



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

# Empowering Parliaments through the Use of ICTs

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- written by Henrik Olesen, Raul Zambrano and Val-
- entina Azzarello, after extensive consultations with
- Members of Parliaments from both developed and
- developing countries and UNDP colleagues.

*The analysis and recommendations of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Development Programme, its Executive Board or the United Nations Member States. This is an independent publication by UNDP*

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# List of Acronyms

<b>ACP</b>	AFRICA-CARIBBEAN AND THE PACIFIC	<b>MDGS</b>	MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
<b>APDIP</b>	ASIA-PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION PROGRAMME	<b>MEP</b>	MEMBER OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
<b>ASEAN</b>	ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS	<b>MP</b>	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
<b>CIS</b>	COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES	<b>NATO</b>	NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION
<b>CSOS</b>	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS	<b>NDI</b>	NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
<b>CO</b>	COUNTRY OFFICE	<b>NEPAD</b>	NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT
<b>DAI</b>	DIGITAL ACCESS INDEX	<b>NGO</b>	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
<b>DFID</b>	DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (U.K.)	<b>NVOS</b>	NETWORKED VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS
<b>DOT(F)</b>	DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE	<b>OECD</b>	ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
<b>EP</b>	EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT	<b>OSCE</b>	ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE
<b>EU</b>	EUROPEAN UNION	<b>POGAR</b>	PROGRAMME ON GOVERNANCE IN THE ARAB REGION
<b>EUI</b>	EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE	<b>PRS</b>	POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY
<b>FAQS</b>	FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	<b>RBAS</b>	REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ARAB STATES
<b>FIPA</b>	INTER-PARLIAMENTARY FORUM OF THE AMERICAS	<b>R&amp;D</b>	RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
<b>FOSS</b>	FREE AND OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE	<b>SADC</b>	SOUTH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
<b>GNI</b>	GROSS NATIONAL INCOME	<b>SMES</b>	SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES
<b>IBSG</b>	INTERNET BUSINESS SOLUTIONS GROUP (CISCO)	<b>SMS</b>	SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT SERVER
<b>ICA</b>	INSTITUTE FOR CONNECTIVITY IN THE AMERICAS	<b>TAI</b>	TECHNOLOGY ACHIEVEMENT INDEX
<b>ICTS</b>	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES	<b>UNDESA</b>	UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
<b>ICTD</b>	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT	<b>UNDP</b>	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
<b>ICTDAR</b>	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN ARAB REGION	<b>UNESCO</b>	UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
<b>IDB</b>	INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK	<b>VP</b>	VIRTUAL PARLIAMENT
<b>IPRS</b>	INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS	<b>WB</b>	WORLD BANK
<b>IPU</b>	INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION	<b>WDI</b>	WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS
<b>IT</b>	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	<b>WSIS</b>	WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY
<b>LAC</b>	LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	<b>WTO</b>	WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION
<b>LAN</b>	LOCAL AREA NETWORK		

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# Executive Summary

At the request of the European Union, UNDP conducted a feasibility study on how the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can empower Parliaments and MPs at both the national and global levels. While at the national level the focus is on Parliament as an institution, at the global level the study centers on a new networking initiative: e-parl.net. This initiative aims to link all the parliamentarians in the world, assisting them with readily available information, resources and experiences to help them in decision-making, while fostering the spread of democracy across the globe.

The main aim of this survey is to assess the general situation on the availability of, and support for, ICTs in Parliament in various countries.

The study has developed an analytical framework that focuses on the three core functions of Parliaments — legislation, representation and oversight — and establishes links between them. The study provides concrete examples of the importance of ICTs for the empowerment and increased credibility of parliamentary institutions.

One conclusion of the study is that any successful deployment of ICTs in a Parliament must be closely related to its core business processes. Technology-driven innovations or projects in Parliaments may be necessary, but they are not sufficient to bring the real potential of ICTs to MPs and Parliaments.

After consultations with relevant stakeholders and visits to the Parliaments of Benin, Canada, Chile, the European Parliament, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mexico, Senegal, Swe-

den and Uganda, and after receiving contributions from Parliaments in Egypt, Bahrain, Lebanon and Morocco, the study's main conclusions are as follows:

e-Parliament is an emerging area of work in developing countries, and is thus still in its infancy when compared to national ICT for Development strategies, e-government or e-commerce. Not surprisingly, there are few studies on the subject, few comparative experiences and human resources are limited. Furthermore, e-Parliament is not yet considered a strategic area of work when it comes to e-government programmes or national ICTD priorities.

In developed countries, on the other hand, e-Parliament is fairly well advanced, in particular when it comes to the use of ICTs for legislation and oversight. The representation function, however, is lagging behind. The prevailing means of communication is still one-way, while two-way communications and interactions (MPs to constituents to MPs, Parliaments to the public and back) are just beginning to be introduced. Even in developed countries, e-Democracy is thus still in its infancy.

In developing countries, e-Parliament is facing much greater challenges and gaps, ranging from access and connectivity to local capacity, governance and democratization issues. In addition, there are no systematic studies or research on the status of e-Parliaments in developing countries, nor are there any comparative studies across regions. Nevertheless, there is a clear intention on the part of those surveyed by this study to confront these challenges and gaps and create programmes to improve

the use of ICTs within Parliaments and by MPs. Resources, however, are scarce.

Many developing country MPs expressed keen interest in e-Parliament and in the e-parl.net proposal. It is important to respond to this demand for the increased use of ICTs in daily parliamentary work.

#### **A Global Programme for Empowering Parliaments through the Use of ICTs**

To ensure that all interested stakeholders become involved in a well coordinated, efficient and structured manner, the study suggests the establishment of a *Global Programme for Empowering Parliaments* through the enhanced use of ICTs. The programme will focus on both national parliamentary development via ICTs and the global e-parl.net initiative.

The Global Programme should assist 60 Parliaments in the enhanced use of ICTs over a period of five years through dedicated national programmes.

It should be financed by the European Union and other interested donors, and implemented by an international institution to be identified later. The programme should be guided by a Steering Committee to ensure inclusiveness and transparency and to provide the necessary means for monitoring progress and assessing impact at the country level.

The cost of the Global Programme is estimated at approximately 70 million Euros over a period of five years.

# Introduction

One of the essential outcomes of the current globalization process is not only the increasing interdependence among most countries in the world, but also the emergence of issues that can only be tackled on a global scale. This applies not only to economic issues, but also to social and political ones. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), which have been catalysts for globalization, have not only created new issues, but have also cast old issues in a new light. This has in turn created new challenges as to the governance of global issues and their resolution at the national level. It is here that Members of Parliaments (MPs) and legislators can play a critical role.

It is thus interesting to note that most Parliaments and MPs, especially in the developing world, have yet to fully capitalize on the use of ICTs to empower their role at both the national and global levels. This is in contrast to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) which were the first to use ICTs to address specific local and/or global issues in the early 1990s.

It is important to highlight that ICTs, understood as a dynamic set of converging technologies, are not limited to computers, information systems or the Internet. The emergence of innovative ICTs such as mobile telephones has provided new tools at more affordable costs for end users in developing countries. ICTs thus include a wide variety of technologies that can help end users network in an increasingly productive fashion at various levels (local, national, regional and global).

In several quarters, the predominant view on e-Parliament reduces it to the idea of deploying computer systems (computerization or “informatization”) to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of existing Parliaments. This is indeed similar to the idea most people have about e-government which usually falls short, and does not explicitly address the issue of ICT use by citizens to enhance their involvement in global, national and/or local *governance* issues. Deploying ICT systems of any kind is essential for many Parliaments, but it is just one part of the overall equation. Making institutions more efficient is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for fostering enhanced participation and networking of MPs or ordinary citizens on critical development and governance issues.

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**We are witnessing the emergence of a network society where access to information and knowledge-sharing are taking centre stage.**

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The concept presented in this study, e-parl.net, entailed the establishment of a virtual network which would act as a platform for MPs to exchange information and experiences, and would also provide relevant information on social, economic and political issues such as the environment, health, democracy and conflict.

The European Commission asked UNDP to conduct a feasibility study on the status of Parliaments in several selected countries. After a series of discussions, the EU and UNDP agreed that the possibility of supporting ICTs in Parliaments in developing countries, in particular ACP countries, was an important component which would not only go beyond the e-parl.net initiative but could also complement it.

In order to provide guidance for the study, a Steering Committee was established composed of three Members of the European Parliament, three Members of European Parliaments and three Members of National Parliaments in developing countries (India, Chile and Uganda). It also included one representative from the EU and one from UNDP.<sup>1</sup>

This report is divided into five parts, plus annexes:

- » An Executive Summary followed by a short introduction.
- » Chapter 1: A general status report on e-Parliament based on findings presented to the first meeting of the Steering Committee on 24 January, 2005 in Brussels.
- » Chapter 2: National level: Findings, conclusions and proposals on how to empower Parliaments in developing countries through the enhanced use of ICTs.
- » Chapter 3: Global level: Findings, conclusions and proposals regarding the e-parl.net programme.
- » Chapter 4: Conclusion and modalities for implementation and future work on e-Parliaments.

- » Annexe I: Examples of the three functions of Parliaments.
- » Annexe II: ICTs for Development in the global agenda.
- » Annexe III: e-Government and e-Governance.
- » Annexe IV: Methodology and sample questionnaire.
- » Annexe V: Table on e-Parliament development plan: components and costs.
- » Annexe VI: List of graphs comparing Parliaments in developed and developing countries (how they are elected, parliamentary websites and the participation of women).
- » Annexe VII: e-Parliament projects and initiatives.

The investigations were undertaken partly through visits of UNDP staff to the following Parliaments: Benin, Canada, Chile, the European Parliament, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mexico, Senegal, Sweden and Uganda, and partly through joint reports established by UNDP Country Offices and Parliaments in Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco.

In order to avoid confusion, the term e-Parliament will be used as a generic term covering this new discipline, equivalent to e-Government or e-Access. The future international institution, or NGO, that requested EU funding will be treated in more detail in Chapter 3 and will be called "e-parl.net".

# Chapter I: Overall Review of ICTs and their Use in Parliaments

## I. e-Parliaments: Context and Definitions

### A. Parliaments and ICTs

Parliaments are one of the main pillars of democratic societies, and thus play a key role in the promotion and enhancement of democracy and democratic values. From an institutional point of view, Parliaments enact laws, debate and establish political priorities, allocate resources, represent different constituencies and political parties and oversee the executive branch of government. Indeed, Parliaments are one of the principal forums for discussing public policy and promoting consensus-building.<sup>2</sup>

Parliaments, as democratic institutions, have three main functions which comprise all of the above elements. These are: legislative, representative, and oversight of government. Members of Parliament must have concrete channels that enable them to interact with their constituencies, and also with governmental institutions and civil servants. Also, MPs need to be relatively independent, so that they can both adequately reflect the diverse views in society, and ensure the representation of the needs of their constituency, as opposed to the interests of their party affiliations. Finally, MPs must have the informational tools at their disposal to be able to debate and process legislation and laws in an informed and efficient fashion.<sup>3</sup>

In the last decade, new national and sub-national Parliaments have emerged as more and more countries begin to embrace democratic principles and seek to

improve governance. This has been the result, in part, of the process of globalization which has created heavy interdependencies among most countries in the world. One factor that has played a key role in these processes has been the emergence of new ICTs. In effect, ICTs are having a profound impact on all sectors — public, private and civil society. The power of ICTs can best be seen in their capacity to create new networks and enhance existing networks which can easily transcend national boundaries. We are indeed witnessing the emergence of a network society where access to information and knowledge-sharing are taking centre stage.

