

Major Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This final chapter summarizes the most significant findings concerning the status of ICT in parliaments based upon the 2009 survey, draws conclusions about the overall status of e-parliament at the global level, and provides insights into the impact of e-parliament developments on legislators. It also makes recommendations for how parliaments, individually and collectively, and the international community can work together within a common framework to advance the use of ICT in parliamentary settings to strengthen democracy.

HOW PARLIAMENTS ARE DOING: MAJOR FINDINGS

The survey results offer an extensive view of the major areas of ICT implementation, including communicating with the public; standards for transparency and accessibility, especially for parliamentary websites; oversight and management of ICT; systems and standards for parliamentary documents; libraries and research services; and, infrastructure, services, applications and training. The following sections provide a summary of the key findings in each of these specific areas.

Communicating with the public

Members and committees use of e-mail and websites

- 78% of parliaments reported that most or some members use e-mail to communicate with citizens, an increase over the findings from 2007.
- 88% reported that most or some of the members reply to these messages, suggesting that the responsiveness of members to e-mail has also increased in the last two years.
- 55% of parliaments reported that most or some committees use e-mail, again more than in 2007.
- However, only 21% of parliaments have a system to help manage e-mail.
- 51% of parliaments reported that most or some members have personal websites; of these, 75% said that one of the functions of personal websites was to seek comments and opinions from the public.
- However, only a third of parliaments reported that most or some committees have websites, and just over half (52%) of these said that the purpose was to seek comments and opinions from the public.

Other communication methods used or being planned

- Besides e-mail and websites, the method implemented by the largest proportion of parliaments (43%) for communication is webcasting of plenary sessions.

- The next most popular methods utilize audio or video technology (TV programmes, parliamentary TV channels and radio programmes).
- Of the ten least widely used methods (10% - 16%), seven are interactive and include some of the newest technologies, such as Twitter and YouTube.
- It is likely that audio- and video-based one-way technologies will be predominant for the next few years.
- However, of the technologies that have the largest projected growth among parliaments, the top five are all interactive (online discussions, online polls, e-petitions, e-consultations on issues and e-consultations on bills).

Challenges cited by parliaments

- When asked about the challenges encountered in using technologies to communicate with citizens, the issue mentioned by the largest percentage of legislatures (37%) was the lack of familiarity of members with technology.
- Many parliaments also reported that citizens were not familiar with technology (21%) nor had access to it (20%).
- The challenge for citizens cited by the largest percentage of parliaments is that they are not familiar with the legislative process (32%).

Communicating with young people

- Over 70% of parliaments reported that they have initiatives underway to communicate with young people or are planning them. Most use web technology for this purpose, combined in many cases with some form of new interactive technology, such as games, blogs and social media.

Impact on communication with citizens

- 85% of parliaments reported an increase in communication with citizens using ICT-supported methods.

Standards for transparency and accessibility

General information about parliaments and members

- Only one-third of the items in the general information category were found on the websites of most parliaments. This is the most basic and most static information about the legislature, and it is the minimal starting point for accountability.

Documents and information about the core work: legislation and oversight in committees and plenary

- Fully one third of parliamentary websites do not provide the text and status of proposed legislation.
- 81% of parliaments do provide documentation about plenary activities.
- Significantly less than 50% provide information about committee activities and about their oversight and budget review work.
- Completeness is still lacking, as measured by the number of relevant items linked to proposed legislation: only half of all parliaments link bills to at least five of the 18 most relevant information items and documents identified in the survey.
- Only 36% said they provide explanatory material about proposed legislation and procedural steps always or most of the time and 48% said rarely or never.

Tools for finding and viewing information

- 81% of parliaments reported that they have a search engine with at least one of five important features.
- Fewer than 50% reported that they had the capacity to broadcast or webcast live meetings of any parliamentary body, event or programme, although over 30% are planning or considering this capability.
- Only 32% have an archive that permits on-demand viewing of webcasts.
- Less than half offer alerting services for at least one type of document or activity.

