

Chapter X

Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter distills the most important findings from the survey results, draws conclusions concerning ICT in legislatures, and makes recommendations on how parliaments can fully exploit technology in support of their goals and functions.

HOW PARLIAMENTS ARE DOING: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The results of the Global Survey on ICT in Legislatures carried out between July and November 2007 provide for the first time a baseline for determining the level of adoption of ICT in legislative bodies around the world. With 105 chambers and parliaments responding, the survey results offer an extensive look at various aspects of technology implementation, from vision and strategic planning, through development of infrastructure and services, to managing documents, building key applications and knowledge resources, and exploring new opportunities for communicating with the public. Future worldwide surveys could enable an analysis of trends, establish additional benchmarks and provide the opportunity to examine specific issues in greater depth.

The following sections offer the highlights from the current survey results.

Envisioning, planning and implementing ICT in parliament

- A significant percentage of chambers and parliaments have developed vision statements and strategic plans, but at least one third has not.
- Multiple players are involved in the development and implementation of the vision and the strategic plan for ICT, including the leadership, members, Secretaries General, ICT Directors and other parliamentary officials.
- The Secretaries General are cited most often as having a central role in ICT planning and management. Parliamentary leadership is mentioned as being engaged in the setting of goals and objectives for ICT in less than 40% of the chambers.
- ICT senior officials and staff are mentioned by a vast majority of respondents as providing ideas and proposals for ICT projects, while members are identified in less than 50% of legislative bodies.
- Although the survey was not able to gather definitive data on resources devoted to ICT infrastructure in parliament, allocations appear to vary between 2% and 6% of the total budget of parliament.

Managing legislative information

- More than half of the chambers have systems for recording and managing plenary debate, votes and actions. Slightly less than half have systems in place for preparing and managing bills, amendments and committee documents. There is a substantial difference among legislatures based on their country's income level.
- Fewer than 15% use open document standards, notably XML, in systems to prepare bills or plenary debate. However, taking into account all systems that are currently in place for managing any type of document, 25% are using XML in at least one of these systems. In addition to these, at least 19 parliaments have already planned to use XML when a parliamentary information system for man-

aging bills is implemented.

- Less than 30% of chambers reported having a policy for retaining digital resources permanently, although a significant number indicated plans to develop one.

Providing access to legislative information

- Over 90% of chambers and parliaments have a website. While many websites meet a number of the IPU guidelines for information, other recommended items, especially committee documents and explanatory material, are not available.
- Approximately half of websites provide links from proposed legislation to related plenary debates, existing laws, and committee reports, but far fewer websites provide links to other legislative documents. In bicameral legislatures only one chamber in three establishes links to related documents in the other chamber.
- Over half of the websites do not have a search engine that allows user to search the full text of proposed legislation, parliamentary documents and actions.
- A significant majority employ, or are planning to employ, formal usability testing when planning their website interface. However, only 31% are required to meet mandated accessibility standards in support of persons with disabilities. While 41% are planning or considering doing so, 21% are not planning on meeting such standards.
- One quarter of the chambers and parliaments reported that they make their complete sessions available on both television and the Web.

Technical resources

- Almost 90% of chambers and parliaments provide basic ICT services, such as personal computer support and network management, including a local area network and access to the Internet, either on a shared or personal basis. However, one out of ten does not.
- Over one third do not provide individual members with personal computers and only half provide a personal printer or cell phone.
- Over 40% of chambers and parliaments do not have document management systems.
- 93% of responding chambers and parliaments use commercial software, while 7% use open source software for word processing, presentations, spreadsheets and databases.
- The overall level of technical infrastructure of parliaments is significantly affected by a country's income level.

Human resources

- While legislatures make use of both internal ICT staff and contractors, in almost all parliaments the internal staff play a key role in managing the technical infrastructure and applications needed by parliaments and in interacting with users.
- Despite the critical role played by human resources, over 30% do not have training programs for their ICT staff.

