

## Chapter II

# Vision, Innovation and Leadership

### Box 2.1

“One can no longer deny the transformative effects of the information revolution on our global society and its impact on governance systems. New technologies have helped to empower citizens and media to take part in public life; to increase the dialogue among state institutions and society at large; to assist countries in responding to international calls for standards of accountability, transparency, and participatory governance; and to encourage international exchanges and cooperation in many sectors.”

Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations  
Opening address at the World e-Parliament Conference 2007

## A VISION FOR ICT IN PARLIAMENT

Information and communication technologies have become essential tools for supporting the many functions of legislative bodies throughout the world. They are a strategic and vital resource at the service of parliament. From the outset, however, parliaments need to establish a clear vision for how technology will help them achieve their ultimate objectives. This vision sets the framework for all subsequent strategic planning, resource programming and activities.

The vision should be based on political decisions made at the highest levels of the institution, receive the support of the members of the legislature, and be endorsed by the key stakeholders in parliament. It should be rooted in a broad consensus on the primary purposes of ICT in parliament, so that the technical infrastructure that is put in place supports the role of the institution in today’s global information society. The vision should also be communicated and made public so that all those affected - both inside and outside the parliament - can have access to it and understand the rationale behind it.

### Box 2.2

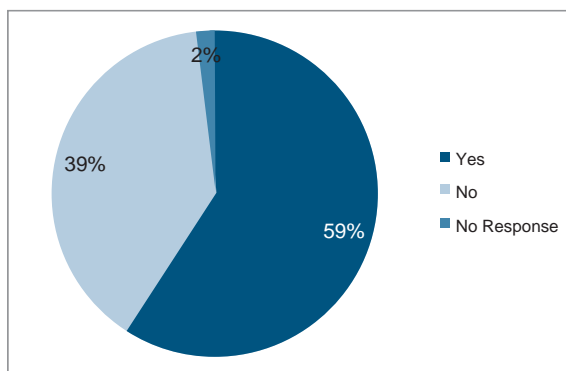
“The vision we had in the Riksdag and in several other parliaments some ten-twenty years ago, to make our official parliamentary documents and information available to the public has, in many senses, been realized. A key goal in these efforts has been to make the work and decisions of parliament transparent to the public, and thus to create opportunities for greater understanding and dialogue on political developments. Freedom of expression and information have been crucial in this process.”

Anders Forsberg, President of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments  
Opening address at the World e-Parliament Conference 2007

Visions evolve over time as the state of technology changes and new opportunities for supporting the work of parliaments emerge. Some parliaments have stated, and later revised, their vision over many years, to incorporate the new institutional challenges and reflect the evolution of technology; others have recently begun this process; many have not yet started to develop their vision.

59% of the respondents to the global survey in fact reported that their assembly has a vision statement for ICT in parliament; yet, 39% indicated that theirs does not.

Figure 2-1: Vision for ICT



(Source: Survey, Section 1, Question 11)

The following comments provided by some of the chambers and parliaments illustrate the variety of stages that different institutions may have reached in establishing a vision statement:

- A vision statement, representing the first stage of the process of preparing the ICT Strategic Plan, has been adopted for the first time in the last months.
- We have established a Global Vision on technology.
- ...we hope to start elaborating soon ... a declaration on our vision on ICT...
- Currently there is not a vision statement for ICT for the whole of parliament.
- Under study.

### Key issues

As technology has become more sophisticated, more widely available, and more useful to legislatures, vision statements have had to become more comprehensive. At the same time, however, they are most effective when they are clear, concise, and focused on the most important goals of the parliament. The statement should embody the fundamental values of the parliament, for it is here that the institution expresses its views on parliament's role in the information society and on e-parliament. In this context, parliaments need to consider how their vision for ICT deployment addresses such concerns as:

- Achieving *transparency and openness* for both the parliament as an institution and the members as individual representatives of their constituencies
- Providing *universal access* for citizens regardless of their personal resources or abilities
- Improving the mechanisms for *accountability* of parliament and its members to their electorate
- Enabling *dialogue* between the parliament - and its members - and the citizenry
- Ensuring the *security* of authoritative information and the *privacy* of personal information
- Supporting the *work of the parliament* in an efficient and cost-effective manner
- Participating in the *global information society*.

***The demand for transparency and openness.*** There is increasing pressure on parliaments to be transparent, to ensure that their activities are recorded and accessible to civil society and citizens. In addition to the traditional, country specific ways to keep citizens informed about their work, parliaments are using a number of technologies to attain these goals, including public websites, audio and video broadcasting and webcasting, and the use of e-mail alerts and RSS feeds. In today's world, few would challenge the idea that full transparency requires the effective use of new technologies and innovative working methods.