The use and deployment of ICTs is becoming pervasive and has led to critical innovations in government, business and the way in which citizens interact, not only with government, but also among themselves. E-government, e-business and e-democracy are now common applications of ICT, among many others. But perhaps more importantly, “governance without governments” has also become a reality.<sup>4</sup>

This study will illustrate ways in which ICTs can empower Parliaments in both developed and developing countries. It is important to note that ICTs, especially in the context of developing countries, are by no means limited to the use of desktop computers or the Internet. They also include other new technologies such as mobile telephones, wireless communications, etc. This point is perhaps best illustrated by the example of Sub-Saharan Africa, where the growth of mobile telephony has outpaced that of the Internet.

For the purposes of this study, e-Parliament is defined as the use of ICTs in parliamentary institutions with the objective of enhancing and strengthening their core functions and operations. One critical aspect of this that could lead to the innovative involvement of Parliaments in promoting democratic governance relates to the use of ICTs to network with networks of constituents, as well as to enhance access to local, regional and global knowledge networking amongst MPs.

### B. Framework for Analysis of the Empowering Potential of ICTs

An analysis of the potential of the new ICTs in connection with the three core functions of Parliaments led to the development of the following framework:

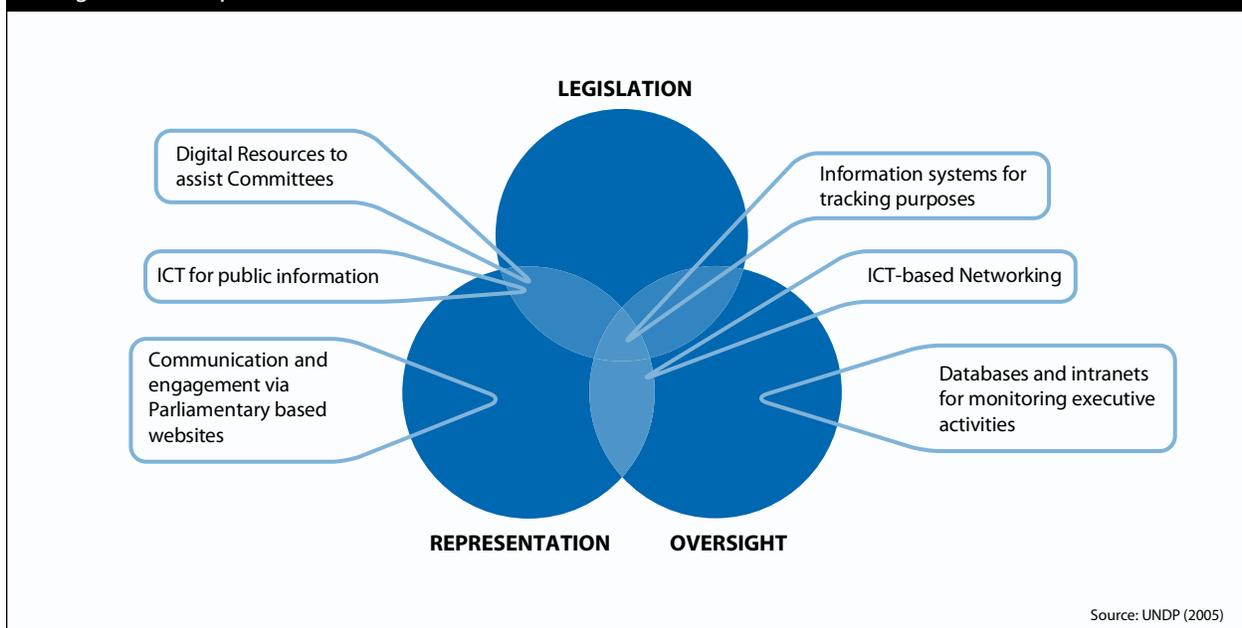
The framework focuses not on the use of ICTs themselves, but rather on the way Parliaments do their “business” and the impact that ICTs can have when deployed strategically. The framework suggests how generic or specific ICT applications can be brought into the core functions of Parliaments. The starting point for supporting the use of ICTs in Parliaments, however, is not the deployment of the latest technology, but rather a comprehensive understanding of the way in which Parliaments operate within their national context. The identification of critical or priority areas in which ICTs could be deployed for maximum impact is also crucial to secure buy-in and ownership by the institution and the MPs themselves.

**The starting point for supporting the use of ICTs in Parliaments is not the deployment of the latest technology, but rather a comprehensive understanding of the way in which Parliaments operate within their national context.**

Furthermore, there is no one-to-one correspondence between a given ICT tool and a specific function of Parliament, nor are there any silver bullets. The key core functions of Parliaments overlap to varying degrees, depending on the specific national context. On the other hand, ICTs are neutral in the sense that they can be adopted and adapted to cater to different processes and transactions. For example, the deployment of tracking systems in Parliaments could have an impact on all three core functions of Parliament if done strategically.

This suggests that any attempt to deploy ICTs in Parliament should be done in a “holistic” and comprehensive manner — similar to the way in which many developing countries are now designing and implementing national ICTD strategies. Furthermore, e-Parliament should not

Fig. 1: ICT to empower Parliaments Main Functions



only be related to these strategies, it should also be included as one of their components.

ICT innovations in Parliaments are usually implemented either on a bottom-up basis (through ICT-aware MPs<sup>5</sup>) or by forward-looking ICT departments, almost on their own. Although this has indeed opened many opportunities for Parliaments and created awareness and capacity among MPs, it involves risks. First, there is the risk of creating an ICT divide between those who can easily use the new tools and those who cannot. Second, there is the risk of failing to enhance the core functions of Parliaments. Creating a website or giving each MP a PC or a laptop computer cannot alone bring to Parliaments the real transformative impact that ICTs could otherwise have.

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This is not to say that many Parliaments have not been using information systems for the last two decades or so. This is especially true of databases and related tools which essentially facilitate the legislative function of Parliaments. Thus, it is quite feasible to find “legacy” systems in Parliaments which might add additional challenges to the deployment of innovative ICTs. This is yet another factor to take into careful consideration when implementing e-Parliament projects.

But the really transformative potential of innovative ICTs emerges from their capacity to foster both the creation of new networks that can easily and cost-effectively interact regardless of location and the strengthening of existing networks that start to adopt ICTs. Comparatively speaking, the following table illustrates this point vis-à-vis past technologies.

Interactive and innovative tools not only have the potential to transcend national boundaries, they also provide MPs and citizens with new ways to act and interact in a more effective and “tight” manner. On this basis, ICTs can perhaps have their largest impact on the representation function of Parliament. By bridging the gap between constituents and their representatives, ICTs can act as catalysts to strengthen democracy and promote good governance.

#### C. Examples of how ICTs Can Empower Parliaments

Several concrete examples of how ICTs can empower Parliament’s three main functions are described in detail below.<sup>6</sup>

##### Legislation

An important role played by MPs is to articulate the needs and preferences of citizens and transform them into policy by enacting legislation. For this, MPs require easy access to a wide range of information and knowledge resources in order to make informed decisions. Through databases, intranets, and digital libraries, MPs can have efficient access to resources relating to legislative documents, such as bills and proceedings. The quality of the legislative aspect of their work can be enhanced through quick access to legislative committee reports online and through a tracking mechanism to monitor all legislation in process and under debate.

Table I: Comparison of Technologies as Information and Communication Tools

	One-way	Interactive
Traditional	Non-digital. End-user: passive recipient. One-to-many, large audiences. TV, radio, etc.	Non-digital. End-user: active participant. One-to-one, difficult to reach large audiences simultaneously. Fixed phone lines, etc.
Innovative	Digital. End-user: pulling information. One-to-many, large audiences. Static websites, etc.	Digital. End-user: networks pulling and pushing information. Many to many, local and global audiences. Dynamic websites, online forums, e-discussions, etc.

A crucial task of any Parliament consists of organizing information and knowledge resources to support the work of MPs. Specifically, ICTs can significantly improve content management (such as the production, storage and dissemination of documents) as well as the process of parliamentary activities (such as the organization and coordination of commission meetings, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

### Representation

The representative role requires MPs to be informed about issues of importance to their constituents. Hence, appropriate channels are needed for the public to inform MPs of their views on specific issues, and campaign for representation. ICT tools can thus facilitate the research tasks of MPs who need to be well-informed about citizens' concerns.

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## The provision of feedback mechanisms where the public has the opportunity to have their opinions heard is crucial.

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ICTs can also inform the public about the role of MPs through various channels, including blogs, personalised websites and webcasting. Even in rural areas, where large segments of the population may not have ICT access, web-based parliamentary outreach to public access points can ensure access to information, including information on the role of Parliaments, at an affordable cost.<sup>8</sup> The information provided online could include a description of the administrative structure of Parliament, legislation, parliamentary statements on the annual budget, and schedules of hearings and proceedings. In fact, many ICT for Development projects focus specifically on the provision of public information to economically disadvantaged groups at affordable costs. Public information can also be provided through digital newspapers and bulletins on economic reform policies or on access to new social services.<sup>9</sup>

Interaction between the constituent and the MP is essential. If the constituent perceives that the MP is trustworthy and reliable, she/he will be more inclined to communicate her/his needs. In turn, the MP will be seen as a credible representative who listens to the electorate, and in turn

will win more votes. The provision of feedback mechanisms where the public has the opportunity to have their opinions heard is thus crucial.

The Internet is also a highly effective archival tool that enables vast amounts of information to be stored and accessed.<sup>10</sup> ICTs can facilitate increased access and more effective communication between Parliaments and government agencies, civil society organizations and the public both nationally and internationally. ICT systems can make it easier for individual MPs to have their own networks of people and groups and to maintain them, to coordinate research and focus groups, poll people throughout society, and coordinate activities in larger groups of people.<sup>11</sup> And lastly, the use of ICTs can decrease Parliament's heavy dependency on paper as a means of communication.

### Oversight

The extent to which a Parliament performs the oversight function will vary according to the country's constitution. The oversight function can also be performed in different ways, such as through oversight committees and/or a parliamentary ombudsman through whom citizens can voice their concerns and complaints.<sup>12</sup> ICTs can render this process more efficient by providing the means for citizens to post their complaints online, thus saving time and paper. In many recently established Parliaments, however, the oversight function still remains weak.

Through the use of ICTs such as databases, the committees which oversee the central government's budget can monitor and assess how the government spends its money. In India, for example, the available online information facilitates the role of MPs in assessing any shortcomings in the performance of ministries.

### D. Challenges to ICT for Parliaments

From the external assessments that have been conducted, mainly in developed countries, it is clear that there is still a gap in assessing the ways in which ICTs can enhance democracy. Although many online discussions are being developed, most of these originated with civil society groups. A positive aspect of this is that younger generations are becoming more politically active, and are gradually interacting more with their MPs.

Still, many challenges persist for both developed and developing countries. Some are common to both, such

as the need for political will to strengthen links between the electorate and the public, and the need to increase the credibility of Parliaments and MPs. Also, strategies on the use of ICTs for Parliaments need to be developed further.

For developing countries, where Parliaments are younger institutions compared to those in developed countries, challenges are more acute and varied, depending on the context. Crucial challenges include infrastructure, the policy environment, awareness-raising and capacity development. These challenges are described in detail in Chapter II, ICTs in National Parliaments.