Building an informed legislature

- Almost 70% of the chambers and parliaments have automated systems for managing library resources, and the majority of these systems are web-based.
- Almost two-thirds of parliaments provide Internet access to outside electronic information resources, but less than half have portals that organize Internet resources for users.
- Only 30% have a system that supports collaboration among library and research staff.
- Approximately one-third indicated that they provide information services linked specifically to policy issues and legislation being considered by parliaments. Those that do so make heavy use of ICT for research and information gathering, as well as for the preparation and distribution of the product or service.

Interacting with citizens

- E-mail is still the primary electronic tool available to the public for interacting with parliament and with individual members.
- Websites are primarily used as a one-way tool for delivering information to citizens. Few enable interaction between parliament and citizens.
- Some parliaments are experimenting with a variety of approaches for engaging the public in the legislative process, including online discussion groups, online comments on pending legislation, and blogs, but few assessments have been carried out to date.
- Fewer than 50% of chambers and parliaments have technology to support audio or video streaming and teleconferencing or videoconferencing.

LEVELS OF ICT IN PARLIAMENT

The higher end: extensive ICT use

The analyses of responses from parliaments contained in this report show that some legislatures have been very successful in their use of ICT to support and even enhance their functions. Several of the institutions in this group have developed systems for managing most of their critical documents - bills, amendments, committee reports, plenary debate and votes - and are using open document standards for at least some of them. They have websites that present the most current activities of the parliament, many using both text and real time video formats, and are accumulating archives of this information. They have wide ranging information resources and are building a policy and legislative knowledge base, with numerous links of relevant documents and information to proposed bills, that is available to members and the public. Members have computers in their offices and a laptop that provides remote access to parliament and its information resources - both public and confidential - when they are in their home constituencies or travelling. Many are exploring new ICT-based methods for communicating with citizens and for engaging them in constructive discussions of policy options.

But the percentage of chambers and parliaments that achieve this high level is small and falls entirely in the high or upper middle income groups. Based on the survey responses it is estimated to be less than 10%. And many of these chambers are not yet benefiting fully from ICT to support the values and goals of transparency, accountability, accessibility and effectiveness in carrying out their representative, legislative and oversight functions. Furthermore, the mere existence of a system or service as identified by the survey is not a guarantee of benefits for users and citizens. More attention needs to be given to evaluating the experiences to date and sharing the lessons learned.

The lower end: not meeting basic services

The ability of many chambers is significantly constrained by resources, some to the point that they cannot yet provide even the most basic ICT services. At least 10% of chambers and parliaments appear to fall into this group, and, based on responses to a variety of survey questions, the percentage could be as high as 30%. Results show that many have plans for building their capacities to use ICT and to enhance the effectiveness of their operations. Some have established strategic plans that can be implemented as the resources do become available, but it will take time to build the skills and applications that can adequately support their legislative and representational work. It will also require hard choices and a focus on the most important priorities from among the many that parliaments and parliamentarians might want to implement. Assistance from donors, international organizations and particularly from other parliaments to develop the capacity to transition from planning to implementation also will be needed. Those assemblies that have already made substantial strides in applying ICT should assist others that are only beginning this process through exchanging information, providing examples of good practices, and working collaboratively. There is, throughout the Report, a sense of a great opportunity for cooperation

to help parliaments at earlier stages of technology “leapfrog” and better capitalize on the most recent advances in ICT. This is a comparative advantage, since technologically mature parliaments may have to deal with heavy ICT legacies and related organizational structures, while at the same time upgrading their infrastructure and applications to take advantage of and adapt to the latest developments.

The uneven middle ground: low to mid level ICT use

The status of the ICT systems and services of those in between these two groups would have to be described as uneven at best. Many of them have implemented ICT applications that serve some of their most important functions. But many of these applications appear to be operating at the lowest level of utility and have not been enhanced in a way that takes greater advantage of ICT to improve efficiency and effectiveness, or offer additional services. They have, for example, built systems for managing bills but have not extended this to other areas such as committee documents. The vast majority have built systems that are using proprietary document standards, and, of particular concern, some have stated explicitly that they do not have plans to consider open standards in the future. This means that they will eventually face problems of compatibility with their older documents as the systems that support them are upgraded or replaced. Some have developed websites that have the text of bills but do not have information about committee activities or links to related information or documents. Committees may have websites, but they lack standards for what should appear on the site or be retained. Many of these websites lack a search engine for finding bills and related documents.

