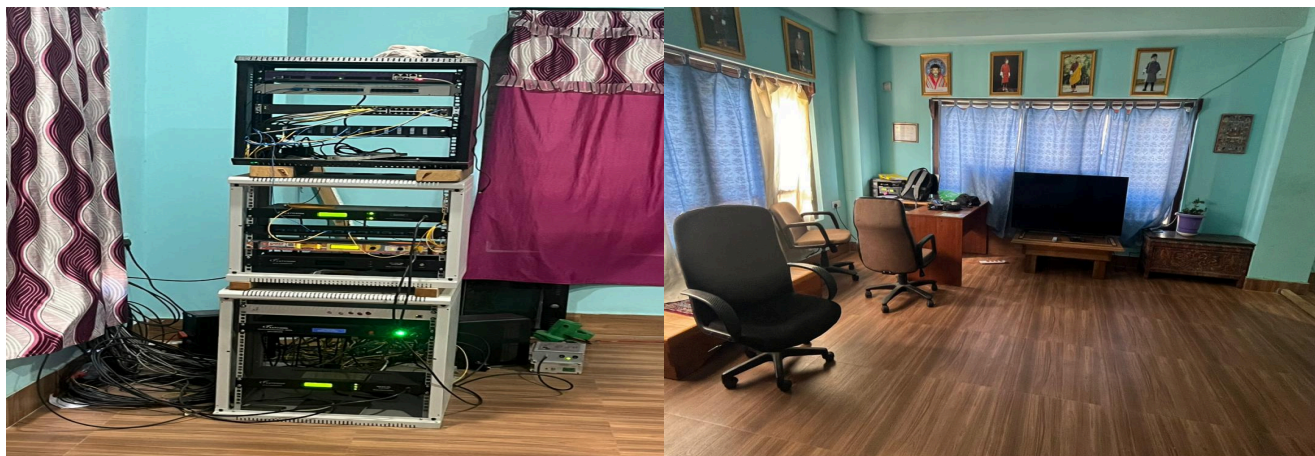


Figure 7: Control Room and Office of Buddha Cable Service.

- Upon visiting the Control room of Buddha Cable Service located at Khuruthang Town in Punakha, it was found that the analog station was fully removed and the signal was provided in fully digital with signal feed from NetCom MSO.

2.4.2 Guma Gewog, Punakha Dzongkhag



Figure 8: Complaint lodge area.

Service at resident of the complainer.



Figure 9: Service Line and nodes.

- The team visited the site where the complaint was lodged and found that the cable operator has provided his services to the area for a week long ago but yet no one has availed his cable service.
- We tried to contact the house owner (complainer) but could not meet him as he was on tour with guests.
- Upon inquiry with his few tenants, some are even not interested to avail the cable services and others are planning to get connection soon.

2.5 Control room location of New CATV Service at Daga Gewog, Wangdue Dzongkhag.



Figure 10: Control room of new Cable set-up.

Observations and Recommendations

1. The team observed that the land used for the construction of the control room was on lease from the government and further the land has been again leased to other parties by the cable owner.
2. When the officials from BICMA inquiry with the resident nearby we learned that the construction of the Control room house was kept on hold by the dzongkhag engineer sector as the quality of the walls are not good. Currently there is small hut build for the use of control room but we couldn't see inside it as it has been lockup and the owner of the cable is at Thimphu. The owner of the cable said that he will instruct somebody to open the room for our visit but that person didn't turn up saying he is somewhere busy with his work.
3. The nearby resident said that they are willing to connect with the cable line if the cable owner is able to connect the line in their area. The resident also mentioned that the cable owner is not a trustworthy person as he keeps on telling lie and there are also so many incident where he informed public that he will provide bus service and open a restaurant but he failed to do.

4. While connecting with the cable owner through a phone call we learned that there is no established equipment(Cable television system) in the control room which is required as per the CATV rules and regulation 2019.The cable operator even requested us to issue the license so that he can avail loan on the name of cable license and do the necessary setup in control room.
5. The officials through our observation learned that the cable owner isn't in the position to establish a control room in Daga gewog as despite giving the time extension he failed to set up or establish the control room and we recommend canceling his in principle license and giving the area to other interested cable operators.