## II. ICTs for Development in the Global Agenda

### A. Overview of ICTs for Development

From the outset, it should be reiterated that ICTs are not a goal in themselves, but rather a set of new and powerful tools with the potential to greatly impact ongoing processes and networks and create new ones. Thus, the very notion that the establishment of a sophisticated ICT system will automatically make a public institution more efficient and transparent is essentially a myth. On the ground, this misconception has taken a heavy toll on many ICT for Development initiatives.

Since the late 1990s, there has been a sharp increase in the number of activities and programmes that support the deployment of ICTs for development processes and agendas. While the initial emphasis was placed on access and connectivity (in particular, telecentres and access points), by the start of the Millennium many developing countries were focusing on policy and strategy issues. Not surprisingly, more than 90 countries have now finalized national ICT for Development strategies. However, only a few have been able to secure the needed resources to implement them. In the last couple of years, there has been yet another shift toward specific ICT applications where e-government has taken a priority role. Efforts have also begun to focus on the use of ICTs in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

At any rate, there have been quite a few lessons learned from implementing ICT for Development projects. For example, e-government projects that are implemented on a stand-alone basis, and not as part of an overall

national strategy to modernise the government, may fail to achieve their primary objective. Similarly, telecentres that do not have a coherent sustainability plan and do not work closely with the local communities and stakeholders do not have a realistic chance of surviving in the long run.

For an overview of global ICTs for Development initiatives and resources, see Annex II.

### III. e-Government and e-Governance

Whereas governments have been quick to adopt ICTs for the enhancement of administrative and service delivery purposes, there are many lessons that remain to be systematized and put into practice. It is not unusual to find accounts of failed e-government initiatives in specialized press reports.<sup>13</sup>

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**E-government projects that are implemented on a stand-alone basis, and not as part of an overall national strategy to modernise the government, may fail to achieve their primary objective.**

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The area of e-governance — civil society and ICTs, including community informatics — has virtually exploded within the last couple of years in developed countries, through blogs, discussion forums, etc. While it is impossible to cover these in an appropriate fashion here, they have become an inherent and important part of democracy. However, this is still not the case in emerging democracies.

For an overview of e-government and e-governance activities and reports see Annex III.

### IV. e-Parliaments: Regional and Global Initiatives

A number of regional programmes of collaboration among parliamentarians at the regional level have recently started. They are most often composed of par-

liamentarians elected by their peers to sit in Regional Parliaments, Parliamentary Assemblies or Forums. With regard to e-Parliaments in a regional and/or global context, a few examples are presented below.

#### A. Regional Initiatives

##### *Africa*

The African Parliamentarians' Forum for NEPAD was created in 2002, and is based in Benin.<sup>14</sup> During a NEPAD forum on the Role of Parliaments and Good Governance (2002), the latter was defined as including transparency and participation by, and interaction with, all social groups in society.<sup>15</sup>

UNDP's West Africa Policy hub has proposed a project on "e-Parliament as a Tool for Fostering Parliamentary Networks." Through support for NEPAD, its emerging Pan-African Parliament and individual African Parliaments, a process has been initiated that could have remarkable repercussions for democracy in Africa.<sup>16</sup>

The Pan-African Parliament is a new regional Parliament created in March 2004, and is based in South Africa. It will initially have advisory functions, which will later be increased. It is composed of five MPs from each participating state, at least one of whom must be a woman. Currently 44 states out of 54 have ratified the treaty. The MPs are elected by their colleagues in their own Parliaments.<sup>17</sup>

The South African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum is a regional organisation that brings together 12 Parliaments in the Southern Africa region, represented by 1,800 MPs. Its mission is to develop into a regional parliamentary structure, for the purpose of strengthening the capacity of the Southern African Development Community by involving parliamentarians from member states in SADC's activities<sup>18</sup>. UNDP has helped the SADC Parliamentary Forum to elaborate an MP's Orientation Handbook: *Professional Performance and Development for Parliamentarians*.<sup>19</sup>

The Parliamentary Assembly of EU/ACP Countries is a very active entity. It is backed by the European Parliament and the European Commission, and has the necessary resources, albeit indirectly, to implement the decisions it takes. It has played an important role in trying to close the North-South gap.<sup>20</sup>

#### UNDESA on "Strengthening Parliamentary Information Systems in Africa"

This initiative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is a US \$4 million project launched in 2003 to support Parliamentary information systems in Africa. An innovative component has been the use of Eurovoc — Africa, a multilingual thesaurus for the classification of parliamentary documents.

##### *Arab States*

UNDP, along with its Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) launched the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR) in early 2000. Besides being an informational portal equipped with extensive resources on civil society, Arab reforms and governance issues, among other things, it implements pilot projects on accountability, transparency and participation in the region.<sup>21</sup>

##### *Asia*

The Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum is an informal structure made up of national parliamentarians who use the forum to discuss and share ideas on topics of mutual interest and concern. The forum has as its aim to strengthen knowledge of social, political and economics-related policy issues, and also to enhance cohesion among countries in the region.<sup>22</sup>

UNDP's regional programme, the Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) launched the Asian Parliamentarians' Forum<sup>23</sup> in order to facilitate contacts among parliamentarians by giving them easy access to resources, such as a Sourcebook that covers various aspects of ICT, a "Policy Watch" repository that contains ICT policy documents from countries in Asia with regular policy updates from the region and a collection of case studies and useful contacts. The forum, together with FIPA in the Americas (see below), appears to be the closest thing there is to a regional e-Parliament in terms of making e-resources available to parliamentarians in Asia.

### *The European Union*

The best comparative study on parliamentary websites encountered by this study was undertaken by the European University Institute, Florence (EUI) and the University of Geneva on the 25 EU member states' parliamentary websites and those of their political parties: "Evaluation of the Use of New Technologies in Order to Facilitate Democracy in Europe: eDemocratizing the Parliaments and Parties of Europe, 2003"<sup>24</sup>. The study is very thorough, and manages to rank EU countries according to their relative advancement in e-Parliament. The very elaborate and precise methodology developed in the EUI study, combined with the local knowledge of researchers in each studied country, gives credibility to the results.

One interesting — and surprising — conclusion of this study is that there is not necessarily any direct link between a country's high ICT penetration and a high score on the e-Parliament scale. The final report of the present study should certainly address the issue of whether a study (or indeed studies) of the world's Parliaments should be undertaken in order to establish a baseline from which to advance. This would be a logical annual feature for an organisation heavily involved with e-Parliament. The present study has not revealed any studies similar to the EUI study in other regions of the world.

The Council of Europe's **Parliamentary Assembly** has played a significant role in steering democratic processes in the areas of elections, human rights, etc.<sup>25</sup> in countries such as Greece, Turkey and states emerging from the former USSR.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has maintained consistent cooperation with parliamentarians through the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. This co-operation has been complemented by increasing activities with other civil society organizations via consultations with OECD committee members.

### *Eastern Europe and the CIS*

**The 55-member** Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly **has played a significant role in the supervision of elections and the often complex negotiations following less-than-perfect elections, most recently in Ukraine.**<sup>26</sup> Since 1991, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has

**developed extensive co-operation with the** Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU), the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the European Parliament (EP) and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS. **Its main task is to facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue as part of its goal of strengthening democracy throughout the OSCE area.**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE has joined the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in several projects or "Parliamentary Troikas" to improve co-ordination and enhance parliamentary activities. In South Eastern Europe, parliamentary bodies have joined efforts to establish a parliamentary dimension within the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. In Belarus, for example, a Parliamentary Troika, including the OSCE, has been working towards the promotion of dialogue and democratic development in the country.<sup>27</sup>

The Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS, established as an attempt to ensure collaboration among the newly independent states emerging out of the USSR, is still trying to define its role.

### *The Americas*

**The Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)** has a website which acts not only as an archive of information, but is also interactive, offering specific "engagement tools," such as web-casting and video-conferencing.<sup>28</sup>

### *Latin America & the Caribbean (LAC)*

**The Latin America Parliament (Parlatino)** has a well-equipped website with information relating to events, documents and the structure of the parliamentary forum.<sup>29</sup>

**The Central American Parliament**, established in 1991, is devoted to integration in the Central American countries.<sup>30</sup>

**The Andean Parliament** receives assistance for ICT support from UNESCO, although its homepage is currently inactive.<sup>31</sup>

UNDP supports several national Parliaments in the LAC region. In Paraguay, for example, it is supporting the Parliament's representative function by working on

interactions with civil society. It is also working on internal organization, and supporting the oversight function through parliamentary work processes using ICT tools.<sup>32</sup>

## B. Global Initiatives

**The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)** is an international organization of Parliaments of sovereign states established in 1889. Currently there are 141 members, ranging from the “most democratic” to the “least democratic” national Parliaments. The IPU PARLINE database searches member state Parliaments, and, more recently, specialised parliamentary bodies. The 109th Assembly of the IPU (2003) acknowledges the importance of the new ICTs in their ability to facilitate cooperation between national Parliaments and the globalization process. The IPU urged all members to promote the harnessing of these tools and encouraged representatives to voice their ideas and concerns at the WSIS.

The IPU’s inventory of parliamentary websites is useful, but does not currently go beyond an inventory. It would seem logical to conduct a study of the IPU’s total membership similar to the one conducted by the European University Institute/University of Geneva, but this might

be too difficult politically. The IPU can, however, play a significant role in equipping Parliaments with ICTs, acting as a broker between the many parliamentarians who need ICTs and the increasing number of quality offers for such assistance. The IPU’s technical assistance programme would be a natural tool to facilitate this.

The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB)<sup>33</sup> was established to create direct links between individual parliamentarians and the World Bank. One result of this is a recent WB book: *A Parliamentarian’s Guide to the World Bank*.<sup>34</sup>

## V. Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the status of the use of ICTs in Parliaments. A framework has been developed with the purpose of better understanding the complexities of designing and deploying e-Parliament programmes and initiatives, in particular regarding a Parliament’s main functions. While a lot of ground has been covered by ICT for Development initiatives, the same cannot be said about e-Parliaments. As time goes on, global and regional initiatives can only benefit national e-Parliaments as well as sub-national ones.

# Chapter II: ICTs in National Parliaments

The previous chapter provided an overview of the main e-Parliament projects that are being established regionally and globally in both developing and developed countries. While there seem to be many initiatives cropping up, generally Parliaments have been lagging behind on the adoption of ICTs. Not surprising as well is the relatively small quantity of relevant literature that exists on the subject, 'given the relative infancy of the provision and use of ICTs in Parliaments and by Parliamentarians.'<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, while there have been several external assessments of the use of ICTs in Parliaments in developed countries, this is certainly not the case in developing countries. In addition, the external assessments that have been carried out in developed countries focus solely on early instances of MPs adopting ICTs, as opposed to the majority of MPs working in Parliament. Also, these external studies focus on MPs as individuals, and thus do not concentrate on the overall institutional capacities of Parliaments.

## I. e-Parliaments in Developed Countries

A study by the University of Geneva and the European University Institute evaluated the use of technology to foster democracy in Europe. It assessed the websites of Parliaments and political parties in the 15 EU member states, plus the ten accession states. From the study, four dimensions of ICT use were identified: information provision, bilateral interactivity, multi-lateral interactivity and user-friendliness.

The study made it clear that parliamentary websites can be very useful. They can provide information on how the institution functions — in particular on how laws are made and how the process of decision-making on the expenditure and revenue of the government's budget operates.<sup>36</sup>

In the assessment, France, the EU, Greece and Denmark were said to have an impressive e-legislative index<sup>37</sup> (an electronic list of bills, amendments, resolutions, etc.). The study also mentioned that the 15 EU member states had more advanced parliamentary websites than the ten accession states. Yet it noted that factors such as income levels, knowledge and use of ICTs did not automatically lead to better parliamentary websites.<sup>38</sup> It also stated that "differences in party systems — fragmentation, ideological orientation, levels of turnout, distribution of major and minor parties" did not have an impact on the development of parliamentary websites either.<sup>39</sup> Instead, a factor which did have an impact was the strategies developed by political actors, rather than ICT in itself.