In effect, many of these chambers have introduced some of the important ICT tools but they have limited the implementation to the provision of basic services. This is a concern, as it suggests a lack of the technical capabilities needed to support the most fundamental goals of legislatures that want to be transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

PRIMARY CONCLUSIONS

Overall the analysis makes evident that there is a substantial gap in most parliaments between what is possible with ICT to support the values and goals of parliaments and what has been accomplished. This gap is especially pronounced among legislatures from countries with lower income levels. The digital divide that exists between high income and low income countries is reflected in parliaments. This has implications not only for the efficiency of parliamentary operations, but also for the quality of the relation between parliament and citizens.

Lack of resources is one cause of this problem. ICT requires major investments and a skilled staff. Funding of ICT must also be done wisely and parliaments must be wary of unproven expectations and the “hype” that sometimes accompanies the latest technical breakthroughs. At the same time, expenditures must be at a level that is sufficient to enable a legislature to achieve its most important goals and sustain its commitment to democratic ideals. This does not mean that legislatures need to embrace the e-parliament concept in one step. Building a technological infrastructure is a gradual process that occurs over an extended period of time.

While this relationship between income and the level of use of ICT has been noted throughout the Report, it can be seen more broadly through an analysis of selected questions that, taken together, provide an overall indication of the use of ICT.¹ As seen in Figure 10-1, the average percentage for all chambers and parliaments on the selected questions is 51%. Of particular significance is the difference between average percentages for different income groups: the extent of implementation of ICT in the Low Income group (33%), as measured by responses to these questions, is on average about half that in the High Income group (66%). Figure 10-1 also highlights percentages below the total average, which correspond to areas for possible improvements by each group.

Figure 10-1: Level of adoption of ICT: Percentage of parliaments or chambers that state having each item, by country's income group

Items	All	Low Income	Lower Middle Income	Upper Middle Income	High Income	Section/ Question
Has a website used by Parliament that contains parliamentary documents & actions	95%	91%	91%	96%	100%	7/1
Has reliable electrical power 24 hours per day	90%	78%	86%	96%	97%	2/5
Citizens can contact Parliament by e-mail to express their opinions	88%	61%	86%	100%	97%	8/1
Provides Internet access to electronic information resources	70%	48%	59%	73%	91%	6/4
Has a strategic plan with goals, objectives & timetables for ICT	70%	61%	59%	73%	79%	1/12
Has an automated system for managing library resources	70%	43%	73%	77%	79%	6/1
Includes status of current parliamentary business on the parliamentary website	67%	39%	45%	77%	91%	7/5
Provides a PC to each Member of Parliament for his/her personal use	64%	39%	45%	77%	82%	2/3
Has a training program for in-house ICT staff	64%	74%	59%	62%	61%	2/16
Has a system for recording/managing text of debate & speeches in plenary sessions in digital format	59%	22%	41%	85%	76%	4/9
Has a vision statement for ICT in Parliament	59%	52%	45%	69%	67%	1/11
Provides a laptop to each Member of Parliament for his/her personal use	58%	39%	41%	65%	79%	2/3
Has at least 17 types of information included on the parliamentary website (IPU guidelines)	57%	35%	36%	62%	82%	7/5
Has a search engine that allows users to search full text of proposed legislation, parliamentary documents & actions on website	56%	30%	32%	69%	82%	7/5
The system for creating bills has a method for authenticating authorized users	53%	30%	36%	58%	76%	3/10
Within a week, at least 9 types of documents & activities are included or linked on the parliamentary website	52%	13%	41%	65%	76%	7/6
Employs formal techniques of usability testing when designing the web interface	52%	57%	36%	58%	55%	7/10
Provides remote data access to each Member of Parliament	51%	22%	32%	54%	82%	2/3
Has a portal that organizes & provides access to Internet resources	45%	39%	32%	38%	61%	6/7
Has a system for creating/managing bills in digital format	43%	4%	14%	62%	73%	3/1
Has at least 6 items linked directly to proposed legislation on the website	42%	13%	32%	50%	61%	7/8
Webcasts at least 2 activities	35%	9%	18%	38%	61%	7/12
Provides information services linked specifically to policy issues & legislation before Parliament	34%	22%	23%	31%	52%	6/11
Has mandated standards for accessibility in support of persons with disabilities that the website must meet	30%	13%	9%	31%	52%	7/11
Has a policy for retaining digital resources permanently	27%	17%	23%	27%	33%	6/14
Has at least one system for creating documents which uses XML for the data standard	25%	4%	9%	27%	45%	3/2,16,19; 4/2,4,6,8,10,12,14
Has a system for creating/managing plenary session amendments to bills in digital format	22%	0%	5%	31%	39%	3/18
Has developed other electronic means for enabling citizens to express their views, apart from online discussion groups	20%	9%	14%	31%	24%	8/12
Citizens can express their opinions through online discussion groups supported by Parliament	18%	4%	14%	23%	24%	8/7
Has developed other electronic means for enabling members & parties to communicate their views, apart from websites	16%	17%	9%	19%	18%	8/21
Average	51%	33%	38%	57%	66%	

