

Chapter IX

Cooperation and Coordination

Parliaments have a long tradition of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on many levels and on a wide array of subjects. Thousands of agreements and partnerships exist among chambers and parliaments to carry out common activities or achieve shared goals. The last decade has witnessed a significant surge in international activities undertaken by legislatures. This has been accompanied by the establishment of new regional and transnational parliaments and by the creation of formal parliamentary assemblies, informal parliamentarians' associations and networks of legislators. As the Inter-Parliamentary Union highlighted in a recent publication "One common feature of regional inter-parliamentary assemblies is the aim to foster greater integration and legislative coordination between member countries."¹

Although the majority of these exchanges have taken place among members of assemblies, many parliaments have also engaged in bilateral or multilateral efforts directed at mutually strengthening, improving or evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of their administrations. ICT is one area where cooperation among legislatures has especially increased. In addition, several bilateral technical assistance programmes have been initiated to build the capacity of parliaments in developing countries or emerging democracies to better perform their functions.

Box 9.1

"Technical assistance typically covers a wide variety of areas, such as standing orders and rules of procedure, committee systems, legislation, the representational function of parliament, oversight, administration, and library, documentation, research and archives services. Gender and human rights are cross-cutting issues which feature prominently in training programmes and advisory services. For its part, infrastructural support covers public address systems and audio-visual recording and broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings, printing, transportation and refurbishment of premises. Technical assistance is delivered in the form of advisory services, seminars and workshops, study tours, attachments and other in-service training programmes, as well as meetings and conferences. Increasingly, information and communication technologies are taking centre stage in technical assistance programmes."

Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice,
Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006

At the multilateral level, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has gained considerable experience in technical assistance due to its long standing efforts to foster democracy around the world, as have other parliamentary associations, such as the Francophone Parliamentary Assembly and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. More recently, the United Nations and its agencies and programmes have intensified their support to legislative bodies under their good governance agenda. Similarly, multi-lateral and international institutions, as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the European Commission; and non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, have increased their attention towards parliamentary bodies. Bilateral donors and development cooperation agencies are increasingly including parliamentary strengthening among their priorities.

1 *Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006.

There is no doubt that the recent evolution and growth of technology has helped to intensify the number of exchanges and facilitate communication between parliaments and supporting institutions. There is also no doubt that global coordination among all the actors involved - including recipient parliaments - needs to improve to ensure coherence of action, avoid the risk of overlapping efforts, and foster better analyses of lessons learned.

Box 9-2

“Surprisingly, up to now, parliaments and supranational/international organizations have operated virtually with no kind of linkage or coordination. This lack of coordination entails a risk of duplication and inefficiency, as well as a significant waste of resources.

This lack of coordination is particularly astonishing in the EU where so far the European Commission and the EU parliaments have been acting without any form of linkage.

The EU parliaments have been receiving an increasing number of requests for technical assistance directly from parliaments of countries all over the world. Parliaments possess the best expertise on both the political and the technical dimensions of parliamentary experiences. At the same time, however, they do not always have sufficient financial resources to respond to these requests.

On the other hand, the European Commission has substantial resources at its disposal, but it only responds to some of these requests for assistance, and even when it does so, it uses a tendering system that does not take into account the special role and unique know-how of EU parliaments and their administrations.

In this framework, there is a clear need for coordination among the EU parliaments and between these and the Commission. Then, it is also necessary to step up cooperation at the European and global level in order to better take into account the requests of recipient parliaments and the role of international organizations.

Against this background, the EU Speakers’ Conference launched a project on the assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies (NEDs) aimed at promoting cooperation and coordination among the EU parliaments and the EU institutions in this field and at fostering coordination at a wider level.”

Alessandro Palanza, Deputy Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy.
Statement at the World e-Parliament Conference 2007

The need for more structured and coherent cooperation among parliaments and international actors may even be more urgent and critical in the field of information and communication technologies for several reasons.