3. Complaints received with and compiled by the Authority

In the event of any issues/complaints related to the cable television services, the Authority has made many platforms available for the subscribers to lodge the complaints with the Authority. The complainant can contact the Authority through our focal officers appointed for the service, the details for which have been mentioned in the website (www.bicma.gov.bt) and social media (Facebook) page (www.facebook.com/bicmabhutan). We also have an online complaint platform on our website under the services/complaints section through which anyone can lodge the complaints. They can also write an email to bicma@bicma.bt

In order to enhance the customer grievance redressal mechanism, the officials from the Authority also scan the social media pages on a daily basis to see if there are any complaints and issues related to the cable television services provided by the Service providers. As mentioned above, the Authority has made many platforms available from where the subscriber of cable television as well as our licensee such as local cable operators and multi-service operators can lodge the complaints with the Authority. The complaints received are well resolved and documented. The BICMA also receives the customer complaints through emails and formal letters from the public and Gewogs administrations. Particularly for the cable operators to share their challenges, issues and to submit the complaints with the Authority to take up the appropriate action, the Authority has formed the cable operators' group in social media platform "Telegram".

For the last three months (January- March,2024) the complaints received by the Authority are:

Monthly Complaint Report

July, 2024.

Sl. No.	Cable TV Operator	Date of Complaint	Complaint Resolved date	Area/Location	Name of Complainant	Contact Number/Particulars	Issue/ Description	Remarks
1	Nakchung Cable	29/06/2024	03/07/2024	Namseling		17624719	New line connection	Resolved
2	Tshering Norbu Cable	10/07/2024	12/07/2024	Trashigang Town	Tshering Dorji	77828542	STB Issue	Resolved
3	DrukCom	16/07/2024	17/07/2024	Genekha	Norchen Tshering	17315052	Line issue	Resolved
4	Tshering Norbu Cable	23/07/2024	24/07/2024	Ranjung	Kinley Phuntsho	17344162	Line Issue	Resolved
5	DrukCom	25/07/2024	26/07/2024	Depsi	Karma Namgay	17633220	Line issue	Resolved

Monthly Complaint Report

August, 2024.

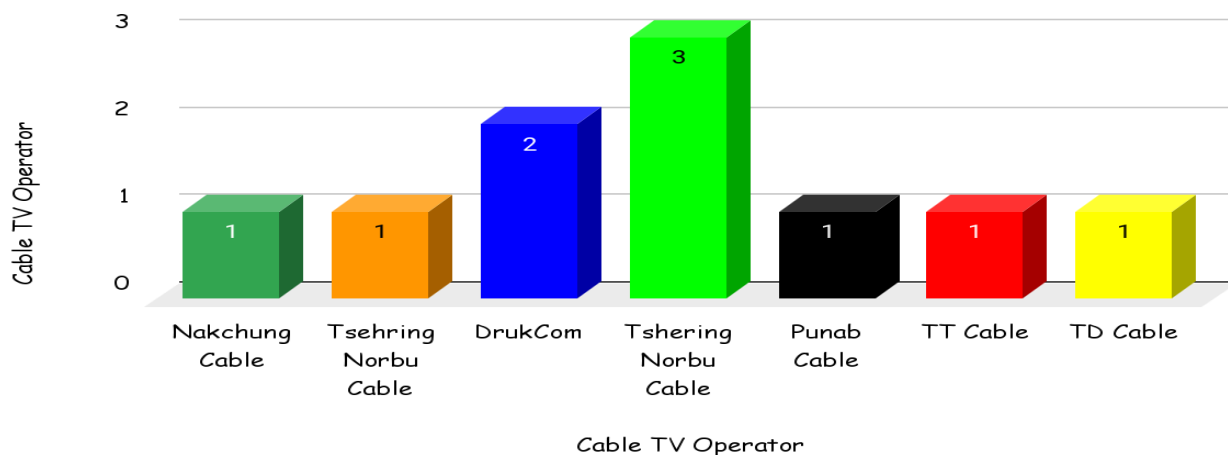
Sl. No.	Cable TV Operator	Date of Complaint	Complaint Resolved date	Area/Location	Name of Complainant	Contact Number/Particulars	Issue/ Description	Remarks
1	Tshering Norbu Cable	08/08/2024	12/08/2024	Phongmey	Cheki Wangmo	17751118	Line issue	Resolved
2	Punakha Dzongkhag	19/08/2024	26/08/2024	Guma Gewog	Pema Namgyel	17617166	New TV Line	Resolved