***The imperative of universal access.*** The Internet and the Web have become increasingly important for an informed participation of citizens and the civil society in public life. As parliaments make their actions, decisions, and documents known through modern communication tools, it is imperative that all citizens, regardless of their means or their abilities, be given the possibility of access to this information. This implies that parliaments must be committed to bridging the digital divide within the society and to ensuring that their words and their actions can be understood and analysed by all constituents in their diversity.

#### Box 2.3

“Few people would disagree that transparency and accessibility are two of the key objectives of a democratic parliament. ICT offers us an important means of achieving these objectives and we should do everything in our power to seize these opportunities.”

Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union  
Opening address at the World e-Parliament Conference 2007

***The call for accountability.*** The crisis of legitimacy of parliaments can broadly be ascribed to their perceived inability to effectively safeguard the diversity of the interests of the communities they represent. It is further fueled by an alleged “accountability deficit”, whereby the electorate is not always given the means to make an informed judgment on the performance and integrity of office holders. The opportunities offered by ICT to reach out to the public and provide an accounting of parliament and legislators’ actions – i.e. voting records, codes of conduct, attendance, performance and integrity – have been increasingly exploited in an attempt to regain the confidence of the electorate.

***The challenge of online dialogue.*** The development of new web-based technologies that support interactive communications has encouraged an increasing numbers of citizens and civil society organizations to express their views on policy issues directly to their parliamentary representatives. These developments have created greater demands on legislators and they have raised people’s expectations concerning the acknowledgement of such communications, their consideration in the decision-making process, and their participation in political dialogues. Moreover, in the face of some evidence of a declining involvement of citizens in public affairs, modern technologies have raised hopes of a re-engagement in the democratic process. This will certainly require more than ICT alone. For ICT to contribute to fulfilling this goal at least partially would entail identifying the most effective technological approaches for successfully interacting with the public and enabling parliaments to respond efficiently to new levels of public input.

***The critical importance of security and privacy.*** Privacy and security are essential elements in ensuring the integrity of parliamentary transparency and guaranteeing the rights of citizens to confidential communication. These requirements cannot be overlooked and their importance cannot be underestimated. As parliaments become more visible through the Web, the information and the documents presented must meet the highest standards of accuracy and their authenticity cannot be doubted, even in cases where paper remains the “official version of record”. Similarly, citizens must be assured

that communications sent to their representatives, along with information about themselves, remain confidential if they so wish. At the same time, legislatures must determine the appropriate balance required between the demands for security and privacy on the one hand and the need for openness and attribution on the other.

*Supporting the work of the parliament.* The work of legislative bodies is based on communication and compromise. To accomplish their primary goals, they must give the highest priority to ensuring that a diversity of views can be expressed and considered, and that the laws that result from these deliberations accommodate the values and wishes of as many as possible. While they want to be effective in carrying out their official responsibilities, they are not designed to be “efficient” in the traditional business sense. This does not mean, however, that parliaments should allow inefficiency to hinder the operations that support them. Modern legislatures - as is true for most of today’s public and private institutions - need their supporting infrastructure to be as efficient as possible. Only then can their actions and decisions occur in an informed, timely, and responsive environment. Achieving these goals requires accompanying more traditional practices with the intelligent use of ICT.

*Participation in the global information society.* The societal issues that parliaments must address demand both an understanding of their global implications and the broader environment in which they exist. ICT make it possible to share ideas among parliaments, know what actions have been taken by other legislative bodies, and potentially harmonize approaches to global problems. They also enable parliaments to exchange good practices and collaborate on common technical problems more effectively. As all segments of society increasingly operate via the Internet, parliaments need to determine the best ways to become active participants through the online environment in the global information community.

## THE CHALLENGE OF INNOVATION

Globalization and technological innovations have created important opportunities for parliaments. Through sharing and collaboration, these trends have also leveled the playing field, at least in terms of experience and knowledge, by enabling parliaments to learn on a worldwide basis about good practices, effective strategies, innovative approaches, and potential pitfalls. Those in the early stages of introducing informatics to their legislatures may face challenges in obtaining adequate resources of funding and experienced staff to innovate. They will have the advantage, however, of being less constrained by embedded technologies and systems that can hamper the introduction of new approaches, a frequent complaint raised by technologically mature parliaments who have to struggle with old ICT legacies. Similarly, emerging democracies may be able to establish modern organizational systems with less deference to existing procedures and historical operations.

The potential value of ICT must be reflected in the vision in the context of the nature of legislatures and their legislative process. The task is to determine which technologies and which approaches best serve the needs of parliamentary procedures. Many of these procedures will seem inefficient to the technically-oriented observer. But many of them have evolved over time and been both adopted and adapted to support the work of lawmakers who must have sufficient time to gather information, weigh options, fashion compromises, and then frequently move decisively in a relatively short time. ICT must serve what may sometimes appear to be inefficient processes but that are purposefully intended to achieve, when possible, broadly consensual policy choices.