1. The fast evolution of ICT requires parliaments to adapt continuously. While the “richest” may have the advantage of greater resources to better exploit ICT to support their functions, they are likely to confront greater obstacles in terms of technology legacies and organizational re-engineering. On the other hand, parliaments with fewer resources that have just started to move through the e-parliament stages may benefit by being able to apply recent ICT advances more quickly due to their greater flexibility and smaller installed technology base. At the same time, they are able to take advantage of the experience, and mistakes, of more technologically mature legislatures. Both of these factors help to level the playing field among parliaments with different access to resources.

2. Capitalizing on the advantages of ICT developments and deployments in legislative settings requires a high degree of collaboration and cooperation between parliaments. Without these efforts it is difficult to exploit the immense opportunities offered by open standards, collaborative software developments and emerging technologies, and by the potential for exchanging products developed in-house that are specifically designed for the complex parliamentary environment. In addition, sometimes the pooling of resources among parliaments may be required to achieve ambitious goals.
3. Regardless of a country's development level, frequent dialogue and consultations, sharing of experiences, targeted knowledge transfers and the exchange of lessons learned are all extremely important mechanisms to strengthen the capacity and skills of the human resources needed to perform a variety of critical tasks in parliamentary administrations.

Unfortunately, too often parliamentary initiatives and bilateral and multilateral technical assistance activities devoted to parliamentary strengthening have included ICT as merely a minor component within a mix of uncorrelated activities. And even then, the focus has often been mainly on hardware, with little attention to the full array of parliamentary functions that ICT tools are able to address. Too frequently the existing parliamentary expertise has not been fully engaged in development projects, either because parliaments were not willing to supply it or because it was not requested.

Therefore, while there has been an increase in specialized cooperation between parliamentary officials and staff in the last few decades, the lack of coordination and the failure to focus on the overall impact of ICT in parliament is likely to have greatly limited its value.

EXAMPLES OF COOPERATION

The last 20-30 years have witnessed the growth of formal cooperative activities at the global and regional level. Two inter-parliamentary networks have been in existence for over 25 years and now have well-developed mechanisms for sharing ICT information and experiences. These are the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and the U.S. National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Two other large ICT networks – in Latin America and in Africa - took preliminary organizational steps in the last year. At the global level, the Association of Secretaries General of Parliament (ASGP) and the Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) are important venues for collaboration, although they do not focus specifically on ICT-related issues.

European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation

The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)² was created in 1977 in Vienna by the Conference of Speakers of European Parliamentary Assemblies (since 2004, the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments). The Conference delegated the formation and management of ECPRD to the Presidents of the European Parliament (EP) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Since its founding, the ECPRD has adapted to reflect the changes in the European Community and the growth in importance of ICT in parliaments. The Conference of Speakers has reaffirmed at various times the role of the ECPRD in supporting interaction and cooperation among parliaments, the importance of maintaining links among legislative officials, and the use of new technologies to support collaboration.

2 <http://www.ecprd.org>.

ICT in parliament is designated by the ECPRD as an area requiring “continuity of activity”, led by a coordinator appointed for a three-year term. The coordinator arranges meetings that provide an opportunity for technical staff and managers within parliaments to meet to exchange ideas and experiences with colleagues on the latest developments in technology and communications, particularly as they apply to legislative bodies. Typically, staff from the ICT departments of the hosting parliament make presentations on their activities and plans, with speakers from other countries reporting on their work in related areas. Topics are wide ranging as illustrated by the titles of recent meetings, which included discussions of wireless strategies, e-parliament for citizens, information security, the application of service oriented architecture, business relationship management, and webcasting. Materials from these sessions, often including video recordings of the presentations, are made available on the Web.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Conference of Speakers highlighted the role that the ECPRD could play in supporting legislative cooperation on EU matters. This led to the initiation of a collaborative technology-based project to enable the exchange of information among parliaments regarding proposed EU legislation. The project is named IPEX, which stands for Inter-Parliamentary EXchange. IPEX is an example of a new kind of collaborative activity facilitated substantially by ICT to provide a formal exchange of information, including on legislative harmonization, among countries.

Specifically IPEX aims at 1) facilitating the exchange of all EU-related information between parliaments; 2) providing forums for the exchange of views on scrutiny including subsidiarity (the principle that governmental power should be exercised at the lowest possible level); and, 3) maintaining a calendar of inter-parliamentary meetings. The Speakers of EU Parliaments define the objectives of IPEX, while the Secretaries General oversee the project and appoint the members of the IPEX Board for a period of one year. The Board is responsible for the management of the system and supervises the work of the Central Support. Thus objectives come from the highest level of leadership and oversight and management is the responsibility of Secretaries General.

