

Utilization of Modern Technology and the Requirement of Technology at Cambodian Senate

Introduction

The Senate and General Secretariat are similar to other Parliament throughout the world in the sense that they rely very much on the effective collation and dissemination of information, in which technology plays an important role. Although there is a sufficient number of individual computer work stations (almost 200), the General Secretariat lacks a proper up-to-date network connecting its own work and that of the commissions that allows for the effective transfer and sharing of data. This situation means there is no reliable mechanism for creating or maintaining an 'Institutional memory', and no reliable and safe system for storing official documentation or retrieving it once stored. A small number of computers are connected to the Internet, but there is no general access or use of the Internet system, which would otherwise enhance the effectiveness of work.

In order for it to be effective, efficient and conform to the continuing trend of expansion of democratic pluralism and a bicameral system of the Legislative body, the Senate shall have, apart from its newly achieved 5 years Strategic Plan, and also have a plan to develop an information strategy that includes planning and installing a modern information system and information technology infrastructure, which we called IT (Information Technology) Master Plan. It will be construed as the main pillar for the Senate development in our contemporary era of the Information Technology.

IT Master Plan is master piece of a large number of key information on strategic goals and objectives in which figure the intranet, extranet networking, Library Management Information Technology, which including Catalog Module, Lending Module and E-Library, Election Documents Managements System, Inventory Management Information System, Finance Management Information System (FMIS), Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) and training structures, systems, policies and procedures toward which the Senate intend to achieve in short, medium and long term period. This plan started in the year 2003 in corporation with UNDP, however, we do not put in practice yet and that is mean that the plan is not successful. Beside this so the senate of Cambodia prepared five years strategic plan in order to replace and supplement to IT master plan.

I. Current Infrastructure Provision

The Senate operates from a number of buildings on one main site. These building are not networked. Where cabling exist within buildings. There are no fiber optic cables. The local network (Which should allow information sharing on draft bill analysis, challenges and comments, Internet access, shared use of printers, e-mail, file sharing and storage) where it does exist can be classified as 'poor'. Poor networking mean documents are not efficiently shared, they become lost, and multiple version control. None of the Senate buildings are linked to any other institution, such as near by ministries and National Assembly.

I. a. Current IT Human Resource and Staff skills

I.a.1. IT Skills of staff

Most staff use computers solely for word processing and make little use of the extensive range of other applications. Staff generally does not have the sufficient range of skills or knowledge

to enter the correct information into the computer. There was a lack of working methodology in computer usage, which points to poor work efficiency. Staff do not know how to format or create documents correctly. They do not really understand the software packages provided as part of their system software. Most of them do not know how to manage documents efficiently.

Therefore, generally speaking, the overall knowledge and skills of staff with regard to IT use within the senate was limited to word processing (although some staff who had access to the Internet demonstrated sufficient user competence in basic searching and accessing Internet e-mail accounts such as Yahoo and Hotmail), In terms of overall knowledge and skill application, little use was made by staff of other software programmes (such as spreadsheets, Power Point, et cetera), although some individuals did demonstrate competency within these areas.

1.a.2. IT support

The current Senate IT Team is very small. Their existing knowledge and level of skills are insufficient to perform the required existing tasks or no database administrator (as there is no database to be administered) and no programme developer to write in-house programme. There is no network manager and no one currently provides any ‘web Master’ service or function. Finding staff to undertake these role and responsibilities will be essential for a well functioning Institutional IT system.

1.a.3.Connection to other institutions

Currently there is no means of communicating with other institutions, such as the National Assembly and Ministries (e.g. Council of Ministers; Ministry of Assembly Relations and Inspection) other than through ISPs (usually e-mail) or telephone, and this is providing that the other institution has the necessary IT facilities in place.

1.a.4.Video link to the National Assembly

Currently there is no means of observing the activities of the National Assembly while they are in session, discussing draft legislating and proposal of law. One of the desires expressed by Senators during the survey period was for the ability to observe proceedings in the Assembly.