Usability and accessibility

- Only 45% have implemented standards that ensure access to websites by persons with disabilities.

Vision, strategic planning, and effective management

- Only 41% of parliaments reported that political leaders at the level of the President/Speaker were highly engaged in envisioning e-parliament, and almost one-quarter reported that they were engaged very little or not at all.
- Only 43% of parliaments have a written vision statement.
- Over 40% do not have a strategic plan for ICT that is regularly updated.
- However, over 60% of parliaments have established a special committee or group to provide oversight and direction for ICT.
- The Secretary General and the Director of ICT establish goals and objectives in 68% and 60% of parliaments respectively.

Systems and standards for parliamentary documents

- There was only a minor increase from 43% to 46% of parliaments that have systems for managing proposed legislation.
- However, over 70% indicated that they have systems for managing plenary speeches.
- Over half of all parliaments reported having systems for at least five types of committee and plenary documents (minutes, hearings, reports, speeches and debates, and votes).
- Overall, only 25% of all parliaments use XML for any document.

Library and research services

- Most parliamentary libraries have basic ICT-supported capabilities such as systems for managing library resources.
- However, over 40% are not connected to a parliamentary intranet, even though Local Area Networks (LANs) are in place in nearly all legislatures. This limits their ability to provide members and committees with digital information services.
- Only half of parliamentary libraries are able to deliver online topical information related to policies considered by the parliament.
- Just over half subscribe to online journals and databases.
- 60% have subject matter experts, much of whose work is made available in digital formats.
- Over 50% are taking an active role in maintaining an archive of parliamentary documents in digital formats.
- An important percentage (although less than half) of libraries also contribute to the website of the parliament, most often by providing some of its content, but also by updating and maintaining the website, and by being involved in the organization, testing, and design of the site.

Building a responsive and robust technical infrastructure

Basic technical services

- 80% of parliaments provide members with either a desktop or a laptop computer; 48% are able to supply both.
- 97% of parliaments have Internet access, but not all of them provide Internet access to each member for their own use.
- 96% of parliaments have Local Area Networks (LANs); however, only 72% state that all members and committees are connected.
- The number of parliaments reporting that they lack reliable electrical power increased from 6% to 10%.

Support for parliamentary functions

- Many parliaments provide ICT support for recording plenary activities, including speeches and debates (72%), calendars and schedules (66%), minutes (66%), and voting (60%).
- However, in many parliaments the calendars and schedules for plenary sessions would ideally be made available earlier than is currently the case.
- Application support for legislative work is less prevalent; of five legislative activities included in the survey, only two - a database of laws passed by parliament and a system for tracking bill status - are supported by at least 50% of parliaments
- Support for functions directly related to budget, oversight, and communication is lagging even further behind.

Training

- 84% of parliaments provide training, through either internal or outside sources, for in-house ICT staff, a substantial increase over 2007.
- A large percentage of parliaments are also providing ICT training or orientation courses for members (61%) or plan to do so (26%).
- Even more already provide training to non-ICT staff (71%).

The state of e-parliament in 2010

The *World e-Parliament Report 2010* assessed the state of e-parliament in the world's legislatures based on the responses received from parliaments and on a statistical methodology that assigns a numeric score to each of the six areas included in the 2009 survey. The e-parliament elements included in the methodology reflect the most important aspects identified by parliamentary leaders, members, staff and experts in presentations at the three World e-Parliament Conferences in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The total scores measuring ICT use in individual parliaments range from a minimum of 13.5% to a maximum of 82.7%. Of all parliaments participating in the survey, 20% achieved a total score represented by at least two thirds of the maximum possible score (66 over 100), and consistently reached upper or high scores in all six areas. This group represents the most advanced users of ICT.

These parliaments are more likely to possess a combination of elements that satisfy the various technology needs of a legislature. These include:

- a sound management organization;
- a solid yet flexible infrastructure and systems for managing all parliamentary documents;
- library and research services well supported by technology and applications;
- a website offering a great deal of timely and complete information with multiple channels to access it; and,

- a variety of methods for engaging with citizens through traditional communication means as well as new and more interactive media.