National Conference of State Legislatures

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)³ was founded in 1975. NCSL's membership is comprised of the legislatures of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. commonwealths and territories. It operates as a non-partisan organization that serves both legislators and staff.

The mission of the NCSL is to 1) improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures; 2) promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures; and, 3) ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system. ICT is the focus of one of the 10 designated staff sections within the NCSL, called the National Association of Legislative Information Technology (NALIT). The membership of NALIT includes legislative information technology managers, webmasters, and other staff involved with ICT development in state legislatures. The purposes of NALIT include the following:

- To promote the exchange of ideas and information on all aspects of legislative information systems. This includes, but is not limited to, the management and technical development of these systems.
- To provide a network of information exchange among persons involved in providing management and technical support for legislative information systems.
- To provide improved communications and foster better relations between legislative information systems management and staff, and the legislators and legislative staff they serve.

NALIT publishes a newsletter, gives an online directory of ICT staff in state legislatures, and sponsors sessions at the NCSL Annual Meeting. The newsletter provides an opportunity for ICT staff

3 <http://www.ncsl.org>

to share information about projects in their respective states that may be helpful to other state legislatures. For example, newsletters have featured articles on supporting mobile devices for legislators and use of Voice over IP (VOIP) telephone. At a recent NCSL Annual Meeting NALIT sponsored several sessions on topics such as computer security and constituent services software.

NALIT has expanded its impact over the last 10 years by convening an annual professional development seminar each fall. The programme is divided into two tracks with one aimed at ICT technical specialists and the other designed for managers involved with ICT programmes and policies. In addition, a pre-conference in-depth training seminar is offered.

NALIT members communicate electronically with each other concerning a variety of legislative information technology issues through the NALIT listserv. The listserv has proved to be a valuable mechanism for exchanging information about technical issues confronting ICT specialists and for discussions by ICT managers of related policies and organizational concerns. Examples of topics covered in online discussions include XML bill drafting systems, wireless networks, and e-mail policies. The seminars and listserv are complementary activities that help to reinforce collaboration among ICT professionals in the state legislatures.

The NALIT website serves as an archive for materials from all its meetings and previous activities, information about legislative IT and Internet policies, and surveys the group has undertaken. One major effort is an ongoing survey on the use of information technology in the 50 state legislatures and territories where the information is collected via forms on the NALIT website. The results of the survey are compiled in a database that facilitates information exchange and the sharing of best practices among the state legislatures. Previous online surveys have covered the topics of website privacy policies, legislator's home pages, and bill drafting tools.

One of the keys to the success of the ECPRD's Working Group on ICT and NCSL/NALIT in enhancing ICT in legislatures is that they were established within the framework of broader parliamentary associations. ECPRD has the responsibility for sharing information in all areas of parliamentary administration and support. NCSL's mission is even more expansive, encompassing all aspects of public policy of interest to state legislatures and serving as an advocate for states at the federal level. In both cases exchanges about ICT take place in the context of the overall mission of parliamentary bodies and not solely in a technical context. This linkage enables them to benefit from high level political support, access to greater resources, and interaction with the users of their systems.

African Parliamentary Knowledge Network

The establishment of a network with a broad mandate similar to that of the ECPRD and NCSL/NALIT is being considered by a number of African parliaments. The African Parliamentary Knowledge Network (APKN) was discussed among members and officials from twelve parliamentary delegations from African assemblies and the Pan-African Parliament at a meeting hosted by the National Assembly of Nigeria in Abuja in 2007. The meeting, supported by the United Nations, and taking place under the auspices of the Pan-African Parliament, had the opportunity to evaluate a number of options and possibilities relating to the establishment of the APKN, and proposed different modalities for its implementation.