1.a.5.Problem summary

A number of critical issues have been considered that affect the smooth and efficient working of the Senate. These include the workflow of commissions and departments; existing IT support, provision and infrastructure; Secretariat working practice; exiting human resource capacity and IT skills; and communication with the National Assembly. Many of these issues can be overcome by installing the appropriate IT infrastructure, equipment, software and by providing necessary training and support.

1.a.6.The current work flow of commissions and departments

Improving the passage of draft Bills and information exchange within Parliament and its Parliamentary Commissions is of crucial importance and must be considered the top priority within this IT plan and strategic plan. It is, therefore, briefly worth describing what that process involves before the main problems are identified. In brief, the current passage of draft

Bills is from the originating Ministry (or from the Assembly itself) to the Permanent Committee of the National Assembly. The Permanent Committee is made up of:

- The Chair of the National Assembly
- Two Vice-Chairs of the National Assembly
- Chairpersons of all nine Commissions of the National Assembly

Once the nature of the bill has been established it is then sent to the most appropriate Committee for consideration. The bills sponsor/proposer is then invited to 'defend' the bill, and answer any questions the Committee may have. The bill is then forwarded to the Plenary Session for adoption. In theory the process is straightforward; however, it is fraught with difficulty and delay as detailed in the main points below. Draft bills are rarely shared to other Commissions or Members meaning that Commissions do not have a reasonable period of time to access documents and voice their concerns at an initial stage. We do not have net work or database, so we send every bill and paper in hand.

Some Members claim to receive the bill only one-day prior to the bill being considered; not giving them sufficient time to read the material or consult other colleagues. This inevitably means that Bills are rushed through without a due consultation process being engaged in. Currently, a great deal of Plenary Session time is taken up with discussing and attempting to analyze aspects of the bill, making the Plenary exercise very inefficient. A more effective plenary session may mean more bills being passed in a timely way. Early access to relevant documentation can help overcome this issue. It appears a partisan approach to information sharing takes place, therefore deliberate withholding of documentation is engaged in, meaning Members are unable to fulfill their duties of representing the people as constitutionally mandated.

Poor communication between departments and bureaus (usually because of a lack of facilities and resources) cause problems in the facilitation of a bills passage. There is no real means or ways that interested individuals can access the relevant documentation apart from through certain departments and bureaus. Draft bills are not more widely circulated because of the costs involved in photocopying them. As can be seen from the main issues above, the current passage or flow of draft bills causes considerable problems for the effective functioning of Parliament, and is a major barrier for Commissions when coming to fulfill their duties. The main challenges lie specifically in the Departments of Legal Research; Department of Legislative Procedure; and the Library Group and the Bureaus within each of these Departments. The reason for this is that these Departments are the main actors involved in the passage, study or analysis of a Bill, and need to be able to pass suitable opinion on a Bill's content and implications. A significant responsibility lies with the Bureau of Legal Assistance which undertakes the preparation of the agenda and programme of the Plenary Session and is also responsible for the communication of the Bills adopted by the National Assembly to the Senate, Constitutional Council and the King.

The Legal Analysis Group is responsible for providing legal analysis and legal advice to the Commission deputies as well as the Plenary Session. The Research Group is responsible for providing research material and information relating to all aspects of a bill. In all the departments, bureaus and groups considered above, the lack of desktop computing facilities, internal networking, file sharing, access to the Internet (especially for the Research Group) and general communication all add up to a poor level of service and contribute significantly to Parliament being unable to perform its function effectively. The lack of IT facilities and a suitable infrastructure also extends to the knowledge and skill base of staff with regard to IT application. which is seen as a major key in improving this critical aspect of Parliament's work.

It is worth pointing out that if this key area of Parliament's work is not improved, then the National Assembly will be unable to move toward becoming a well functioning Institution in line with other modern parliamentary institutions throughout the world. In this sense, the importance of acknowledging these limitations and accepting solutions/recommendations aimed at speeding up the information flow and data sharing is essential for helping Parliament meet its constitutional mandate. Without this step forward, draft legislation will continue to be processed in a way that is partisan, inefficient, costly and essentially undemocratic.