Certainly some legislative procedures could be improved. But effecting institutional change in parliamentary bodies that tend to be bound by tradition can be difficult. Whether the ICT structure is being

established for the first time, or whether existing structures are being modernized, these efforts, to be successful, must be viable within the context and culture of the parliament, must have strong support from the political leadership, and must serve the goals of the institution.

The pace of technological innovation within the broader society can be the cause of tensions for parliaments. Citizens and civil society often adopt new technologies long before their legislatures and then wonder why their representative bodies are not more current with the latest trends. This can result in significant pressure on members by their constituents to be more technically adept. This, in turn, puts social and political pressure on legislative leaders and officers to adopt the latest technologies more quickly.

While these pressures are understandable, the vision for e-parliament must resist the idea of technology for its own sake. Because of the critical nature of their work, and the relatively few resources that can usually be devoted to ICT, parliaments have little room to experiment. Except in those limited areas where the activities of parliament are unique and experimentation may be warranted, they are generally cautious and deploy highly reliable and well tested technologies that are known to meet their most critical needs. A sound vision for ICT in parliament should encourage appropriate innovation, but at the same time emphasize the importance of secure and trustworthy systems.

## THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

A vision can be developed in a variety of ways. It could be drafted by a parliamentary committee of members or a working group composed of members, staff and other actors. It could be proposed by one or more officials of the secretariat. It could be established by a directive of the senior officers of the parliament. Or it might be created by a combination of these methods.

### Box 2.4

“A critical success factor was the engagement of the political leadership with the ICT staff throughout the planning process.”

Zingile A. Dingani, Secretary General of the Parliament of South Africa  
Presentation at the World e-Parliament Conference 2007

**Parliamentary leadership.** The parliamentary leadership may have little time for active involvement in establishing the vision for ICT. But regardless of how the vision is formulated, the vision and its development process must be supported and endorsed by the highest leadership of parliament. Because the vision is the starting point and sets the framework for all that follows, it is the element of an e-parliament that most needs the time and attention of the leadership.

**Members.** Ensuring the involvement of members of parliament in this process is also critical to its success. Without such engagement, the institution risks developing a vision that fails to fully meet the needs of legislators and to support the values and goals of the parliament. However, as can occur with the leaders of parliament, many members feel that they lack the expertise to make informed decisions. This situation may be compared to the one that often confronts legislators who must make decisions about policy issues and bills even though they lack detailed knowledge of the subject matter and the time to acquire it.

Without the ideas and proposals of members, however, the use of ICT will be determined by those with the greatest technical expertise. Despite the best of intentions of technical experts who may, by

default, be called upon on to make such decisions, the results will be less effective than if they were made on the basis of inputs from members of parliament and the parliamentary leadership.

Members know the most important challenges they face and the kinds of solutions that would be most helpful to them. The key is for legislators to have the means, the opportunity and the encouragement to express their needs for ICT support, regardless of the level of their technical knowledge. Others will have the skill to transform this into a vision that can address their most important concerns. But the vision must be based on what the members know to be most important in carrying out their legislative, oversight, and representational responsibilities.

***Secretaries General and Directors of ICT.*** In addition to the critical role played by these senior officials in implementing the e-parliament vision, Secretaries General and Directors of ICT make vital contributions to the vision statement through their wide-system perspective. Their understanding of the work of the parliament and their knowledge of its operations provides them with valuable insights into how ICT can be used to serve the legislative body, its goals, and its members. The engagement of the Secretary General and the Director of ICT in creating the vision will ensure that it is based on an awareness of the current needs of the parliament and of its transformative possibilities.

***Officials.*** The vision must be also supported by key officials of the legislature in charge of different departments. Without their endorsement and support, in fact, that vision will unlikely be realized, particularly if it impacts on the complex mechanism of the organization as a whole. Because of the scope of their responsibilities, the involvement by these officials may occur only a few times a year but that involvement is essential.

***Other stakeholders.*** So far few parliaments have experienced the participation of representatives of citizens' associations, civil society or media organizations in developing the vision. However, those who have done so have certainly enriched the process by introducing in the vision views and elements that could have escaped the attention of those stakeholders primarily involved in the inner mechanisms of parliamentary operations.

## SUMMARY

A clear and concise vision statement emerging from the collaborative effort of the leadership of parliament, its members, senior officials and relevant staff is necessary to align the services provided by ICT to the highest goals of the institution. Elements to be considered by these stakeholders in crafting the vision include, among others, transparency, access, dialogue, accountability, security and privacy, business effectiveness and global networking. A successful vision should also take into account the institutional context, and the nature of its processes, within which innovation must take place, while resisting the view of modern technology as an end in itself. Once all of the above is in place, the environment will be created to lead to an effective and creative use of ICT. Against this background, it is therefore a concern that 40% of the chambers and parliaments surveyed acknowledged the lack of a vision for ICT.