Participants agreed on the establishment of the APKN with the aim of strengthening the information management capacity of parliamentary administrations to better serve their institutions and members. The need to promote at a continental level the training and capacity building of members of parliaments and parliamentary staff in the area of legislation, information, research, documentation and technologies was amply recognized. While acknowledging that ICT is not an end in itself, participants stressed its potential to reinforce other areas of the network, as well as parliaments' core

functions and practices. The value of existing regional initiatives, such as the Network of ICT Managers of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, was praised, and the need to take into account these experiences and to benefit from them was highlighted.

It was stressed that strong political backing is required for the African Parliamentary Knowledge Network to grow as a true continental network and to operate in a conducive environment with long-term objectives and sustainability over time. It was therefore recommended that the Pan-African Parliament consider the endorsement of the APKN, the approval of its Charter and ensure oversight with regard to its guidance and implementation.

Latin American Network of IT Experts in Parliament

In October 2007, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) organized a meeting of Latin American parliamentary officials to provide an opportunity for a regional focus on cooperative activities designed to support ICT in parliaments. The meeting was organized under the framework of a recently launched project named RED-FTiP Américas (Red de Funcionarios de Tecnología de la Información en los Parlamentos de las Américas).

The meeting strengthened existing cooperation among the participants and helped identify ways they could establish broader linkages through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. Participants provided background on the existing collaboration among parliaments in Latin America in support of the Global Legal Information Network (GLIN) and identified some of the objectives of the IDB technical cooperation programme for ICT in Latin American parliaments.

One of the group's initiatives is an assessment of websites in parliaments in Latin American countries. Participants gave presentations on specific components of the research effort to date. The assessment used the guidelines for parliamentary websites developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2000 to identify the degree to which parliaments provide basic information about their activities, electoral systems, legislative procedures, and chamber organization, as well as links to other resources. The assessment provides preliminary indicators to be further developed.

The participants advanced their collaboration efforts by agreeing on a long-term workplan. They committed to a continued evaluation of ICT applications within their parliaments, sharing results of regional assessments of parliamentary websites and use of mobile technology, working on regional ICT conceptual studies, creating a clearinghouse of ICT applications and best practices, and establishing additional methods for collaborating regionally and globally.

They agreed that a core group of representatives from the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the Inter-American Development Bank, and each regional area would serve as the coordinating body. The group also discussed ways to maintain communication among the members and agreed that virtual distance IT training opportunities in areas like usability, XML, open source platforms, and accessibility for persons with disabilities would be very helpful.

Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments

The Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP)⁴, constituted as a consultative body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, seeks to facilitate personal contacts between holders of the office of Secretary General in any parliamentary assembly. It is the task of the ASGP to study the law, procedure, practice and working methods of different Parliaments and to propose measures for improving those methods and for securing cooperation between the services of different parliaments. ICT is one of areas of interest to the association and it has provided a number of papers that discuss developments in technology and their impact on legislatures.

4 <http://www.asgp.info>

International Federation of Library Associations

The Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments of the International Federation of Library Associations⁵ provides assistance and support to parliamentary libraries in accordance with the interest, requirements and stage of development of parliaments in various regions of the world. Specific objectives of the Section are: 1) to encourage bilateral assistance and development programmes and to act as a clearing house in this regard; 2) to encourage programmes which would foster the adaptation of the latest information technologies to parliamentary library services; 3) to examine the relationship of the research work carried out in parliament and by public and private institutions and the needs and work of parliament with special reference to the library and research services of parliaments themselves; 4) to examine the administrative arrangements within parliaments with regard to library, information, and research services; 5) to strengthen the cooperation between the Inter-Parliamentary Union and parliamentary libraries, and explore possibilities of joint programmes and activities; 6) to encourage the establishment of regional groups of parliamentary libraries like the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation.

A particular aspect of the Section's work is to promote cooperation among legislatures and especially their libraries because of the growing need for legislators to be well informed about legislative developments worldwide. The Section holds a meeting in conjunction with the IFLA annual meeting once a year.

VALUE OF GLOBAL COOPERATION

The success of long established networks like the NCSL/NALIT and the ECPRD, coupled with plans to create new groups in Latin America and Africa, underscores the value of these organizations. And the growing number of such groups suggests the opportunity to extend the benefits of cooperation to a global level. Formal and informal exchanges among regional groups could in fact be highly useful. They might also help to address in part the concern regarding coordination, potential overlap and inefficiency.