The evaluation concludes that parliamentarians in Europe and the European Parliament use parliamentary websites primarily for information provision and bilateral interactivity (such as offering email access to MPs and other parliamentary staff).<sup>40</sup> Regarding the type of information used, information on both legislation and committees was most frequently requested. On the issue of bilateral interactivity, the study assessed the rate of response to emails by MPs and MEPs and found it to be quite slow.

The overall study concludes that in area of multi-lateral interactivity there is an “extremely low level of citizen deliberation” and e-participation.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, a survey carried out in the UK reveals that, while 43 percent of respondents had access to the Internet or email at home, only 3 percent got their political news from the Internet.<sup>42</sup> The younger people who answered the survey said they would email their local MP if they knew their MP’s email address. In fact, the younger group stated that MPs should be more active in using ICTs, especially the Internet.<sup>43</sup>

To conclude, parliamentary websites are an important channel for enhancing the public’s knowledge of current issues, discussions and laws that are being drafted in Parliament. According to the study, the factor that seems to have most impact on the development of parliamentary websites is the strategy of the political actors involved, as opposed income levels or whether or not they have extensive knowledge of and expertise with ICTs.

To date, MPs have generally based their strategies on both the provision of access to information and one-way communications through ICTs. What still needs to be identified and developed is a strategy that goes beyond the provision of information by parliamentarians (documents, minutes, etc.) to opportunities for the public to provide feedback. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are various ways in which participatory politics can enhance the decision-making power of the citizens themselves. Targeting younger groups is also crucial as they are often already connected, but their interest and knowledge about the importance of Parliament as an institution in society needs to be nurtured. This can be done through online discussions, video-conferences, role-playing and interactive tools that spark interest and increase knowledge.

One can conclude that Parliaments in developed countries have, for the most part, deployed ICT tools to strengthen the parliamentary functions of legislation and oversight. This has been done in most cases without a long-term e-Parliament strategy. On the other hand, the function of representation appears to have received much less attention, and innovations for real two-way networking with constituencies have yet to become a reality on a broader scale.

## II. e-Parliament in Developing Countries

### A. ICT Policy and Access Challenges for Parliaments

As mentioned in Chapter I, since the late 1990s there has been a flurry of ICT for Development projects and programmes in developing countries. While closing the so-called “digital divide” was the initial focus of most of these, the latest trend is to address both strategic policy issues and policy environments and sectoral aspects such as health and education. Many developing countries have in fact established national ICT for Development strategies and even a few have linked them to Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS). While results have been mixed, it is important to note the interest and political will of countries to harness the potential benefits of ICTs in becoming part of the global network society. On the other hand, it should also be noted that while substantial progress has been made in terms of access and connectivity, huge gaps still remain, especially in poor urban and rural areas.

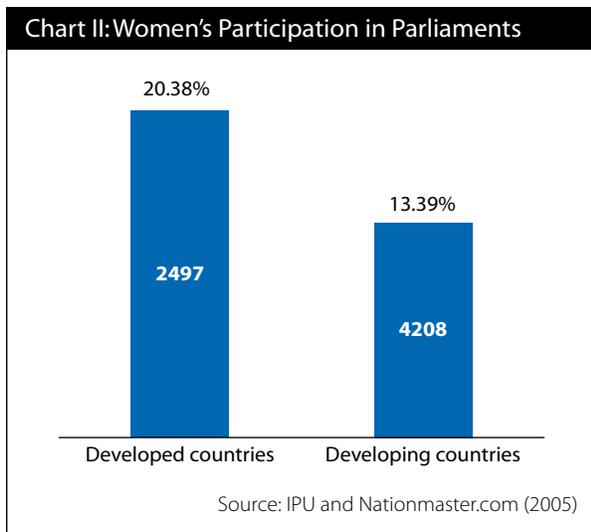
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**Parliaments, as an institution, have not been included as one of the priority areas of work in national ICT for Development strategies or e-government programmes.**

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With very few exceptions, Parliaments, as an institution, have not been included as one of the priority areas of work in national ICT for Development strategies or e-government programmes. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that Parliaments are not, strictly speaking, either governmental institutions or NGOs. Nor are they “poor” in the economic and/or social sense. But paradoxically, quite a few Parliaments in developing countries have already passed laws on digital signatures<sup>44</sup> and e-commerce and have even discussed technical legislation related to the use of Free/Open Source Software<sup>45</sup> in government.

Not surprisingly, developing countries have thus been focusing more on e-government programmes and national ICT for Development strategies than on projects

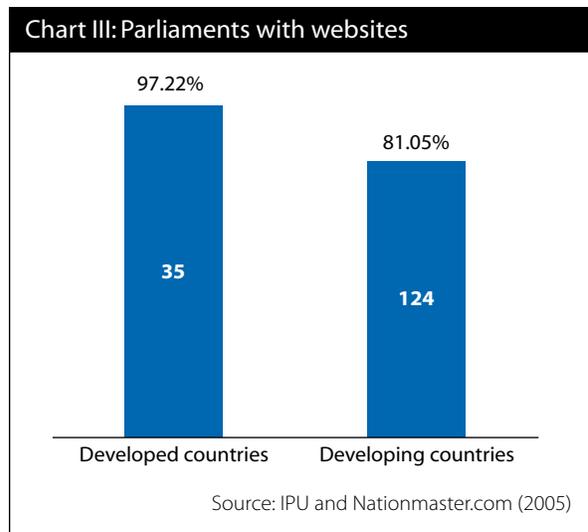


dealing with ICTs for Parliaments. In some cases, e-Parliament projects have been implemented as a component of overall national strategies, or as part of public administration reform plans and processes.

Furthermore, while donors and others have been keen to support large projects to improve the functioning of government, the same cannot be said about e-Parliaments. Indeed, Parliaments have been under-funded and somewhat neglected. A reason for this could be that in some countries political sensitivities may balk at the oversight function of Parliaments vis-à-vis national governments. This is also related to the broader issues of accountability, transparency and the participation of citizens in governance at the local and national levels.

Having said this, Parliaments are gradually being viewed as crucial institutions for "giving voice to constituencies in remote and historically underserved areas"<sup>46</sup> and making sure that the central government budget is spent on programmes that meet the needs and promote the well-being of society. Thus, Parliaments are starting to play a role in fostering the development of e-governance. They certainly should not be the only venue to accomplish this but they could be a key player in the overall context.

However, access to ICT resources in developing countries, as we know, is still a big challenge. Access to ICTs is extremely unequal: some "90% of all Internet users are living in the OECD countries, and more than half of the Internet users world-wide (57%) are from the US, despite the US just making up 5% of the world's population."<sup>47</sup>



The chart above illustrates the discrepancy that exists between developed and developing countries in the development of parliamentary websites. Of the 124 developing countries, only 81.5 percent have parliamentary websites, compared to 97.22 percent of the 35 developed countries. Factors that affect the development (or lack thereof) of parliamentary websites include a strategic approach to e-Parliament strategies, political will, access and resources. Moreover, the functionality and nature of the website is also crucial.<sup>48</sup> If the parliamentary website is limited to the provision of information, this will no doubt prove useful to people, but it should be interactive in order to strengthen the link between MPs and their constituents. Yet, realistically, as we have seen from the external assessments of developed countries, this dynamic, two-way dimension still remains a challenge even there.

The adoption of ICTs, in particular by developing countries, depends on other factors as well. The so-called digital divide is a reflection of a much greater discrepancy between, and within, countries. This reflects once again the wider disparity that exists between the North and South. Indeed, the democracy divide is also a critical factor, as is gender distribution within Parliaments in developing countries.

The chart above illustrates the striking gap that exists between North and South on the number of women in Parliaments. In the 124 developing countries, there are 4,208 women in Parliament (13.39 percent), in contrast to the 2,497 women in Parliament in the 35 developed countries (20.38 percent). In terms of ratios, in developed

countries there are roughly 70 women on average per Parliament, whereas in developing countries there are only 30 women per Parliament, the overall ratio being 2.3 to 1.

## B. Access and Connectivity in Parliament

An analysis of the surveys conducted for the feasibility study provides insights on the status of ICTs in Parliaments in selected countries. In particular, the analysis presents the status of access and connectivity, the use of ICTs in Parliaments, and gaps and challenges for developing countries.

We will see that the technology, in particular the availability of computers to MPs, varies from country to country, as does the monthly Internet cost of being connected. While the connectivity challenge depends mostly on the availability of funds, the access challenge depends on the availability, not only of funds, but also of skills training. This is what we mean by human access.

Of the countries analysed in terms of access and connectivity, roughly half of the total number of MPs have computers, but many lack access and knowledge about how to use them. For example, all of Benin's 83 MPs have a laptop provided by Parliament, yet only 35 MPs know how to use one. In Bahrain, there are 80 MPs, and less than a quarter of them have laptops or desktops provided by the Parliament. There are a total of 170 PCs with Internet connection available overall in Parliament, but they are used mostly by the 160 parliamentary staff.

In Morocco, only seven desktops are provided to the 595 MPs by Parliament. All of the 150 PCs available in Parliament are used by MPs and are also connected to the Internet by LAN. In Mali, of 147 MPs, roughly 60 per cent are computer literate but only 30 receive laptops and desktops from Parliament. This number is included in the total of 81 PCs available, of which only 68 have Internet connection.

**Table II. Members of Parliaments and Access to PCs with Internet Connection (2005)**

Country	No. of MPs Name of National Legislatures	PCs available in Parliament	PCs connected by Local Area Network (LAN)	PCs with Internet access	Monthly cost for Internet connection (in US dollars)
<b>Bahrain</b>	80 (Consultative Council: 40 House of Representatives: 40)	170	170	170	US \$1,185
<b>Benin</b>	83 National Assembly	50	20	20	US \$2,000
<b>Chile</b>	160 (Senate: 40 Congress: 120)	60 desktops and 60 laptops	120	120	US \$1,000
<b>Egypt</b>	718 (Majlis al-Shaab: 454 Majlis al-Shura: 264)	350	350	350	US \$10,000
<b>India</b>	750 (Lok Sabha: 545 Rajya Sabha: 245)	1,100	1,100	1,100	No cost (borne by the Government of India)
<b>Lebanon</b>	128 (one house: Lebanese Parliament)	200	200	194	No cost (paid by the University of Albany)
<b>Mexico</b>	628 (Senate:128 House of Representatives: 500)	5500 (500 in the Senate and 5000 in the House of Representatives)	5500	5500	No cost (due to special package deal with service provider)
<b>Mozambique</b>	250 (Frelimo deputies: 129 Renamo deputies: 112)	130	0*	6	US \$400
<b>Uganda</b>	303 (86 elected by interest groups)	180	150	150	US \$2,600

On the other hand, all of Lebanon's 128 MPs have desktops provided by Parliament and these also have access to the Internet.

In India, there are approximately 1,100 PCs available for Parliament overall, all of which have access to the Internet. Of the 545 MPs in Lok Sabha, 191 have desktop PCs provided by Parliament. Likewise, of the 245 MPs in the Rajya Sabha, 147 have desktop PCs provided by Parliament. Furthermore, 287 MPs in Lok Sabha and 92 MPs in Rajya Sabha are provided with laptops by Parliament. In addition, 370 MPs in Lok Sabha are provided by Parliament with palmtops that have inbuilt mobile phones.