(Items ranked in descending order of percentage of all respondents having the item)

In addition to resources, however, there are a number of other reasons for this gap. There is sometimes a lack of understanding of what can be achieved with ICT, which leads to the absence of a clear vision that can be shared with others and used as the basis for moving forward. Leaders and members may not be fully committed to the development of ICT in parliament. Management responsibility and accountability may be unstated or ill-suited to the efficient use of technology. Or there may be conflicting objectives and an unwillingness to establish priorities, which can lead to spreading resources over too many projects. Whatever the causes, they must be acknowledged and solved by parliaments that wish to place themselves firmly at the centre of the information society.

Another major conclusion that emerges from this Report is that while many parliaments may not yet be employing ICT to its fullest, most have plans to improve their use of technology to support their stated values and goals. This is evident from the responses received, comments made and practices shared through the survey. The substantial percentage of respondents who acknowledged that they are “planning or considering” a particular application of technology or who noted their intention to enhance a system or service is a positive finding. The willingness of chambers and parliaments to complete this extensive survey and their openness in describing the current state of their technical environment is a demonstration of their interest in exchanging information, in learning from peers, and in cooperating with other legislative bodies. This conclusion suggests that with sufficient political will and availability of resources, there can be a far more effective deployment of ICT in parliaments in the future.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE: RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommended solutions emerging from this Report are based on the experiences of those who have been using ICT extensively to support the values and goals of their parliaments. They are intended to identify some of the key steps that legislatures can take to implement ICT more effectively. Although not exhaustive, they point to critical areas where improvements in management and strategic investments in technology, processes, standards, and people can make a significant difference. The recommendations are grouped into two major categories, managerial and technical, and include separate notes on the importance of human resources development and of cooperation and coordination.

Managerial recommendations

- Engage all major stakeholders in establishing a vision for ICT in parliament based on the values and goals of the institution, providing a shared view of priorities and leading to consensus on what needs to be achieved.
- Develop a strategic planning process that creates project plans, assigns management authority and responsibility, allocates resources, establishes deadlines, and ensures that its implementation is managed effectively.
- Consult members of parliament on an ongoing basis on priorities and technological solutions needed to support their representative and legislative tasks.
- Promote strong management by Secretaries General and other senior officers of the innovation process to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately, ICT projects are sustained over time, and meet their objectives.
- Invest in human resources, including by providing training for ICT specialists, other legislative and research staff, and members.
- Advocate collaboration at all levels, internally among IT specialists and major operating units, between chambers, at regional levels, and on a global basis to enable sharing of resources, good practices, and expertise.