Those at the lowest level of adoption have limited ICT capabilities for supporting their legislatures. They tend to lack:

- an appropriate management structure;
- an adequate infrastructure (some do not have reliable electrical power);
- systems for managing documents; and,
- capabilities for using ICT-supported methods to communicate with citizens.

They also have very weak libraries and websites with the least amount of information, and in a few cases no websites at all.

Those in the middle vary in their strengths and weaknesses. While they may have good scores in one or two domains, they usually do not achieve a high level of adoption in most areas. This confirms a continued unevenness in ICT adoption and implementation among a large group of parliaments, similar to what was first observed in the *World e-Parliament Report 2008*.

The results contained in both Reports indicate that the income level of a country often has a direct relationship to the level of adoption of ICT in parliament. One promising finding is that legislatures in Latin America achieve a total score that is above the average total score for all parliaments and above the mean score of the upper middle income group, suggesting an encouraging path of e-parliament development in the region. African parliaments are among those most affected in their ICT deployment by the lack of resources. To make progress in the next years, they will likely need various forms of assistance – such as skills development, knowledge transfer, and financial support.

The impact on members of parliaments

The Report presents some of the findings from the perspective of legislators to show the impact of technology on the ability of members to perform their daily work.

Of the 27,249 parliamentarians represented in the legislatures that responded to the survey:

Infrastructure and managerial barriers

- 3,817 (14%) cannot count on reliable electrical power in the parliament.
- 5,365 (20%) do not have a personal desktop or laptop computer at their disposal.
- 8,508 (31%) are not offered any type of ICT training or orientation programmes by their parliament.
- 9,997 (37%) work in legislatures that have not yet devised a strategic plan for ICT.

Barriers to information gathering

- 4,301 (16%) do not have personal access to Internet in the parliament.
- 8,530 (31%) are not provided with personal access to the parliament's intranet.
- 12,038 (44%) do not have access to a library website that organizes information on issues of concern to members.

Barriers to access of key parliamentary documents

- 7,726 (28%) cannot access the text and current status of proposed legislation on their parliament's websites.

- 8,019 (29%) cannot access plenary calendars and schedules on-line, either through an intranet or the Internet.
- 8,373 (31%) cannot access a database with the laws passed by the parliament.

Barriers to communication

- 5,149 (19%) are not yet provided with personal e-mail accounts by their parliament.
- 12,840 (47%) serve in parliaments that have not implemented accessibility standards for persons with disabilities on their websites, disallowing these citizens from following members' and parliament's work.
- 22,505 (83%) are in parliaments that do not provide a system for managing and supporting the answering of incoming e-mail.

Cooperation and collaboration at the international level

The 2010 Report highlights the value of inter-parliamentary cooperation as one of the least expensive and potentially most effective ways for legislatures to enhance their use of technology. It also emphasizes cooperation at the regional level, which, despite language and communication barriers, offers unique opportunities to share resources, overcome lack of know-how and establish common approaches. The progress made in establishing regional networks in Africa, Asia and Latin America, coupled with the activities of those already in existence at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, are concrete signs of this positive cooperation.

Survey findings indicate the following key points about collaboration:

- Slightly more than one fourth (28%) of parliaments provide support to other legislatures for developing their use of ICT.
- 46% reported that they were receiving or seeking assistance in ICT from other parliaments and from outside organizations that are instrumental in helping legislatures to strengthen their capacities in ICT.
- There is ongoing and possibly increasing south-south inter-parliamentary cooperation, and even south-north exchanges and a willingness to provide ICT support among parliaments from all income groups, including from countries with lower income levels.
- 35% of parliaments from high income countries currently provide support to other parliaments, and 17% are planning or considering following their example. Regrettably, the ICT expertise of 48% of legislatures from high income countries is not yet being made available to other parliaments.
- The number of legislatures receiving support is largest in the low income countries (80%), indicating that the combined efforts of the donor and parliamentary communities are directed to those most in need.
- The largest gaps between the percentage of parliaments that provide (or are willing to provide) certain types of assistance and the percentage of parliaments that receive (or would like to receive) that type of assistance are in document standards (34%), library and research services (29%), document management systems (26%), and communication with citizens (26%).
- The smallest gaps, and therefore the areas that currently offer the most opportunities for collaboration among parliaments, are: ICT services for plenary; parliamentary websites; ICT services for members; hardware and software; ICT planning; and ICT management.