In Egypt, there are 718 MPs, yet none receive a desktop or laptop from Parliament. For almost 1,000 Parliamentary staff, only 350 Internet-connected PCs are available overall. In fact, in Egypt it was noted that parliamentary assistants use computers more than MPs, apparently because of lack of skills or resources to buy equipment. The level of computer literacy among MPs was estimated to be quite low: around five to 12 percent being computer literate.

In Mexico, on the other hand, more than 5,000 PCs are available for the 128 MPs in the Senate and the 500 MPs in the House of Representatives. The PCs are also all connected to a LAN and have access to the Internet. Nevertheless, it was noted that while many MPs are computer literate, the PCs are used mostly by parliamentary assistants.

In Mozambique, the estimate of MPs who are computer literate is five to 15 percent. In Indonesia half of the 695 MPs are computer literate. In Senegal, there are 160 available PCs for 120 MPs, although only a third of the MPs know how to use a computer. Also, roughly 10 percent of MPs are said to use the overall ICT resources that are available in Parliament.

Regarding monthly costs for Internet connection, there also seem to be striking differences among countries. While Lebanon has an agreement with the University of Albany, and has no monthly Internet costs to pay, Egypt pays a high rate of US \$10,000 per month, even though it has only 350 PCs hooked up to the Internet.

The Parliament in India does not pay for Internet connectivity costs as they are borne by the government of

India. Similarly in Mexico, Congress has free access to the Internet due to a special package established with the service provider who also supplies telephone and cell services.

In Indonesia, the Parliament pays US \$4,000 per month for its almost 1,000 PCs which have access to the Internet. However, due to the slow Internet connection, many MPs have discontinued use of the official system and instead use private Internet Service Providers.

There is a big discrepancy between Benin and Uganda. They pay almost the same monthly cost, and yet Uganda has three times the number of PCs connected to the Internet. Benin has only 20 PCs connected to the Internet, and Internet access costs US \$2,000 per month.

### C. Capacity to Use ICTs in Parliaments

While the data from the surveys is incomplete, one can get a sense of the levels of ICT use in the various Parliaments.

In developing countries, it seems that for daily work purposes, parliamentary staff members use computers more than MPs. Tasks carried out by parliamentary assistants/staff may include using ICTs to assist in financial controls and in managing programmes for delegations and using the Internet for online background research. Roughly half of parliamentary staff in several sample countries have access to computers which they use to search records of all proceedings and to record bills online. Typical tasks carried out by parliamentary staff include searching for petitions and reports of the various committees online and searching for legislative documents via the legislative assembly website. Several surveys showed that parliamentary staff members use PCs with Internet connection on a daily basis to carry out a wide range of activities, such as staff development (for example, e-learning and online toolkits).

MPs are increasingly using ICT tools as well. In Egypt, MPs make use of ICTs to search for legislation and decrees online, and to use database and CD-ROM services. In Lebanon, MPs use ICTs to participate in mailing lists or to run their own list servers. MPs also use the Internet or the Parliament intranet to perform online searches and to design their own personalized websites for campaign/presentation purposes.

Table III. Parliamentary Assistants and Functions Carried out via ICTs (2005)

Country	Number of parliamentary staff or assistants	Parliamentary staff with PCs from the Parliament	Examples of tasks carried out via ICT (PCs connected to Internet, databases)	Frequency of use of PCs for work
Bahrain	160	160	Search records of all proceedings online; search procedural matters involving drafting of motions; record bills for divisions online; search for petitions online; post reports of the various committees online; staff development (i.e., online toolkits, e-learning).	Daily use
Chile	N/A	All	-	Daily use.
Egypt	918	300	Search for procedural matters involving drafting of motions; record bills for divisions online; search for petitions online; search for committee reports online; search a legislative assembly Internet website; search other legislative websites for outreach, publications and promotion of Parliament as an institution.	1-3 days per week.
Indonesia	550	Have access to PCs with Internet connection, although exact number is not known.	-	
Lebanon	150	72	Search records of all proceedings online; record bills for divisions online; search for legislative committee reports online; search legislative websites; database use.	Daily use.
Mexico	3-5 parliamentary assistants per MP (628 MPs total).	All have PCs with access to the Internet.	Search records of all proceedings online; procedural matters involving drafting of motions; record bills for divisions online; search for petitions online; reports of the various committees online; staff development (i.e., online toolkits, e-learning).	Daily use.
Mozambique	22	Have access to PCs but not the Internet.	-	
Senegal	22	Have access to PCs with Internet. Number not known.	-	
India	At least one Parliamentary assistant per MP.	All have PCs with access to the Internet.		Daily use.

In Brazil, MPs use a virtual library where they and their staff can search for computerized parliamentary documents, such as parliamentary proceedings, debates, speeches, and so forth.<sup>49</sup>

In Poland, MPs are adopting technology such as network software to connect to institutions and persons working on similar subjects.<sup>50</sup>

In India, 478 of the 545 MPs of the Lok Sabha use ICT resources made available by Parliament, either directly or with the help of personal staff. Several of the ICT resources available include access to the Parliament LAN/WAN and parliamentary databases.

Many Parliaments, such as in Bahrain, Morocco and Lebanon, are demonstrating their interest in ICTs by providing training for parliamentary staff. Training is also being provided in Egypt, although it was mentioned that the training was too theoretical, and not sufficiently hands-on.

Asked why there is no current, overall implementation strategy for ICT, representatives from Lebanon stated that there was simply a lack of human capacity and skills. Representatives from Egypt said that the lack of an ICT strategy is due to numerous factors, including lack of financial resources, lack of human capacity and skills, an overall sentiment that ICTs do not have a positive impact

on the efficiency of administrative tasks in Parliament and a lack of clarity as to whether there is support from above. In Chile, it was mentioned that the ICT strategy was one component of the overall strategy towards the modernization of Congress, but not the main one.

In sum, parliamentary staff members tend to have more advanced ICT skills than MPs, enabling them to facilitate the work of the latter in Parliament. MPs' limited use of ICTs is due to several factors, including lack of familiarity and confidence in the use of the new tools. This issue needs to be addressed through specialized capacity building. In particular, since parliamentary staff members operate as *de facto* knowledge brokers for MPs, any capacity building efforts should also address the development of MPs' information and knowledge management skills — not just technology.

#### D. Parliamentary Outreach via ICTs

A Parliament's representative function is crucial. A question in the survey asked, "Why it is important for citizens to interact with their MPs?" The answer given at the Parliament in Egypt was, "to improve the link between the legislature and the public to enhance democratic drive, accountability and transparency."

The survey made a distinction between one-way and two-way communication. The latter promotes citizen feedback and engages the citizenry in dialogues on social, political and economic affairs.

##### 1. One-way communication

One-way communication uses sources of information such as newspapers, radios and posters, to name a few. Other sources, such as letters and phones, can be viewed as both one-way and two-way communication. For example, if the phone is used for campaign purposes, this would constitute a one-way form of communication. Phones and letters can also be interactive if there is feedback shared between the two actors involved.

In terms of this analysis, most developing country respondents selected newspapers, personal field visits, TV and letters as the standard means of one-way communication. In Mozambique, it was stated that 50 percent of communication was carried out via letters, 80 percent via phone and 90 percent via personal contacts between the constituency and their MPs. Mozambique

does not have a Parliament email in use, and the percentage of political constituents with access to email is very small. A project that is being developed is an Internet café for parliamentarians.

In Benin, MPs were said to use the phone most to contact constituents (50 percent), followed by personal contacts (40 percent), and finally via writing letters (10 percent). In Mali, the standard methods of communication were shown as 25 percent via letters, 35 percent via phone, 25 percent through personal contacts, and 15 percent via email.

The findings indicate that Senegal has one of the highest rates of politically interested constituents using email: 25 percent, and this is increasing.

##### 2. Two-way communication

Two-way outreach communication implies an interaction between two actors (or sources) where an individual has the opportunity not only to become aware of a particular issue, but also to comment on it. In terms of a two-way outreach mechanism, most developing countries selected correspondence with constituents via letters and telephone. Bahrain seemed to be the one with the most advanced two-way communication methods including websites, e-discussions and web-casting.

Respondents also mentioned that interaction between MPs and their constituents helps them become familiar with local issues in the community. It also helps them formulate questions when representing the interests of constituents in Parliament, and it narrows the physical gap between them and the public.

For constituents, the interaction helps them identify their MPs in the future and informs them of the resources and services existing at the local government level. Asked what are the key issues constituents want to discuss with their MPs, respondents' replies included local politics, poverty, community healthcare centres and housing. MPs in Poland, for example, have embarked on e-democracy initiatives by holding e-discussions with citizens on issues, such as the preparation of certain laws. Costa Rica's parliamentary website holds e-dialogues with the public, (*dialogos con el pueblo*) on issues such as fiscal reform and social capital in cooperatives around the country.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. Access and connectivity as obstacles for constituents

Several sample countries stated that email encourages more open comments on governmental activities from constituents than ordinary mail. Indeed, all countries demonstrated their desire to increase the use of email and other communication software by their politically-oriented constituencies. Such constituencies will be in a more informed position if they take advantage of available online resources to provide more critical feedback on government activities and responsibilities.

Still, the main challenges for the public to interact with MPs include lack of access and connectivity. In Egypt, for example, the politically interested constituency that uses email makes up only 1 percent of the population.

## III. Development of e-Parliament Strategies

This section assesses the development of e-Parliament strategies, specifically looking at policy, strategic issues and potential costs.

### A. Development of National Strategies

**Bahrain** has advanced substantially in e-Parliament by envisaging, developing and implementing an e-Parliament strategy whose estimated cost is US \$1 million. The e-Parliament plan entails the development and adoption of software applications and the training of staff. Five to 10 percent of Bahrain's annual budget is already being allocated to ICTs. The average level of computer literacy is already quite high compared to other countries in the region. MPs already make use of ICTs through operational correspondence via email to other government staff and public bodies, running their own mailing lists, searching for publicly available legislation, decrees and other resources online, as well as conducting e-discussions and e-voting and using web-cast tools. Bahrain has advanced quite a bit in terms of knowledge management with the use of a digital library, networking with other MPs, participation in virtual Parliaments through e-forums and other knowledge mechanisms such as fairs and bulletin boards.

**Egypt** established an e-Parliament strategy from 2001 to 2005, which cost approximately US \$1.5 million. The plan included the development of software applications for content management of minutes and legislative documents.

**India** has been focusing on the computerization of Parliament since 1985. The estimated cost of computerization for 2005-2006 is about US \$1.4 million.

**Lesotho**, in cooperation with UNDP and DFID, has established an e-Parliament project known as *e-Governance for Parliamentary Capacity Strengthening in Lesotho* which aims to increase the ICT facilities in Parliament, and also the transparency of parliamentary processes and citizen participation. The project aims to develop Lesotho's parliamentary website, in particular by increasing the Parliament's legislative and oversight functions in order to build trust with the public and enhance parliamentary democracy. This e-Parliament strategy has also been incorporated into the country's poverty reduction strategy and the long-term national vision. One of the objectives of the project will be to support the Parliament's oversight role in addressing HIV/AIDS and poverty.<sup>52</sup>

**Mali** already uses the Internet in its commissions and political parties, and Parliament is currently cooperating with NEPAD to establish an e-Parliament strategy. UNESCO is also supporting a project to develop a database and archive to store electronic resources. Several documents, such as constitutions, internal regulations and party statutes are already online. Parliamentarians have gone on a study tour to Senegal to learn more about the potential of ICTs to empower Parliaments. Training sessions took place where 60 percent of MPs were trained, as well as all of the administrative staff.