Regional groups are a natural way to gather information from participating parliamentary bodies. The knowledge gained could then be shared with other regions through a variety of channels, including conferences, virtual meetings, online discussion groups, and even simple e-mails. For example, the findings of the survey conducted by the ECPRD on support for the mobile legislator would be of interest to countries in a number of other regions. Another topic of interest to many legislatures would be experiences gained and lessons learned as multiple African parliaments work collectively to implement common open standards for their documents.

The time is right for expanding exchanges among regional groups, between individual countries and regional groups, and between organizations based on shared characteristics other than geographic areas, such as a common language. While ICT can support these exchanges, it is often valuable to sustain these efforts by convening meetings of those who share a common interest and would be open to sharing knowledge.

5 <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s3/index.htm>

A positive example of what can be gained from sharing information has been described by the Congress of Deputies of Spain in the formulation of its modernization plan. Among the first steps taken was to survey activities and plans being undertaken in other parliaments.

Box 9-3

“The analysis of trends aimed at detecting innovative ideas which are currently being developed in other parliaments, and which have served as the basis for identifying opportunities for improvement in the Congress of Deputies in the following areas: projects focusing on technological and communications infrastructure, training programs, services quality, added-value services, etc.

The sources used were as follows:

analysis of existing studies within the network of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD);

application of a questionnaire through the ECPRD network, designed to gather information on the main projects currently being carried out;

information from the websites of various international, European and autonomous parliaments;

other websites and the specialized bibliography on the subject.”

Modernization Plan of the Congress of Deputies of Spain
Contribution to the World e-Parliament Conference 2007

It is interesting to note that the Congress of Deputies of Spain looked not only at the ECPRD, of which is a member, but also at other parliaments outside the group. The result of their survey informed the development of the modernization plan, both affirming its initial directions, but also expanding its vision of what might be undertaken.

There are, of course, significant challenges in establishing and sustaining cooperation and collaboration. Differences in language, for example, can be a hindrance, especially when there are limited resources to fund translation. Differences in the infrastructure or the technical approach preferred by individual parliaments can limit sharing. The experience of NCSL/NALIT, for example, has been that there is often a useful exchange of information about how a particular requirement was handled, but there has been limited ability to share software code developed by an individual legislature. This can reflect differences in political and legal systems that might require extensive customization of the shared code to be useable in another legislature. The approach of the Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan⁶ has been to address this problem through the use of open source software that can be customized to meet local requirements. If this approach proves to be successful, it could have a positive effect on collaboration and the development of parliamentary applications in the future.

Participants in networks intended for information exchange also have to be willing to commit the staff time necessary to make the programme a success. It takes time to respond to survey questionnaires, maintain a shared database, answer e-mail questions, or advise a colleague over the phone. The more effective a parliament becomes in using ICT, the more requests for assistance it may receive. Eventually the time needed to respond to the volume of requests may become more than can be reasonably accommodated without additional financial support. However, by engaging as many members as possible the burden on any single parliament can be reduced.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

The survey revealed a number of specific areas of ICT where collaboration among parliaments could be especially beneficial.

Application exchange and development. The reliance on external staff for application development, either primarily or in conjunction with parliamentary staff, suggests a possible opportunity for collaboration among parliaments. First, exchanges of applications developed in-house by some parliaments on a non-proprietary basis could be facilitated through a coordinated mechanism, such as a repository, which would place them at the disposal of other parliaments. However, this mechanism should rely on the willingness of legislatures to share products voluntarily and to provide training. Furthermore, although it can be challenging to develop applications on a collaborative basis, the Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan is having some success with this approach, and the lessons learned could lead to other viable methods for parliaments to work together in a coordinated way by sharing internal staff expertise and relying less on contractors. Applications suggested by the survey data included: bill and amendment drafting, plenary voting, audio and video webcasting and parliamentary websites.

Implementation of open standards. The use of open standards in the preparation and management of legislative documents is an area that could greatly benefit from sharing experiences among parliaments. Implementation involves many phases including, among others, the development of the document formats, the testing and selection of editing software, the customization of that software to address local practices, the building of database systems that can properly accommodate open standard documents, and so on. All of these are areas in which exchanges among staff of different parliaments or common training could be of considerable value. Moreover, considering the number of parliaments that are planning to introduce open standards in the future, the establishment of a policy dialogue on open standards among parliaments should be seriously explored.