Technical recommendations

- Implement a parliamentary information system, ensuring that it encompasses all bills and amendments, plenary debates and votes, and committee documents and actions.
- Create an authoritative, accessible, and engaging website that is accurate and timely, provides a complete and understandable view of parliamentary activities, offers multiple formats and channels of access, and contains the full range of institutional and legislative content.
- Adopt open standards and apply them to all legislative documents to facilitate wider citizens' access, the creation of a comprehensive legislative information resource that can be shared with others, integration of information and documents both internally and externally, and the establishment of a permanent digital archive.
- Build a technical infrastructure that is robust, flexible, secure and based on the strategic goals of parliament.
- Build a coherent knowledge base for parliaments that links all relevant internal and external information resources into an organized system that facilitates search and retrieval of needed information for members, staff, and the public.
- Continue to explore opportunities for using technology to engage citizens and civil society, perform assessments of their utility, and adopt those that are found most useful for supporting fruitful interaction between parliament and the public.

Human resources development

Human resources are a critical success factor for effectively implementing ICT in parliament. Knowledgeable staff from different departments are required to work together harmoniously to fully exploit new technologies. Those in the ICT departments and offices are called upon to ensure the delivery of critical components of the parliament's infrastructure, while making sure that the organization is able to integrate its knowledge effectively. Investing in in-house ICT staff and in their training is critical if parliaments hope to keep pace with the use of technology in society. Library and research staff have been leaders in using ICT to enhance access to knowledge in support of parliaments. This is due to the knowledge and skill of the people providing these services and to their willingness to share information and experience with others, both within their own parliaments and with colleagues from other parliaments. However, moving to the next level of building a strong parliamentary knowledge base will require additional efforts at developing and sustaining human resources throughout the legislature. Accomplishing this necessitates strong political support from the parliamentary leadership.

Cooperation and coordination

The concept of a global information society involves bringing together national and international players to advance the democratic values of openness and equality. All parliamentary institutions are different and rooted in the customs and traditions of their history, their culture, and their people. At the same time, they all - from local, through regional, to national level and beyond - share many of same challenges and opportunities. This is especially true in the use of information and communication technologies. The experiences of others in the public and private sector are useful, but many of the issues and problems that confront legislative bodies are different and belong to their unique and complex environment. To address these, parliaments need to cooperate and collaborate with each other and with other stakeholders, in a more coordinated way.

The Report underlines several areas where enhanced cooperation and coordination can accelerate progress in using technology in the service of parliamentary processes and of parliament's role in the information society:

- Establishing a global dialogue on open document standards among legislatures presents an opportunity not only to learn from others, but also to expand interoperability among different legislative systems and build a global legislative knowledge base. This topic also calls for an international debate on the political implications of e-parliament, as discussed in Chapter I.
- Developing common guidelines for parliamentary, committee, and member websites based on an update of the IPU Guidelines would serve the goals of greater and improved transparency, as well as providing more effective tools for access to parliamentary information.
- Sharing experiences in the development of the most widely used legislative systems would be particularly helpful to those who currently lack the resources and expertise. In certain situations this could open the possibility of collaborative applications development.
- Designing common interactive capabilities for communicating with citizens and training programmes, including using e-learning tools, for a wide range of parliamentary staff and members.

As the conclusions of this Report confirm, collaboration within and among parliaments is vital. Fortunately, ICT can make it eminently possible.

1. For purposes of this analysis, 30 questions were selected to represent a range of ICT systems, services, and management issues. The questions chosen were viewed as relatively neutral with respect to differences in the practices and procedures among legislative bodies. Based on the responses received, questions that might have been misunderstood, or whose meaning seemed ambiguous to some, were excluded. Data do not necessarily correspond to data shown in other Figures and Tables elsewhere in this report, since percentages here are always over all 105 parliaments or chambers that responded to the questionnaire, including possible non respondents to the question. For questions that contained a list of multiple choices, percentages refer to chambers that selected a certain number of items above the average. The purpose of this analysis was to identify a group of questions that were indicative of the use of ICT. They do not provide a comprehensive picture of technology use, but are simply one measure that provides a somewhat broader view than a single question.