To address the challenges of implementing technology, especially for parliaments in developing countries, and to leverage the willingness expressed by many to provide assistance in this effort, the Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament has articulated a forward-looking

e-Parliament Framework 2010 – 2020 centred on a set of strategic goals. These goals provide guiding principles to the various multilateral and global efforts that could facilitate more effective coordination and collaboration in strengthening parliaments through ICT. The Framework also establishes specific benchmarks for assessing progress.

The e-Parliament Framework 2010 - 2020 addresses five key areas that are targeted for specific action over the next ten years. They include:

- Development of Information Society policies that advance equity and inclusiveness
- Enhancing the link between parliaments and citizens
- Ensuring access by all to a country's laws and legislation and the legislative process
- Implementing ICT to support fundamental parliamentary functions
- Establishing sustained and coordinated technical assistance programmes.

The e-Parliament Framework 2010 - 2020 places particular emphasis on greater coherence and harmonization among parliamentary assistance initiatives to reduce duplication and enable a more effective and sustainable approach to helping emerging democracies and legislatures in low income countries make progress toward e-parliament.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

This Report proposes a number of recommendations to advance the state of e-parliament in all countries. They are organized into the following areas: a) policies; b) planning and management; c) communication; d) transparency and accountability; e) technical infrastructure; f) regional and global cooperation. Some of these recommendations relate to parliaments at the national level. Others, which involve national parliaments and the international community together, need to be addressed at the regional and global level.

Policies

- Promote the establishment and implementation of national ICT policies, as well as a national consultative process, which can lead to the creation of an open and inclusive society, help narrow the digital divide, and guide parliament in its own use of technology.
- Ensure that citizens have access to all laws passed by parliament and the ability to follow the law-making process, including having access to the full text and status of all proposed legislation.
 - Develop a strategy to create, in conjunction with the executive and judicial branches, national databases containing all of a country's laws in force updated on a timely basis and accessible to all citizens.
- Foster the active engagement of the leaders and members of parliament in establishing a vision for e-parliament and providing oversight of its implementation.
 - Involve members and committees as well citizens and stakeholders from civil society organizations in formulating the vision;
 - Anchor the vision in the values that embody the contribution of parliament to democracy – representation, transparency, accessibility, accountability and effectiveness.

Planning and management

- Involve members and staff in proposing ideas for the use of technology in the work of the parliament and providing support for its implementation.
- Based on the vision for e-parliament, develop a strategic plan that leads to specific projects, schedules, and the allocation of resources, both human and financial, from internal and external sources.
 - Establish criteria for evaluating the success of the plan.
 - Review and update the plan regularly.
- Orient all members to the possibilities and uses of ICT by offering appropriate training and information programmes.
- Orient ICT staff to the nature of legislative bodies and provide them with the most appropriate and current technical training.

Communication

- Explore and evaluate the use of interactive technology tools to connect parliaments with citizens and to offer them the means to express their opinions.
- Foster the employment of all tools judged to be useful and effective in the parliamentary environment, including new media and mobile technologies, to provide citizens with improved access to the work of parliament and increased means of participation in the political dialogue.
- Enable all members and their constituents to communicate by e-mail, as well as other interactive technologies, when feasible.
 - Provide members with systems for managing e-mail so that they can be better informed about the views of their constituents and more responsive to their concerns.

Transparency and accountability

- Promote the development of websites that convey the work of the parliament in ways that are accurate, timely, and complete. Follow the IPU's *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites* to meet international standards for:
 - General information about parliament;
 - Documents and information concerning legislation, oversight, and the budget, as well as the activities of members, committees and the plenary;
 - Tools available to users for finding and viewing information;
 - Best practices for usability and standards to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to parliamentary websites.