**Morocco** has already implemented, in cooperation with UNDP, an e-Parliament strategy that includes the development of software applications. It will cost around US \$2.4 million.

**Senegal** has also demonstrated interest in developing an e-Parliament strategy, specifically regarding the development of a digital library. ICTs are already being used to facilitate the oversight function, in particular the retrieval of government information.

**Uganda** has envisaged an e-Parliament development strategy (with support from UNDESA) which would include the use of specialized software to facilitate the exchange of resources between Parliaments. The estimated cost is US\$1.2 million.

## B. International Networking

On the subject of parliamentarians networking with other MPs on the international level, most respondents were very positive. They indicated that the input MPs would find most useful includes examples of best practices, innovative policy ideas, model legislation, international conventions, treaties, and, lastly, information on political campaign methods. Uganda already has experience in institutional networking through a project with UNDESA and the Pan-African Parliament. Indonesia is already participating in the ASEAN Parliament which is also supported by UNDP. Egypt mentioned that it would be very interested in having e-discussions on topics such as a women's network, an inter-faith network, a sub-regional network and a South-South network. India has already established several regional Parliaments, called State Assemblies, which are connected to the federal Parliament via the use of ICT. There is also a national plan to link all State Assemblies to the Parliament of India.

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**If the actual aim is to enhance democracy and democratic values, Parliaments can take the lead by developing e-Parliament strategies that carefully consider concrete ways to interact and network with constituents, particularly young people.**

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Despite such enthusiasm, some countries were concerned about how a networking initiative at the global level would function. A number of questions were asked. Would members have to pay a specific contribution every year? Would the network be open or closed to non-MPs? Would it be moderated, and if so, by whom?

## IV. National e-Parliaments: Challenges and Gaps

As described above, key challenges and gaps exist for Parliaments in both developed and developing countries, albeit of a different nature.

In developed countries, Parliaments have only recently started to adopt technology for the improvement of their work, in most cases through the initiative of innovator MPs. However, Parliaments still need to reflect on, and adopt, a coherent strategy so that ICT deployment can target the three core functions of Parliaments and be accessible to all MPs — not just the few who happen to know how to use it. Moreover, progress has been made mostly in the legislation functions of Parliament and to a lesser extent in the oversight and representation functions.

Indeed, the real potential of the new ICTs seems likely to have the largest impact on the representation function. If the actual aim is to enhance democracy and democratic values, Parliaments can take the lead by developing e-Parliament strategies that carefully consider concrete ways to interact and network with constituents, particularly young people. Although, for the moment, Parliaments are still in the phase where one-way access to information is the main use of parliamentary websites, there are quite a few innovative initiatives for promoting more feedback and participation from the public.

In developing countries, Parliaments are facing more dramatic challenges and will have to close wider gaps. First of all, there is the issue of access and connectivity. Most of the population does not have access to ICTs of any kind. However, new, low-cost technologies are now being deployed and are targeting some of the poorest sectors of the population. The example of cell phone growth in Africa clearly reflects this trend.

Secondly, there are large capacity development gaps. This is not just a question of lack of ICT skills and expertise but also of local management, business and research capacities, to name just a few. This can also be seen within Parliaments where most MPs do not have the required training to use ICTs effectively and might also not be able to find staff to assist them with access and knowledge management.

Thirdly, the development of an e-Parliament strategy needs to be incorporated into an overall national PRS process, or into the general strengthening of government institutions, as in the case of Lesotho. From the examples shared in this report, it can be seen that there has been an increasing number of projects and initia-

tives with an ICT component designed to enhance the Parliament's activities.

Fourthly, in many cases e-Parliament projects have not really focused on strengthening the three main functions of Parliaments in a systematic way. In some cases, a technology-driven approach has prevailed. While this applies to all countries, it is more serious in developing countries where resources and capacities are scarce and thus failure could represent a serious setback.

Proposals for establishing sub-regional, regional and global e-Parliament initiatives are welcome and can only strengthen the role that national Parliaments can, and should, play at those levels. However, these initiatives must take into account the sharp differences between developed and developing countries in order to effectively build an international network of MPs. It will be very difficult to accomplish this goal if national focal points or networks do not exist or do not have the capacity to be part of the global network to which they should belong.

# Chapter III: Feasibility of the e-parl.net Initiative

## 1. Overall assessment of e-parl.net:

This feasibility study originated with a request by members of the European Parliament to the European Commission to fund e-Parliament, a global/international forum referred to in this study as e-parl.net to avoid confusion with the generic term.

### A. Background

The e-parl.net initiative has grown out of the basic consideration of rapid, recent progress in three main areas:

1. Democracy. Considerable advances in democracy have been made in recent years, as more than four billion human beings are now considered to live in comparatively democratic states.
2. Technology advances permit considerably easier local and global communications, thanks to the Internet, mobile telephones, etc.
3. Globalization. Considerably closer interdependence has been created among economic actors at the global level.

The concept of e-parl.net involves providing support to the world's 25,000 parliamentarians through modest investments in the enhanced use of ICTs. This includes issue-related knowledge networks that provide access to pertinent information resources as well as individual contacts among parliamentarians in different countries who might be facing similar problems.

### B. Plan of Action

1. Invite all of the 25,000 parliamentarians in the world to participate in knowledge sharing, discussions and interaction through the Internet, conference calls and face-to-face meetings.
2. Create an interactive site: [www.e-parl.net](http://www.e-parl.net) to be used as a vehicle for information sharing principally among parliamentarians, but also open to experts, the media and the general public.
3. Promote the spreading of democracy through a process steered by an e-parl.net Council and Secretariat, and by specially created committees to manage each issue network and support discussions through active mediation and facilitation.
4. Help legislators formulate e-Parliament priorities and policy targets through online polls.

e-parl.net defines itself as "a non-profit, public-private enterprise" registered in the US and the UK. It calls itself a global forum and has established a Council composed of MPs and non-MPs, supported by a Secretariat.

e-parl.net has been operating for four years. During this time it has established a network, raised funds for initial activities and laid the foundations for a comprehensive website. The concept was initially operationalized through thematic exercises on climate change and energy and space security.

Until now, however, the funds raised have not been sufficient to launch a “live” website. Therefore, the e-parl.net Council decided to approach the EU for financial support. The EU in turn decided to support the preparation of the present feasibility study which aims to assess the proposal and provide recommendations for future action.

### C. Feedback from MPs

It is clear from the feedback received from MPs that there is interest in the e-parl.net initiative among some of them. Having said this, the number of MPs who will participate in the network in the initial phase will probably be limited. If the initiative proves to be useful to these MPs, participation will no doubt increase.

e-parl.net has already identified a few issues that could be of interest to MPs, such as energy, and information is currently being uploaded to the website. Feedback from MPs in this respect is crucial, as preconceived ideas are unlikely to generate significant follow-up from parliamentarians at the global level.

### D. Examples of knowledge sharing

There are many instances where MPs need specific information in order to draft a particular piece of legislation. For example, in a country in the process of drafting a Freedom of Information Act, the problem is to find a balance between the demands of civil society in support of strong legislation, and civil servants who are less interested in a strong, intrusive Freedom of Information Act. Relevant advice was obtained from MPs in countries that had recently gone through this process.

In another example, a country’s MPs wanted to introduce environmental laws protecting citizens from additives in food and similar consumer goods. The question was how to find the right balance among stakeholders, including international treaties and WTO obligations, the requirements of export markets, local and international business interests and consumers. Politically useful advice was provided by fellow MPs from different countries.

Finally, several Parliaments have attempted to create interactive mechanisms on their websites with the aim of targeting young people. The main objective is to trigger interest and fundamentally enhance participation on issues that have an impact on society.

### E. Lessons learned from similar networks

One could compare the e-parl.net knowledge network proposal with two UNDP initiatives, one at the global level: Knowledge Networks, and one at the national level: India’s Solutions Exchange. Both networks are intended to help one community of persons. UNDP’s “community of practices” aims primarily to provide support to UNDP development practitioners.

While the UNDP Solutions Exchange is e-mail based, the e-parl.net solution is essentially web-based, which adds to its cost. Another difference is the limited staff servicing the UNDP network in India, whereas e-parl.net is intended to become a large support network.

Unlike the UNDP networks, e-parl.net aims, in principle, to cater to the highest officials in a country, thus requiring a mechanism to guarantee the veracity of information. The UNDP networks are generally based more on personal experiences and subjective appreciations than on hard core facts.

While the UNDP networks serve an already functioning community that works within reasonably defined parameters, e-parl.net aims to create new networks that have diverse members (in terms of experience, language, and such) but who have similar jobs and a sense of collegiality.

It would be opportune for e-parl.net to exchange information on best practices and lessons learned with the Knowledge Network facilitators at UNDP, specifically on ways to enhance knowledge sharing among MPs.

An even more important experience to compare notes with is the VP (Virtual Parliament) of FIPA, the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas. FIPA proposed an initiative very similar to e-parl.net, in that it links parliamentarians through electronic networks and its Executive Committee holds virtual (electronic) meetings.

An evaluation of the VP was carried out in September 2003 and provides very useful insights in the context of e-parl.net.<sup>53</sup> For example, it posed a key question based on experiences collected during the first year of the Virtual Parliament: “Is it best to encourage virtual communications at the outset or is it better to wait until relationships have been built?”

The evaluation produced several findings of interest:

- » Any international electronic network is only a very small part of an MP's agenda.
- » If a network is to hold the interest of MPs, it must be flexible.
- » Very rapid turnover of MPs, including extended absenteeism, must be foreseen in planning an electronic network.
- » An MP's first experience with a network must be positive; otherwise there is a risk of serious loss of membership.
- » Language and translation are very serious constraints, often putting off MPs if tools are not provided fast enough and are not of sufficiently high quality.
- » Full-time staff is indispensable to maintain the webpage and carry out functions such as network mediator/facilitator, but staff members need to be given sufficient attention from the outset.
- » The problem of access to ICTs in developing countries must be confronted head on.

Many of these lessons are already built into e-parl.net. However, it is important that e-parl.net consults FIPA to ensure that lessons learned are incorporated before e-parl.net is officially launched.

#### F. Ideas Bank

Over and above the knowledge networks, or, as e-parl.net calls them, "issue-based networks," e-parl.net has developed the feature of an Ideas Bank for parliamentarians:

When registering with e-parl.net, MPs will be asked to indicate their interest in specific policy areas. In consultation with the e-parl.net Council and MPs, the Secretariat will develop a list of ideas. These will then be researched and discussed through the networks, consolidated by experts on the subject and uploaded to the e-parl.net website.

It is not clear whether in the long run an Ideas Bank is the best way to provide knowledge and information to

MPs and others. It is possible that established networks will develop positively and that completed network discussions do not need to be formalized into an Ideas Bank. However, the Ideas Bank could prove to be useful in the short term as a means to attract MPs' interest and participation in the network. Attentive monitoring and evaluation will be required to make sure the Ideas Bank is serving its purpose. (See below)

A more general problem was raised by many MPs from developing countries. Many developing country Parliaments have only rudimentary libraries, databases and research facilities and thus have very limited capacity and access to knowledge resources. This is an issue that goes beyond the Ideas Bank.