II. Information Services

Disseminating information relating to the activities of the Senate and creating as Institutional 'identity' is an important task for the Senate and General Secretariat. However, this has not been as easy task mainly due to a lack of the necessary 'Information Technology' and appropriate financial resources that would allow the effective dissemination of information to the public throughout the Kingdom. The senate publication, aimed at providing information on the procedural workings of the Senate is somewhat limited in scope. The publication is produced regularly but provides little detail about the legislative activities of the House. These constraints are mainly due to the limited funds and technical support necessary to widely produce and distribute information.

Many staff lack any experience of how a modern parliamentary system functions and consequently there is a lack of useful documentation specifically designed for senators, staff and the public on the various working aspects of the Senate. Furthermore, new senators elected to Parliament will find little relevant literature to induct them in the workings of the parliamentary system, or any information that clearly describes the roles and responsibilities of various departments, committees and other relevant procedural functions. There is a need to improve the production of Parliamentary records and develop ways to improve public access to these records. Therefore, in order to develop the information technology among the parliamentary staff as well parliamentary member, the Senate has a 5 years strategic plan for modern information system.

III. Develop an information strategy that includes planning and installing a modern information system and information technology infrastructure.

Making better use of information technology is seen as a key means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Senate and General Secretariat's work. The first step in achieving this aim is to develop a strategy for the installation of a communication system that enables the timely exchange of information, and increases the level of internal networking. Achieving this goal will allow the creation of systems designed to electronically document the working of the Senate through the introduction of electronic catalogues and electronic libraries and support the work of Information dissemination. Updating and redesigning the Senate web-site is an important means of managing and making available Senate publications both internally within the Institution, and to a wider external audience.

This approach needs to be complemented by developing the capacity of staff in information technology skills in several key areas, specifically those related to making best use of an Internet/Intranet system. Staff also needs to be given training in maintaining and repairing office electronic equipment such as computers, printers and photocopiers.

Main Activities

- Undertaken a comprehensive review of the current Information Technology (IT) situation in the Senate in cooperation with the National Assembly;
- Conduct a thorough IT needs analysis relating to the administrative, material and legislative needs of the Senate;
- Develop a short and long term IT infrastructure plan covering the design, purchase, installation and implementation of new systems and obtain donor funding to implement the IT plan;
- Undertake a phased and progressive installation plan focusing on the most urgent IT needs;
- Develop and implement an IT training plan that takes into account the need to maintain and repair new system, as well as providing on repairing office electronic equipment such as computers, printer and photocopiers;
- Redesign and update the Senate Web-site.

IV. Improve the information, research and documentation services and research of the Secretariat to better communicate the work of the public and civil society

The capacity to provide documentation, research and information support services to the Senate is of great importance, as the systematic and efficient distribution of legislative information and documentation is a necessary condition for a well functioning Senate that communicates effectively with the population. In order to achieve this, there is a need to establish new information dissemination systems and services, and upgrade those that already exist; and a necessary part of this process is to train staff in operating, managing and maintaining these services once established.

The roles of the library, the Internet/Intranet, mass media, and parliamentary publications skill Hansard will play an increasingly important part in the future of the Senate and Secretariat. The existing Senate library has good potential to become a ‘Recourse Center’, but requires a through feasibility study and subsequent training of staff in appropriate skill to realize this aim. This objective could be achieved through cooperation between the Cambodian Parliament, UNDP, and other partners and donors.

Main Activities

- General own Senate’s printing House the most practical and efficient mechanism for printing official Senate publication (e.g. Hansard, minutes of proceedings) and other documents in a timely way;
- Undertake a feasibility study on establishing a ‘Resource Center’ and measures needed to improve the Senate Library;
- Develop proper archive facilities, an e-catalogue and e-library using literature and materials from local research Institution and train staff in development and use;
- Develop proposals for the establishment of an independent radio/television station for the Senate and seek donor support for the purchase of equipment;
- Train staff in managing, operating and maintaining information dissemination technology and equipment;

- Improve the quality of bulletins so they provide useful information on the legislative process;
- Train ten staff for TOT in information and documentation support services.