Technical infrastructure and information support

- Promote the development and maintenance of adequate technical infrastructures and systems in all parliaments to support their legislative, oversight, and representational work by providing:
 - All members with a personal computer, LAN connection, and access to the Internet;
 - A document management system capable of preparing and managing all parliamentary documentation;
 - Use of XML as the document standard;
 - Mobile access for all members;
 - Automated systems for managing library resources;
 - Development of digital services for members and committees based on greater access to technology and technical support;

- Access to relevant electronic resources, also through cooperative agreements with other libraries;
- Information and research services supported by ICT and linked to the legislative and policy issues that confront the parliament.

Regional and global cooperation

- Foster the regular exchange of information, experiences, and practices among parliaments at the regional and global level.
- Support staff to travel to regional and global network meetings as part of their training.
- Support the collaborative development of systems, applications and solutions particularly to leverage limited funding.
- Extend support to newly established networks, and to the processes for their creation in regions where there are none.
- When possible, establish clear links among global associations and regional networks.
- Encourage parliaments with advanced technological infrastructures and expert knowledge to support parliaments in developing countries by lending staff expertise and by providing material assistance.
- Work to ensure that ICT-related contributions from parliaments and from the international community of donors are closely integrated.
- Ensure that externally supported programmes that include the enhancement of ICT as part of their objectives are integrated with the overall technology plans of the parliament.
- Establish and maintain an online facility to map assistance for ICT in parliaments around the world with a view to share solutions and knowledge.
- Encourage dialogue among legislators for addressing Information Society-related issues and the sharing of experiences and legislative practices at the international level.
- Adopt the e-Parliament Framework 2010 - 2020 and the goals and benchmarks it provides to make it possible to advance globally and to evaluate how well the world of parliaments and the international community are doing in attaining these goals.
- Establish a consultative mechanism to coordinate assistance to parliaments in the area of ICT within the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) implementation process.
- Support the work of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament to act as a hub for information, research, documentation and networking, as well as to provide assistance and generate partnerships with donors and advanced legislatures. Through the Centre, encourage the exchange of lessons learned and good practices among programmes of support to parliament.

CONCLUSIONS

As discussed throughout this Report, ICT enables parliaments to strengthen their capacity for effective law making, oversight, and representation. A document management system for proposed legislation provides members with timely access to bills and amendments while they are still being drafted. Library and research services that use technology to find and present information dealing with pressing policy issues being considered by the parliament assist members and committees conduct oversight of government programs more effectively. And a system for receiving and categorizing e-mail from constituents helps members keep abreast of the opinions and concerns of those they represent.

Technology enables parliaments to realize the values of transparency, accessibility, and accountability. A website with the most current reports of committee actions and plenary debates ensures a more open institution. Interactive communication tools that enable citizens and civil society organizations to engage with the legislature, through multiple channels, foster greater access for all segments of society, regardless of their physical location or their economic status. Publishing the speeches and votes of members advances the state of accountability, as does the availability of information about the prerogatives, salaries and expenses of leaders, members, and staff.

It is arguable, in fact, that in the age of the Information Society, the ability of parliaments to fulfil their responsibilities as representatives of the people and to attain the highest levels of openness requires the effective and creative application of information and communication technologies in their daily work. It can be further argued that to achieve these goals, parliaments have to be able to share experiences, knowledge, and ideas with each other in regional and international settings in a collaborative global environment.

Reaching the highest levels of e-parliament allows legislatures to operate at a level of competence and efficiency that is the hallmark of successful organizations and institutions. Parliaments that attain these levels are able to conduct their work in the most effective manner and, at the same time, be transparent and accessible to the public. This is part of the unique nature of legislative bodies. They must be engaged with the citizens they represent, open to a variety of views and opinions, able to negotiate and compromise, and fully accountable for their decisions and actions. While doing all of this, they must also be efficient and fully transparent in their use of public resources. Achieving these diverse and sometimes conflicting goals depends increasingly on the appropriate use of technology. As the findings have repeatedly documented, this requires both intellectual and financial resources. As the Report also notes, many of those that have greater resources are working at a level that is substantially higher than their peers.