Many MPs interviewed expressed considerable interest in having one internationally recognized database to hold information needed by MPs for their daily work. Information could include all international treaties and conventions and information from international organisations, etc., in an easily accessible format. Many expressed the wish that such a database could be made available by e-parl.net. Thus, there could be a Global Virtual Library/Research Facility for Parliamentarians resembling the Development Foundation Gateway which provides knowledge resources to development practitioners. Also, there could be a mechanism whereby one could contribute resources and ideas.

#### F. Issues at stake

##### *Confidentiality*

Many MPs expressed interest in participating in discussions over the Internet with fellow MPs, but expressed serious reservations as to whether it would be appropriate to let non-MPs participate.

For democracy to work it must be open to as large a public as possible. On the other hand, MPs are public figures. Where they get their information can easily be misused by their "colleagues," the media and the public. Political, strategic and tactical discussions within political parties probably need to take place away from the public space, and discussions among MPs on substantive issues may have to be kept "for MPs only." In fact, in some instances, e-parl.net will also be using conference calls to communicate with MPs. Intranets and private websites can also

be developed where MPs can have specific dialogues which are not accessible to the public.

#### *“Democratic regimes”*

e-parl.net intends to deal with “democratic regimes.” One should, however, keep in mind that MPs from repressive regimes may make positive contributions to discussions inside e-parl.net. Whether such MPs should be excluded from decisions inside e-parl.net is best left to the leaders of this forum.

Whether or not democratic change in a country is best accomplished by keeping that country outside “democratic regional or global groupings” is debatable. Most conventional wisdom today claims that being inside under consistent peer pressure to change and comply with increasingly stringent rules is comparatively effective. A case in point was the Helsinki process and the USSR. Myanmar’s participation in ASEAN is another example. It is, however, not yet clear which approach is the most efficient time-wise.

It may indeed be judicious to establish an organisation such as e-parl.net to work more or less in parallel with the IPU to advance democracy. This can be compared to the fact that UNDP could publish the first Human Development Reports critical of many governments, while its parent, the UN, could not have done so at that time. At any rate, it is strongly advised that e-parl.net maintain close contact with the IPU to avoid competition and/or overlapping.

#### *Continued evaluation and monitoring*

Only time will tell if e-parl.net will be sustainable in the long term. This feasibility study seeks to establish coherent parameters and conditions to enable the EU Commission to respond to the request to finance the initiative. But for the initiative to be successful, strong inner discipline must be applied.

In the organigram on page 82 of the 2004 presentation document<sup>54</sup> there is no indication of an evaluation service, yet its creation is considered important for the exercise to work. There ought to be independent monitoring and evaluation of activities, maintained through constant feedback from participants, as well as through question-

naires, e-mail follow up, etc. The evaluation exercise of FIPA proves this point, as several of the presumptions in the initial scheme did not hold true in practice.

The evaluation/monitoring service should report directly to the e-parl.net Council, thus ensuring that the integrity of the information is high and that remedial corrective action, when needed, is taken. The function could be combined with an independent audit function that would also report to the Council. Appointments to these posts should be approved by the Council, to add to the credibility of the operation.

#### *National vs. global*

Parliaments are still national institutions (although nowadays there are examples of regional Parliaments) and MPs are primarily involved at the national level. Thus, the global or trans-national scope of e-parl.net should be seen as a supplement to the core activities of Parliaments in enhancing national democracies, particularly in developing countries.

#### **G. Conclusions**

Many aspects of the proposal to establish a global communication network principally to serve the world’s parliamentarians have considerable merit. Furthermore, the proposal to establish e-parl.net with the suggested features and structures has come at an opportune time. It is seen as a potentially important contribution for empowering parliamentarians and advancing democracy, especially in developing countries.

On the other hand, e-parl.net cannot claim a monopoly; indeed, it is clear that there are risks involved which might make the enterprise redundant. It would be judicious, therefore, to go ahead cautiously and build upon experience before going full-scale. This is the approach suggested by e-parl.net itself in the documents mentioned.

One recommendation is to finance the operation for an initial period of three years, while ensuring close continued monitoring and evaluation of the start-up phase. If the start-up phase is deemed successful, a further contribution from the EU to the operation should be foreseen.

# Chapter IV: Conclusions and the Way Forward

## I. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the previous chapters, the report presented an analytical framework to study the status of the use of ICTs in Parliaments at the national, regional and global levels. Specific results for both developed and developing countries have been presented as well as a detailed discussion on the status of the e-parl.net global initiative.

The report has also identified critical challenges, gaps and opportunities that the deployment of an e-Parliament initiative faces today. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Substantial interest exists in Parliaments and among many MPs to use ICTs to enhance the three core functions of Parliaments: legislation, representation and oversight. This is reflected in the increasing number of Parliaments that are adopting the new ICTs to promote their work. However, national public funding is usually not readily available; hence, donor funded initiatives are welcomed by national stakeholders.
2. Most Parliaments, especially those in developing countries, do not have and are not considering designing and implementing long-term e-Parliament strategies. Although this is less true in rich countries, the deployment of ICT in Parliaments has often been pushed by a handful of ICT-aware MPs (mostly men) or IT departments within Parliament. In most cases, no real institutional support exists for these efforts.
3. In general, e-Parliaments are neither part of national ICT for Development strategies nor of e-government programmes. (In a few cases, deploying ICTs in Parliaments has been part of the effort to modernize the public sector.) As a result, most Parliaments, especially in the developing world, lag behind other institutions and organizations.
4. It could be of critical importance to establish policy and programmatic links between e-Parliament initiatives and the completion and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies and/or the achievement of the MDGs. After all, Parliaments are supposed to play a crucial role in the latter when it comes to legislation and oversight.
5. There is still a large gender divide within Parliaments. Women are still a small minority in the institution and the introduction of ICTs in an ad hoc fashion could exacerbate the gap as women usually have fewer opportunities to innovate in the ICT field. Thus, e-Parliament strategies should openly address the divide, create awareness and provide ways in which ICTs can help close the gender gap.
6. There is agreement among ICT experts and ICT-aware MPs that the greatest potential of ICT use in Parliaments would be in the core function of representation. The new tools provide affordable and manageable ways to involve constituencies

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## It is essential to view the role of ICTs in empowering Parliaments and MPs in the broader context of parliamentary development.

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more closely and effectively through two-way communication tools. This in itself will further promote democratic values, transparency and accountability in Parliaments and restore their credibility, especially among young people.

7. As expected, developing countries are facing greater challenges and gaps when it comes to deploying e-Parliament programmes and activities. These range from lack of access and connectivity to the need for local capacity development to issues related to the promotion of democracy, good governance and citizen participation.
8. In contrast with developed countries, there are no systematic studies or research on the situation of e-Parliaments in developing countries. Although it is possible to find research on specific countries, no comparative studies are available.
9. Most MPs agree that increased South-South and North-South cooperation will benefit their activities at the national level. In particular, MPs agree that Parliaments should have the capacity to easily and effectively exchange knowledge and expertise, not only on technical details about e-Parliament but also on how they undertake the three core functions of the institution.
10. The e-parl.net proposal was welcomed by the MPs interviewed in this study. Most, in particular those in developing countries, felt that it should go ahead, especially if complemented by efforts to help MPs have access to ICTs within their own Parliaments.

### II. The Way Forward

Deploying ICT systems of any kind is essential for many Parliaments but it is just one part of the overall equation. Making institutions more efficient is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for fostering enhanced participation

and networking of MPs and ordinary citizens on critical development and governance issues.

It is thus essential to view the role of ICTs in empowering Parliaments and MPs in the broader context of parliamentary development. In a nutshell, the latter aims to strengthen the role Parliaments can play in the many governance issues at stake in developing countries by strengthening their three core functions.

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the report recommends the formulation and implementation of a **Global Programme to Empower Parliaments through enhanced use of ICTs in developing countries**.

The programme will be comprised of the following elements:

1. ICTs to foster national parliamentary development in developing countries
2. The need to proceed cautiously and assess success
3. Partnerships and fund raising strategy
4. Implementation arrangements and governance of the Global Programme
5. ICTs to foster national parliamentary development in developing countries

This component of the Global Programme will focus on national activities to support, through ICTs, the main functions of Parliaments in developing countries. In particular, this should address the following issues:

Legislation:

- » Development of ICT and Knowledge Management strategies for Parliaments, connected to national ICTD and e-government strategies.

#### Representation:

- » Creation and/or strengthening of thematic networks among MPs and between MPs and constituencies.
- » Fostering enhanced two-way interactions between MPs and constituencies and between Parliaments and the public in general, to increase the involvement and participation of stakeholders in relevant processes.
- » Creation and strengthening of new and dynamic means of communication, such as dynamic and interactive websites, on line forums and broadcasting and multimedia technology combined with traditional means of communication.

#### Overall support to the three main functions of Parliaments:

- » Development, support and implementation of open standards<sup>55</sup> to facilitate parliamentary information exchange and dissemination.
- » Support to ongoing “informatization” processes of Parliaments.
- » Capacity development of MPs in both the use of new ICT tools and in the management of information and knowledge resources.
- » Development of medium and long-term sustainability plans for e-Parliaments.

#### Elements of each national component of the Global Programme could include:

- A. Feasibility studies: This will be the entry point for any country selected under the criteria established by the Global Programme. The feasibility study will provide the required, up-to-date information and materials to create a national e-Parliament programme and lead to the disbursement of resources. Wherever possible, feasibility studies could be run simultaneously in several countries to create a standardized assessment tool and develop comparative studies.
- B. Access and connectivity, including e-assessments: As two of the main challenges faced by developing countries, issues of access and connectivity should be addressed from the outset. Most countries now have e-readiness assessments which can be used to provide benchmarks for the Global Programme. A **Compendium of ICT Solutions** from different countries could be established so that countries in need do not have to start from zero. The UNDESA project in Africa, among others, has already established a number of requirements which could serve as a basis for this.
- C. End-user equipment and tools for MPs: while most ongoing e-Parliament projects give preference to the deployment of PCs and laptops, the Global Programme will also consider, based on A and B above, other options such as smart phones or wireless networks. Decisions will ultimately be made on the basis of consultations with MPs and Parliament staff. At any rate, recent ICT innovations and trends indicate that mobile technologies are likely to become pervasive, at least in the short run.
- D. Development and customization of e-Parliament applications: Some Parliaments have already developed and deployed adequate ICT solutions to their business needs. Although Parliaments differ, they all share the three core operational functions. In principle, therefore, there should be no need to reinvent the wheel. Awareness raising may be required, as Parliaments protect their independence, and they may not necessarily be interested in using systems developed for other countries and circumstances. The other key point is the promotion of open standards for e-Parliament applications. Free/Open Source Software, which is increasingly being used in Africa, could also be considered. Finally, twinning arrangements among Parliaments should be fostered. Many developed country Parliaments have considerable experience to share and Parliament to Parliament, speaker to speaker, and clerk to clerk relations are among the most interesting avenues for doing this.
- E. Capacity building for MPs and information campaigns: This aspect is perhaps the core item of the overall Global Programme. It should address

not only the traditional ICT training of MPs and parliamentary staff, but also capacity building in knowledge management, information dissemination and the use of ICTs to promote broader participation and engagement with constituencies, government officials and institutions. Also, special attention would be paid to women in Parliament and to empowering them to use ICTs. This can be complemented through targeted information and awareness raising campaigns for MPs, political party staff, media, government institutions and the general public on how to exploit existing ICT applications.

This study has obtained specific indications of what is needed in this area, and the number of Parliaments that would need to be included in such a programme could be large. Thus, detailed cost estimates cannot be presented without undertaking local feasibility studies in each Parliament. It is, however, possible to develop overall estimates for the cost of the components of the Global Programme, based on the information gathered during the study.

