

Executive summary

THE CHALLENGES FACING PARLIAMENTS

The advent of information and communication technologies (ICT) is altering the economic, social, and political landscape around the world. Statistics on the spread of Internet connectivity and mobile technologies provide ample evidence of the pervasive growth of the Information Society. Its dynamic expansion and continuous evolution have important consequences for public institutions, politicians and government officials, civil society organizations and ordinary citizens, in both developed and developing countries.

Parliaments today find themselves at a crossroads. The rapid growth of ICT is changing the environment within which they operate and influencing how they are perceived by the citizenry. Rather than being mere witnesses to these transformative effects, parliaments are exploring ways to use technology to strengthen democracy and encourage political participation.

A persistent theme expressed by legislatures at the World e-Parliament Conferences is that the values of democracy should guide the policies and plans for implementing ICT in the legislative environment. This approach coincides with the Inter-Parliamentary Union's broad framework that has identified the basic values and the key characteristics of a democratic parliament: one that is representative, transparent, accessible, accountable, and effective.

The *World e-Parliament Report 2010* assists parliamentary leaders, members, and staff in responding to these challenges and exploiting the considerable benefits of ICT in the legislative context. It follows the groundbreaking work of the 2008 edition in documenting the efforts of parliaments to employ modern technologies to strengthen their institutional role. It guides readers through the unique environment of parliaments and technology, and while providing evidence of the complexities of e-parliament, it suggests ways to overcome some of the challenges posed by ICT.

The Report presents the latest data on the use and availability of systems, applications, hardware, and other tools in parliaments around the world, based on the global survey conducted by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament in 2009. A questionnaire was sent to 264 chambers of unicameral and bicameral parliaments in 188 countries and to two regional parliaments. 134 responses were received, marking a significant increase from the 105 responses received in 2007. They include national legislative bodies from 109 countries, one regional legislature from Europe and one regional body from Africa. Taken together, the national legislative bodies participating in the survey represent a membership of almost 27,250 legislators (61%) of the world total of nearly 44,800 members of national parliaments.

The Report highlights two critical issues - communication with citizens and the demand for transparency. It also proposes a methodology for assessing ICT in legislatures and provides a detailed description of the status of e-parliament world-wide. It concludes with an analysis of inter-parliamentary cooperation and proposes to the parliamentary and donor communities a shared framework for e-parliament based on strategic goals that serve democracy, good governance, and the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals.

HOW PARLIAMENTS ARE DOING: MAJOR FINDINGS

Findings regarding how parliaments are doing in communicating with the public suggest there has been some improvement since 2007 and that a greater number of parliaments and members are trying to use these technologies more effectively to engage with citizens. 85% of parliaments reported an increase in communication from citizens using ICT-supported methods. It is likely that audio- and video-based unidirectional methods will be predominant for the next few years. Webcasting, for example, is one of those most frequently used, and it is projected to increase over the next several years. However, the top five methods that are predicted to have the highest growth rates are all interactive (online discussions, online polls, e-petitions, e-consultations on issues and e-consultations on bills). The challenges in using ICT for communication with citizens cited by the largest percentage of parliaments are that members are not familiar with the technology and citizens are not familiar with the legislative process.

Websites have become the primary means by which parliaments make their work known to citizens and by which they can progress towards the goals of transparency and accountability. The extent of documentation on a parliamentary website, along with how complete, timely, and clear it is, provides one of the primary means for judging the level of openness of a parliament. However, while nearly every parliament now has a website, many of these do not yet meet some of the most important recommendations of the IPU *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*. For example, fully one third of parliamentary websites do not provide the text and status of proposed legislation and only 45% have implemented standards that ensure access to websites for persons with disabilities.

E-parliament builds on the pillars of active engagement, a clear vision, strategic planning, broad-based management, and adequate resources. However, many parliaments lack some of these important elements. Only 43% have a written vision statement, over 40% do not have a strategic plan that is regularly updated, and almost one quarter report that their political leaders at the level of the President/Speaker were engaged very little or not at all. Parliaments must make a strong political commitment to transform their aspirations for increased transparency and accountability into a manageable policy framework for ICT across the whole institution.

Having systems and standards for managing documents in digital formats is an essential element for improving the efficiency of a parliament's operations and increasing its transparency and accessibility. Yet, the findings from the 2009 survey indicate that there has been relatively little progress in systems and standards for parliamentary documents since 2007. Less than half have a system for managing proposed legislation and only 25% use XML for any parliamentary document.

Parliaments have always been information intensive institutions. ICT has created even greater demands for information and has raised the standard by which the currency, completeness, and customization of information are judged. In response to these new demands, some parliamentary libraries have become leaders in integrating technology into their work in new and innovative ways. However, many continue to face challenges that stem from inadequate resources for training, limited availability of technology and, in some cases, lack of understanding of the contribution they can make to the effectiveness of parliamentary business.

E-parliament is rooted in a robust and responsive technical infrastructure. This must include sophisticated and flexible hardware, software, applications, services and security, plus a well trained

staff that understands the legislative environment. Findings from the technical infrastructure section of the 2009 survey suggest that there have been some advances, especially in support for plenary sessions and for training for ICT staff and members. But a number of continuing challenges remain. For example, while 96% of all parliaments have a Local Area Network (LAN), only 72% state that all members and committees are connected to it. In addition, there needs to be more application support for parliament's legislative responsibilities and for functions directly related to oversight.