Monthly Complaint Report

September, 2024

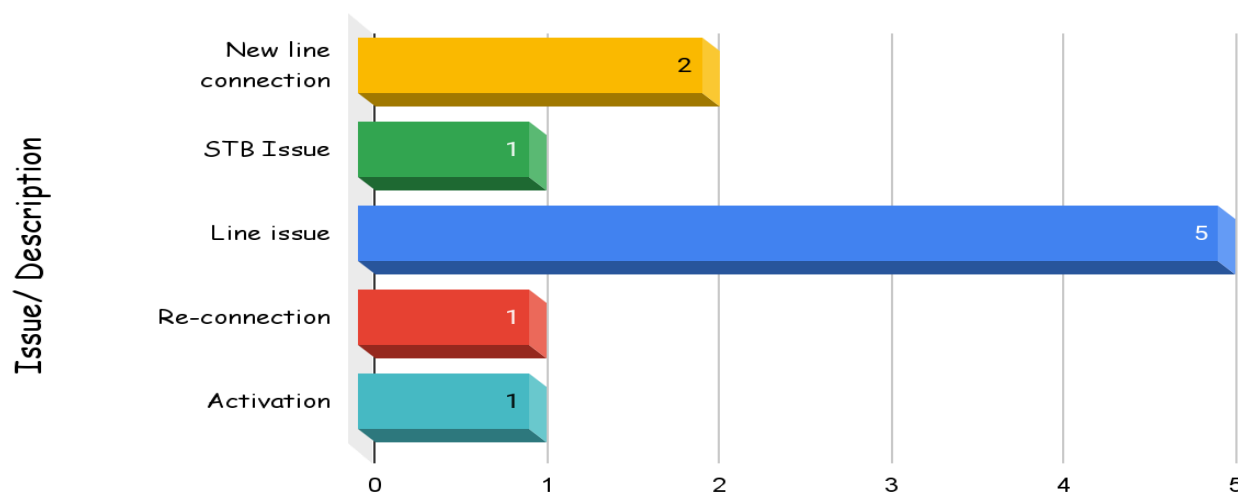
Sl. No.	Cable TV Operator	Date of Complaint	Complaint Resolved date	Area/Location	Name of Complainant	Contact Number/Particulars	Issue/ Description	Remarks
1	TT Cable	16/09/2024	16/09/2024	Wangdue, Gaselo	Wangchuk	17610413	Line issue	Resolved
2	TD Cable	26/09/2024	27/09/2024	Bumthang	Karma Wangchuk	177706333	Re-connection	Resolved
3	Tshering Norbu CATV	30/09/2024	30/09/2024	Tashigang	Chophel	17923335	Activation	Resolved