Based on this information the average investment per Parliament can be estimated at 1 million Euros, ranging from a low cost programme in a country like Mozambique (0.5 million Euros) to a larger and more costly programme in a country like Egypt (1.2 million Euros). The figure of 1 million Euros is a rough estimate and should be revised after a number of individual national feasibility studies have been undertaken.

As the major part of the investment will initially take place in ACP countries, and assuming that an initial phase of a programme could include up to 60 developing country Parliaments over five years, a budget of 60 million Euros for this budget item should be foreseen. Part of this could be financed by the EU while other donor institutions, bilateral or multilateral, should be expected to finance the remainder, especially in non-ACP countries. The composition of investment budgets will vary from country to country, as expected.

The Global Programme will thus adopt a modular approach in which the number of countries it can support can be increased and managed as new resources flow to support it. It is also expected that the second and subsequent batch of countries to be supported by the

Global Programme will benefit from the experiences and lessons learned from the first batch.

## 2. The need to proceed cautiously and assess success

Many aspects of the proposal to establish a global communication network principally to serve the world's parliamentarians have considerable merit. It is, however, an area where e-parl.net cannot claim a monopoly and it is also clear that there is risk involved which might make the enterprise redundant. Political mistakes, misunderstandings or opposition from various quarters might also undermine the credibility of the exercise.

It would, therefore, be judicious to go ahead cautiously and build upon experience before going full scale. This is indeed the approach suggested by e-parl.net itself.

It is suggested to follow the recommendation of e-parl.net in the 2004 presentation document, allocating €5,850,000 to the operation of e-parl.net for three years.

It would, however, be prudent to build in conditions through a system of annual assessments and subsequent approval of continuation for the Global Programme by the Steering Committee. This should be simplified to include objectives achieved or not achieved, new ideas and, of course, continued evaluation of the actual use of the services made available by e-parl.net.

A more extensive assessment should be carried out after 2 ½ years for approval at the third year session of the Steering Committee. If positive, this assessment would trigger an expansion of the funding to go full scale as of the fourth year of operations (2009). If, after a few years, e-parl.net shows itself to be successful, it would certainly attract additional funding, thus decreasing the need for further EU funding.

Such assessments should consequently become an integral part of the proposed Global Programme to Empower Parliaments through enhanced use of ICTs.

## 3. Partnerships and fundraising strategy

The Global Programme will aim to identify other planned and/or existing e-Parliament initiatives in order to avoid duplication and, instead, build on ongoing projects and initiatives. Partnerships will thus be an important piece of the implementation process. A good example here

is UNDESA's work on e-Parliaments in Africa. Others include regional and global institutions and organizations that have already established traditional networks among MPs and could be helpful in disseminating existing knowledge and strengthening networks. This will be complemented by a fundraising strategy aimed at bi-lateral and multi-lateral development agencies interested in supporting e-Parliaments, who could be approached as soon as the project is approved.

#### 4. Implementation arrangements and governance of the Global Programme

To ensure rapid implementation, the Global Programme should be entrusted to one international body held responsible for its progress. This body's main tasks will be to disseminate information on the existence of the programme; engage national Parliaments in the undertaking; solicit requests for funding from national Parliaments; arrange for feasibility studies to be carried out and support the implementation of the programme at the national level, while reporting on progress to the central body responsible for the overall management of the programme.

A Programme Management Unit with a full-time programme manager at its head should be put in place. The manager will hold a contract with the international body to execute the Global Programme.

The elaboration of this report has benefited from the inputs and advice of an international Steering Committee composed of MPs and MEPs. A similar mechanism will be used for the implementation of the Global Programme. Since practical feedback from parliamentarians themselves has been the most useful input to the feasibility study, involving end-users in the actual implementation of the programme seems only logical.

The Programme Manager, in coordination with the executing body, will be responsible for organizing Steering Committee meetings and will report all activities to the Steering Committee.

At the national level where e-Parliament programmes will be deployed, National Steering Committees will also be established and will be chaired by a representative from Parliament. National Steering Committees will also include representatives of interested donor organizations. The Secretariat function could be undertaken by one of the following: the EU Delegation, UNDP, a major donor in this area, or by Parliament itself.

The Programme Manager and management team will also be responsible for commissioning the production of comparative studies on e-Parliaments, using outputs and activities coming from the field. Finally, the team will also undertake impact assessment studies and produce best practice and lessons learned reports to be share with the global community.

#### 5. Proposed five-year budget, targeting 60 countries

ICT National Parliaments	60,000,000
eparl.net	5,580,000
partnerships	500,000
Implementation Arrangements	4,500,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>70,850,000</b>

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The sequence of the development of this feasibility study has been:
1. Launch of the study (October 2004)
  2. Inception report, (November 2004)
  3. Desk Study (Status Report on e-Parliament) (December 2004)
  4. Steering Committee meeting (24 January 2005)
  5. Collection of data from Parliaments (February through June 2005)
  6. Drafting the current report.(May-June 2005)
  7. Workshop and presentation of draft report (11 July 2005)
- <sup>2</sup> UNDP *Practice Note on Parliamentary Development* (April 2003) <http://www.undp.org/governance/parldev/docs/parldeveng.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> See Annex I for a more detailed discussion on this subject as well as some relevant examples.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/summary.asp?id=rhodes1996>
- <sup>5</sup> Most of those who undertake ICT innovations in Parliaments are men. This is in part due to the existing “gender divide” in almost all Parliaments in the world. See Annex III for data on this.
- <sup>6</sup> For more examples on ICT in Parliament, see Annexes
- <sup>7</sup> *Parliamentary Futures: Representing the Issue – Information, Technology and the Dynamics of Democracy* by Bert Mulder, (1999) page 561.
- <sup>8</sup> *Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process and the MDGs – Legislative Public Outreach on Poverty Issues*, UNDP in cooperation with NDI (2004)
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>12</sup> UNDP *Parliamentary Development – Internal Organization of the Legislative Branch*
- <sup>13</sup> Accenture’s 2005 study, *Leadership in Customer Service: New Expectations, New Experiences*, constitutes its sixth annual global report on government service delivery. The study also stated that “over the past 12 months, 57% of respondents had used the telephone to interact with government, as opposed to only 22% who had used the Internet. Yet, despite its popularity, the telephone is consistently ranked as the least easy form of communication across all countries surveyed.” This suggests that service delivery has to adjust more to the needs of the people; it has to be user-friendly by providing easy, hands-on capacity building assistance tools.
- <sup>14</sup> [www.parlanepad.org/](http://www.parlanepad.org/)
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.undp.org/surf-wa/nepad/Parliamentarians/docsfr/Panel2.htm>
- <sup>16</sup> [http://www.undp.org/surf-wa/nepad/Parliamentarians/docsen/e-Parliamenten.htm#\\_ftn1](http://www.undp.org/surf-wa/nepad/Parliamentarians/docsen/e-Parliamenten.htm#_ftn1)
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.africa-union.org/organs/pan%20african%20Parliament/GUIDELINEPAP.htm>
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.sadcpf.org/about/index.asp>
- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.undp.org/governance/parldev/docs/mpsorient.doc>
- <sup>20</sup> [http://www.europarl.eu.int/intcoop/acp/10\\_01/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.eu.int/intcoop/acp/10_01/default_en.htm)
- <sup>21</sup> <http://www.pogar.org>

- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.appf.org.pe/>
- <sup>23</sup> <http://www.eapf.net>
- <sup>24</sup> [www.innovazione.gov.it/ita/news/centro\\_studi/egov/edemocracy/allegati/Euniv.Institute04.pdf](http://www.innovazione.gov.it/ita/news/centro_studi/egov/edemocracy/allegati/Euniv.Institute04.pdf)
- <sup>25</sup> <http://assembly.coe.int/>
- <sup>26</sup> <http://www.oscepa.org/>
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.oscepa.org/index.aspx?articleid=+502>
- <sup>28</sup> [http://www.parlcent.ca/fipa\\_e.php](http://www.parlcent.ca/fipa_e.php)
- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.parlatino.org>
- <sup>30</sup> [portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=9383&URL\\_DO=DO\\_PRINTPAGE&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=9383&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.parlamentoandino.org/>
- <sup>32</sup> [http://www.undp.org/surf-panama/docs/Parliamentary\\_development.doc](http://www.undp.org/surf-panama/docs/Parliamentary_development.doc)
- <sup>33</sup> <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20273888~pagePK:34370~piPK:42768~theSitePK:4607,00.html>
- <sup>34</sup> [http://www.cpahq.org/WorldBankParliamentarianGuide-FeedbackSheet\\_pdf\\_media\\_public.aspx](http://www.cpahq.org/WorldBankParliamentarianGuide-FeedbackSheet_pdf_media_public.aspx)
- <sup>35</sup> *Parliamentarians & ICTs: Awareness, Understanding and Activity Levels of Parliamentarians*, European Parliaments Research Initiative, January 2005  
[http://www.epri.org/epriweb/contents/7thconference\\_mat/200503\\_07\\_D101\\_EPRI\\_First\\_Study\\_final\\_resent.pdf](http://www.epri.org/epriweb/contents/7thconference_mat/200503_07_D101_EPRI_First_Study_final_resent.pdf)
- <sup>36</sup> Sweden's Parliamentary website: <http://www.riksdagen.se/>
- <sup>37</sup> *Evaluation of the Use of New Technologies in Order to Facilitate Democracy in Europe – e-democratizing the Parliaments and Political Parties of Europe*, by Alexander Trechshel, University of Geneva, Raphael Kies, Fernando Mendez, Philippe Schmitter, European University Institute, Florence (October 2003) [http://c2d.unige.ch/int/OverviewInstits/Main\\_Report\\_final%201.pdf](http://c2d.unige.ch/int/OverviewInstits/Main_Report_final%201.pdf)
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>42</sup> Telewest Study (2005) UK [http://www.telewest.co.uk/business/resourcecentre/research/epolitics\\_survey.pdf](http://www.telewest.co.uk/business/resourcecentre/research/epolitics_survey.pdf)
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>44</sup> A digital signature is a "stamp" which can be placed on data so that changes to the data cannot go undetected.
- <sup>45</sup> Free or Open Source Software has a source code that can be read, redistributed or modified by programmers, leading to its improvement and/or adaptation for other uses.
- <sup>46</sup> <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/MainReportChapter7-lowres.pdf>
- <sup>47</sup> Kingham, T. (2003) *e-Parliaments – Series on Contemporary Issues in Parliamentary Development - The Use of Information and Communication Technologies to Improve Parliamentary Processes*, The World Bank Institute
- <sup>48</sup> An assessment of several parliamentary websites of developing countries will be carried out once the proposed programme of action receives the required support and resources.
- <sup>49</sup> Minutes of the Autumn Session (2002), IPU
- <sup>50</sup> Minutes of the Autumn Session (2002), IPU
- <sup>51</sup> [http://asamblea.racsa.co.cr/chat/2004/chat\\_redondo.htm](http://asamblea.racsa.co.cr/chat/2004/chat_redondo.htm)
- <sup>52</sup> UNDP project *e-Governance for Parliamentary Capacity Strengthening in Lesotho*
- <sup>53</sup> ..WP Phase 1 Evaluation FINAL Report.pdf
- <sup>54</sup> 2005-01-19 eParliament presentation 1.0.ppt
- <sup>55</sup> Open standards are publicly available specifications for accomplishing a specific task.

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United Nations Development Programme  
Bureau for Development Policy  
Democratic Governance Group  
One United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017 USA

<http://www.undp.org/governance>