The positive interpretation of these findings is that those at the highest level of e-parliament are breaking new ground and setting new standards of excellence, and that sharing this knowledge could benefit all parliaments.

There is another interpretation, however, based on a concern that the technology gap among parliaments is growing wider and that the rapid pace of change in the Information Society is causing many parliaments to lag further behind in their ability to adopt and utilize appropriate technologies. This increasingly limits their capacity to meet their most important responsibilities as the primary representative of the citizens of the country; it constrains their ability to be transparent and accessible; and it affects their capacity to ensure an open and inclusive Information Society.

The oldest national parliament was founded over 1,000 years ago; some legislatures can trace their origins back several centuries. A number of today's legislatures that are relatively new were established within the last 50 years. It has been only in the last two to three decades, however, that modern information and communication technologies have had a significant impact on public institutions. While the vast majority of parliaments has been in existence longer than today's technologies and have exercised their responsibilities without it, there is the possibility that those that today do not adapt to the changes being brought about by the Information Society will not thrive. They will, in fact, be at risk of losing their perceived relevance and therefore their perceived legitimacy. While this may not represent a "crisis" as some might argue, it will undoubtedly result in some parliaments becoming less significant and less important in the future. And, without an

effective and capable legislature the ability of a country to maintain a healthy democracy will be weakened.

Modern parliaments must work and communicate in ways that are congruent with the ways in which their citizens work and communicate. This means that they cannot be too far ahead or behind their citizens in their use of technology. For countries that are currently less advanced in their use of ICT, however, this does not mean that the parliament should hold back in its implementation of technology. Rather it should demonstrate leadership by using ICT tools to reach out to their citizens in ways not previously possible and that are consistent with the history and political culture of the society.

The seeds of the solutions to these challenges can be found in the findings from the 2009 survey, the contributions of parliamentary leaders and experts at the World e-Parliament Conferences, and the insights of the Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. The survey has confirmed that some parliaments are technically well advanced and the areas of greatest need among those that are less so. It has also confirmed that many parliaments, especially in developing countries, and even a majority of those that are further ahead economically, welcome help from other parliaments to improve the state of their technology. Together these findings confirm the potential value of an international effort that builds upon and extends the inter-connectedness of parliaments through existing regional and international networks. In areas where such associations do not exist, their establishment must be encouraged and sustained. In areas where they do exist, there needs to be a strong focus on mutual assistance and the exchange of ideas.

Thus, the needs are well documented and the expertise to address them is known to exist in legislatures that have achieved high e-parliament levels. The challenge is to establish and carry out a programme for matching the two. The strategic goals proposed by the Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and the means for attaining them are especially relevant to this task. The e-Parliament Framework 2010 - 2020 presented in this Report is based on the accumulated experience and knowledge of parliaments that have successfully adopted ICT, and on donor initiatives that integrate technology closely into their efforts to improve law making, oversight, and representation. The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament serves legislatures as a critical vehicle for bringing together the world of parliaments and the international system to tackle these challenges. Continued support for its work, in concert with the parliamentary and donor communities, will be instrumental for ensuring that collaborative approaches for elevating the ICT capabilities of all parliaments are achieved.

The national constitution establishes the authority of a legislature. Its capacity to exercise that authority, however, depends on how well it is able to carry out its legislative, oversight, and representational responsibilities. ICT are one of the critical means that enables legislatures to do this effectively. As the use of new communication technologies continues to spread throughout society, parliaments have a real opportunity to exploit them to establish a stronger linkage between citizens and their representatives. The assumption is that if citizens feel connected, they will be more engaged and the parliament will be perceived as being more relevant and more legitimate. This offers the potential for reversing negative perceptions of political institutions, including legislative bodies.