Complaint against Cable TV Operator



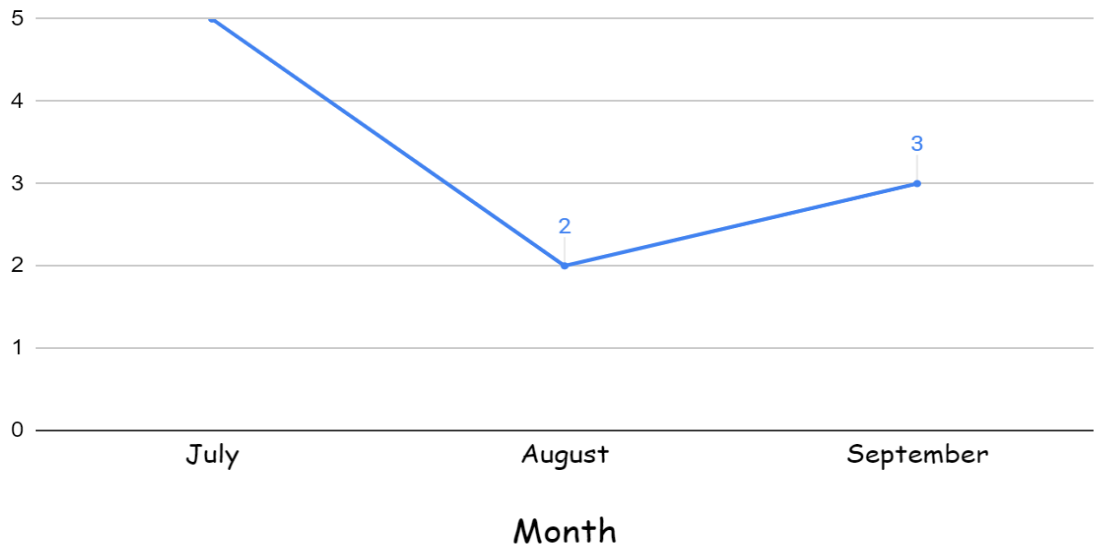
- As per the data recorded from July 1st - September 30th, 2024, the highest complaint was against Tshering Norbu Cable Service (3) complaints, followed by Drukcom (2) and Nakchung Cable, Tshering Norbu Cable, Punjab Cable, TT Cable and TD Cable with (1) complaint each. Out of 10 complaints received, 3 were from Thimphu Thromde/Dzongkhag and 7 from different dzongkhags.

Subject of Complaint



- On the subject of the complaint, (5) were on Cable Line Issue, (2) on New Line Connection, (1) on STB issue, and (1) each on re-connection and activation.

Month of Complaint



- The highest number of complaints received was in the month July (5) followed by (2) in August and (3) in September 2024.

4. Key activities carried out by the Authority

1. The InfoComm and Infrastructure Division conducted several field visits to various Dzongkhags and Gewogs to monitor and verify the status of cable television services. These visits aimed to ensure compliance with BICMA's directives, follow up on the digitization process, proper cable layout, and address issues related to the illegal distribution of Dish TV/DTH/Ku-band dishes.
2. The Authority received various complaints regarding cable television services, and the team resolved these complaints through field visits, direct communication with cable operators, and random inspections.
3. During the field visits, the team met with local cable operators (LCOs) and their technical teams to discuss the status of CATV digitization. These discussions focused on advocating for policy compliance, understanding technical challenges, and identifying ways to enhance service delivery.
4. For this quarter, the division took the monitoring tour in Samtse, Chukha, Gelephu and Sarpang, Wangdue Phodrang, and Punakha Dzongkhag.

5. Findings

1. In the 1st phase of DTH use monitoring , people expressed willingness to switch back to CATV from DTH, especially after being informed about improvements in service and transition of analog to digitization. In areas with access to local cable services, the use of illegal DTH services was prevalent due to previous service quality issues and delays in fiber layout.
2. In Phuentsholing Town, some Indian nationals residing in Bhutan and Bhutanese citizens were found using unauthorized DTH services. These cases were addressed by advising users to discontinue DTH and shift to CATV. Also in Samtse, Gelephu and Sarpang Dzongkhag there exists a DTH user.
3. During the monitoring tour, a number of households were found with inactive DTH units, which had been left unused. Residents were instructed to have these units removed to comply with the Authority's directives.
4. The new CATV control room set-up at Daga Gewog, Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag is not in a position to establish a control room and provide service and the Authority have decided to cancel his in-principle license.

6. Way forward

1. The complaints lodged with the Authority will be properly recorded and resolved.
2. Compile and publish the quarterly report for the cable television services to facilitate Authority in taking proper regulatory measures for improving the quality of cable television services
3. The Authority will take up the monitoring, verification and inspections on a regular basis to other Dzongkhags.