Establishment of website guidelines. The strong reliance on parliamentary websites by both members and the public suggests that joint work for updating the websites guidelines and standards based on the work carried out by the IPU in 2000 would be very helpful. This also applies to committee websites, which are important in the legislative and scrutiny processes of many legislatures, and which the survey suggests are in need of improvement in a number of areas. The same applies as well to member sites, which could benefit from guidelines about the kind of information that is most useful to constituents.

Shared experiences in the use of interactive technologies. The survey confirmed that some parliaments are testing, and in a number of cases using, interactive technologies such as online polls, discussion groups, and blogs to improve two-way communication with constituents. This is still largely an experimental area, however, and there are many good practices to be discovered and lessons to be learned. Exchanges among parliaments and between parliaments and other stakeholders – such as research centres and non-profit organizations - would be especially useful.

ROLE OF THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR ICT IN PARLIAMENT

The international community has repeatedly called for a stronger cooperation between the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and parliaments around the world in the implementation of the international development agenda, including on the role that governing institutions can play in shaping the information society of tomorrow. The outcome documents of the 2005 World Summit, and several resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, reflect this spirit.

At the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the importance of fostering and strengthening cooperation at the international level was repeatedly stressed. The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society also highlighted the importance of coordination of multi-stakeholder implementation activities to help avoid duplication of actions, and encouraged information exchange and sharing of best practices.

At the end of 2005, the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union responded to this call by establishing, with the direct participation of a core group of parliaments, a broad partnership around the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, whose aim is to a) strengthen the role of parliaments in the promotion of the information society, including through fostering related information and legislation actions; and, b) reinforce parliaments' capacity to harness ICT tools to better fulfill their democratic functions and to place them at the service of the institutional process and of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament intends to achieve these goals by providing a framework for sharing knowledge, coordinating actions and pooling information and resources across legislatures around the world, regardless of their country's economic development level.

The aim of the Centre is not to substitute and overlap with autonomous activities or organizations but rather to multiply the effects of the existing ones, enhance their visibility, expand the space for dialogue and knowledge development, and create the conditions to support legislatures that intend to promote policies and the use of new technologies to achieve their highest goals.

In line with the WSIS principles, the spirit of this initiative is that of an alliance of national and regional assemblies, bilateral and multilateral agencies, international organizations, media, research centres and elements of the civil society that join resources together to accomplish what none could achieve on its own. A partnering mechanism and a common framework of action can in fact be the key to channel knowledge, experiences, good practices, and resources in a more coherent way. The engagement and policy direction by parliamentary leaders in shaping an effort of this kind, and in building consensus around it, is an essential ingredient and a unique feature of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament.

In this spirit, the Global Centre has worked toward enhancing dialogue among key stakeholders and has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote collaborative approaches, including by bridging at the global level the existing work of regional networks. These include, among others, the establishment of the online Global Network of IT Experts in Parliament, the convening of several workshops and training seminars - involving parliamentary leaders, members and officials as well as international experts -, the organization of study tours in cooperation with national and regional parliaments, the dissemination of information and the provision of technical assistance in different formats.

The broad participation in the World e-Parliament Conference 2007 and related meetings⁷, and the high response rate to the Global Survey on ICT in Parliament conducted by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament with support from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, underscore the potential for this coordination mechanism at the global level in this area. On the basis on the work of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, in 2006, a Subgroup on ICT and Parliaments was established within the framework of WSIS Action Line C1 "The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICT for development".⁸ The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) act as co-facilitators of this Subgroup.

Against this background, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament is well positioned to act as a catalyst for parliaments and a hub for stakeholders to improve cooperation and coordination in the e-parliament domain.

7 The World e-Parliament Conference 2007 and related meetings took place in Geneva, Switzerland between 9 and 12 October 2007. It was organized by the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament.

8 The WSIS Tunis Agenda recommended that implementation mechanisms at the international level be organized by Action Lines and moderated or facilitated by United Nations agencies when appropriate.