THE STATE OF E-PARLIAMENT IN 2010

The report provides an overall description of the state of e-parliament in 2010 based on the responses received from parliaments and using a statistical methodology for assessing ICT in legislatures. The methodology assigns a numeric score to each of the six areas included in the 2009 survey: 1) Oversight and management of ICT; 2) Infrastructure, services, applications and training; 3) Systems and standards for creating legislative documents and information; 4) Library and research services; 5) Parliamentary websites; and, 6) Communication between citizens and parliaments. These scores are based on responses to a combination of selected questions. The numeric scores for each area are added together to provide an overall score, based on a maximum of 100%, that reflects the current state of e-parliament world-wide.

The total scores, describing the management and adoption of ICT by individual parliaments around the world, range from a minimum of 13.5% to a maximum of 82.7%. Parliaments at the high end, estimated to be no more than 20% of respondents at most, possess a combination of elements that satisfy the various technology needs of a legislature: a sound management organization, a solid yet flexible infrastructure, 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 do not have an appropriate management structure in place, although a surprising number do better than expected in this area. Yet they lack an adequate infrastructure (some do not have reliable electrical power), often have no systems for managing documents, have very weak libraries and websites with the least amount of information (a few do not have websites at all). Many have no capabilities for using ICT-supported methods to communicate with citizens.

Those in the middle vary in their strengths and weaknesses. While they sometimes have good scores in one or two areas, they do not achieve a high level of adoption in most categories. There is a continued unevenness in implementation similar to what was first observed in the *World e-Parliament Report 2008*. For example, while a few score higher than average for libraries, websites and communication, twice as many score below average in these areas.

As anticipated, the income level of a country is an obstacle for many parliaments in their ability to adopt ICT. This is consistent with the findings from the 2008 Report and continues to be a serious concern. However, a geographic analysis indicates that the legislatures in Latin America have a total score above the average for all parliaments in the survey and also above the mean

total score of the upper middle income group, suggesting an encouraging path of e-parliament development in the region.

The current world-wide state of e-parliament also affects members individually. For example, of the 27,249 parliamentarians represented in the legislatures that responded to the survey: 20% do not have a personal desktop or laptop computer at their disposal; 31% are not provided with access to a parliamentary intranet; 28% cannot access the text and current status of proposed legislation on their parliament's websites; 47% serve in parliaments that have not implemented accessibility standards for persons with disabilities on their websites, making it difficult for these citizens to follow members' and parliament's work; and, 44% do not have access to a library website that organizes information sources based on issues of concern to members.

COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The *World e-Parliament Report 2010* highlights the value of inter-parliamentary cooperation as one of the least expensive and potentially most effective ways for legislatures to address the challenges posed by the Information Society through the enhanced use of ICT. The Report also emphasizes cooperation at the regional level, which offers unique opportunities to share resources, overcome lack of know-how and establish common approaches. The progress made by newly established 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 the benefits of ongoing cooperation.

Findings of the Report about collaboration indicate that just over one fourth (28%) of parliaments provide support or would be willing to provide support to other legislatures for developing their use of ICT. On the other hand, 46% reported that they were receiving assistance or would like to receive assistance to improve their use of technology from other parliaments and from outside organizations. This finding underlines the extent of the need and also the significant role that other development actors, in addition to parliaments, can play in helping legislatures to strengthen their ICT capacities.

Because of the critical need for financial and technical support in parliaments in developing countries, the contributions of the international donor community and legislatures in higher income countries are especially important. In order to maximize the benefits of initiatives to strengthen parliaments, there is a need to achieve greater coherence among programmes and to reduce duplication of effort. This will require integrating ICT with other support efforts, rather than treating it as a stand-alone effort. It will also require promoting greater inter-parliamentary collaboration to help emerging democracies and legislatures in low income countries make progress toward e-parliament.

The Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament has articulated an e-Parliament Framework 2010–2020, based on a set of strategic goals for technology in parliament. These goals serve as common principles that underlie the attempt to establish a global effort for facilitating greater coordination and collaboration among parliaments, donors, international organizations and civil society organizations.

The e-Parliament Framework 2010-2020 is centered on five key areas that are targeted for specific action over the next ten years. They include improved policy development, enhanced links between parliaments and citizens, inclusive access to a nation's laws and legislation, implementation of ICT to support fundamental parliamentary functions, and the establishment of a sustained and coordinated technical assistance programme. The results of the 2009 survey provide indicators of the current status of parliaments with respect to these goals; future surveys will assess progress in subsequent years.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

The strategic goals set by the e-Parliament Framework 2010-2020, combined with the findings from the 2009 survey and the presentations and discussions at the World e-Parliament Conferences, provide a clear plan of action for what needs to be done to move forward. The *World e-Parliament Report 2010* presents an integrated set of recommendations, drawn from all of these sources, organized in the following areas: a) policies; b) planning and management; c) communication; d) transparency and accountability; e) technical infrastructure; and 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 international level.

The 2010 Report provides evidence that there are a number of parliaments that have been innovative in their employment of technology and have put it to full and effective use in their daily work. They are attaining a significant degree of openness to the public, and their legislators have the most useful tools at their fingertips to assist them in their law making and oversight activities. Their experience and their knowledge about how to use technology need to be shared with others. On the other hand, there are many parliaments that appear to be adopting "bits and pieces" of technology, but without a coherent and sustained vision. These legislatures are failing significantly to reach the full potential ICT can offer to strengthen the institution; they may, in fact, be falling further behind. The e-Parliament Framework for 2010-2020 will allow parliaments and the international community to measure world-wide progress in addressing these challenges and, most importantly, toward enhancing and sustaining democracy.

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 can be argued 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 ICT 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.

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 is one of the important means for enabling legislatures to do this effectively. As new communication technologies continue to spread throughout society, parliaments have a real opportunity to harness ICT 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.