IV. IT system

In implementing this objective there has been some tension and difficulties, as Network and IT systems have not been installed. There is a need for fund raising from donor countries in order to meet the requirements on equipping the General Secretariat with IT system and to implement the IT system. In spite of this, the General Secretariat has already be prepared in the training of officials specialized in information technology and electronic repair and maintenance. Even facing some difficulties, the General Secretariat has been working on raising funds from development partners. Actually, UNDP, which is a development partner of the General Secretariat of the Senate has helped to install an Internet Cafe for senators and staff of the General Secretariat so that they step by step do research. As for the Senate Website, the General Secretariat has web page. It is noted that development partners usually provide support in skill trainings but do not have any principles in helping with operational material and equipments or on the update and adjustment for the Senate Web Page.

IV.a. Information Dissemination

There have been also some difficulties encountered in this objective as it is related to budget issue which should be spent. Actually, the General Secretariat of the Senate has not created its own printing house and studio to produce and disseminate the information. As this project requires high cost which beyond the capacity of the Senate, there is a need to raise funds from development partners in order to purchase these equipments. However, the General Secretariat of the Senate has developed documents and other information related to the Senate and to disseminate them through public and private print and electronic media. Additionally, we have prepared in the training of staff in the areas of management, operation, maintenance, techniques of the information dissemination. The General Secretariat has also step by step worked on the upgrade and amelioration of the quality of the Senate Bulletin by inserting more important activities of the Senate especially those related to the legislative, oversight, and representative roles of senators. As for the ability to create a Documentation Center; even now the General Secretariat of the Senate has not yet worked on; it has established the Archive Unit to store the Senate's documents. As for the library, although it is not yet electronically organized, there have been efforts to provide books and documents to serve the general citizen; as a matter of fact there were 15,105 and 21,109 people who respectively came to read and looked at the Senate Website. Besides, the training of 10 trainers on the information service and document the General Secretariat has not yet fully implemented.

IV.b. Strategic demand to increase the efficiency of the Senate

- Development of a modernized library: the Senate has strategic plan on library. This plan should be implemented so that members and officials of the Senate can conduct research work more effectively. The Senate should have modernized library with documents and books in hard copies, and information in electronic system. The use of Website can help with the research documents on the Senates. Library should have enough funds to subscribe all issue of important magazines and develop an E-Catalogue. The storage of institutional documents in the Archives should be organized carefully according to the expertise and techniques;

- Manage to implement the master plan established in December 2003 for the development of broader IT at the Senate. With assurance from development partners, the first phase should be

implemented to complete the installation of necessary equipment and human resources training. After this, the remaining phase should be further considered;

- Further develop the Website of the Senate to insure the actuality of dissemination;
- At least one expert advisor should be provided by development partner to help provide advice to the leadership of the Senate in continuing the strategic development and strengthening of the capacity the Senate;

- Regional offices should be developed by establishing more offices, installation of equipment necessary for administrative operations, and strengthening the capacity of those officials working in those regions;

- Establishment of the printing house to increase the efficiency in a number processes (publish reports, bills, proposals, laws, magazines, bulletin, etc...). This operation can be done provided that we have printing machine and other equipment plus technical training;
- Studio should be established to produce and disseminate information the citizen and the press;
- Information Center of the Senate should be established with clear plan and steps along with capacity building of officials who take this responsibility. This Center is a door opened to public relations of the Senate which should contribute to the training of national press members, high ranking officials in various ministries and institutions and the general public so that they have good knowledge of the Senate and increase good cooperation among one another;
- Attention should be paid to the necessary equipment and means to increase the efficiency and quality of all services of the Senate and the system of good security and safety;

- The Permanent Committee of the Senate and the General Secretariat should try to resolve with the royal government so that transportation means will be provided to the nine specialized commissions and services of the General Secretariat.

Conclusion

In short, the Senate of Cambodia at this moment has only web page, for researching some information related to the processing of the bills and draft of law, the Senate and Secretariat General. Therefore, the Senate needs to create an integrating IT strategy for the infrastructure, human resource development, data management to access to meet the increasing need for timely. Which accurate and relevant information that will allow the Senate to meet it overall strategic goal, in particular, improving the overall passage of draft legislation design to enable state reform. Additionally, anticipate benefit of the IT master plan and strategic planning which will be productive, effective and efficient use of human and parliamentary resource that should contribute to lessening to overall expenditure in a number of key areas.

