

THE INTRODUCTION OF ICTs IN THE PARLIAMENT OF ZIMBABWE

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The presenter is privileged to have served the Parliament of Zimbabwe at a time ICTs were being introduced and, after spending some time in the private sector, to be back at Parliament to oversee the implementation of ICTs that should see parliament improve its service delivery. The presenter has the technical know-how to be able to deliver desired outcomes. The institution has the right attitude towards ICTs and the only challenge we face is the funding of the dream.

Parliament, as early as 1995, realized the need for computerization in order to automate the bulk of their processes that were manual. A Systems Analyst was appointed to assist with the automation process. The following hardware and systems were put in place:

- LAN implementation for Hansard processing- we are one of the few countries that produce printed reports of debates (Hansards) in less than 24r hours.
- Introduction of e-mail and internet services for Officers of Parliament to speed up communication.
- Introduction of an Informative website to highlight the functions of Parliament and raise the visibility of the same.
- Introduction of Office automation systems- Finance/Accounts/ERP-PFMS (SAP), Library **CDS/ISIS**.

Discussions and consultations were made over the years leading into the Parliamentary reforms of 1997. The reforms ushered what the Clerk of Parliament called “a new culture of work and service delivery” to parliament. There was need for improved service delivery, need for cost cutting measures, need to revisit parliamentary processes and procedures and identify areas that could be improved and that could cut costs. ICTs play a very central and pivotal role in such business process re-engineering developments. It became necessary to think of new ways to harness the intrinsic power of ICTs in parliamentary processes. We dare to dream since we believe that one day we should be able to provide the best ICT services and products for our parliament. It is in this quest that we have managed to:

- Introduce computers for the constituency offices where the Member of Parliament and the general public can access offline parliamentary information. They can also access the informatics database (a repository of socio-economic and demographic data and information about the constituencies) which is also currently offline. Plans are underway to connect these to Parliament (through a VSAT WAN or any feasible wireless networking infrastructure). This will facilitate for regular updates of the information and the data in the informatics database. The WAN will also enable the constituencies to

access Parliament through the Internet and e-mail. Our challenge is funding the project. We are negotiating with government and other stakeholder in order to collaborate, pool resources and share the cost of WAN infrastructure, bandwidth utilization as well as expertise.

- Develop a revamped database-enabled website. In view of the amount of information (Reports, Bills, Acts, MP Profiles, Constituency data, etc) that has to be regularly updated and uploaded, the website was designed so as to enable content to be managed through a content management system (CMS).

There are projects we are hoping to implement in the near future- pending availability of funding. Some of them are:

- Introduction of e-mail services to members of parliament through webmail services. This way, MPs and Officers can access their Parliament e-mails from anywhere in the world. This requires that we upgrade our bandwidth to the internet and migrate from leased line to broadband via high speed wireless connections in order to cope with increased traffic to the Parliament mail server and demand for internet access by researchers, Members of Parliament and Officers from within the parliament building.
- Implement **BUNGENI AKOMA NTOSO** ("Architecture for **Knowledge-Oriented Management of African Normative Texts using Open Standards and Ontologies**") to manage our legal knowledge and documents. Rationale for the implementation of BUNGENI includes:-
 - By its nature, Parliament must make its documents and publications accessible to the public. It is in the best interest of Parliament to implement systems that can cost effectively deliver the outputs to the publics.
 - Parliament originates and works with huge volumes of information as part of its constitutional mandate (Verbatim Reports [Hansards], Reports from Committee sittings, Bills, Acts, Research Papers, Minutes of public hearing and other proceedings, Votes of proceedings, PR, Promotional and Marketing materials).
 - Such an implementation, complemented by appropriate and timely training will cut costs of document management in a huge way (Printing, photocopying and distribution costs of the above documents to all Members almost on a daily basis).
- Implement open source software in order to avoid the hassles and costs of software licensing (Microsoft). We are targeting Open Lynx or UBUNTU Linux with OpenOffice. The challenge is to do with re-orienting our users to the Open Source platform.
- Expand Office Automation Systems to include HR Systems, Improved Library Management Systems.
- Other systems such as electronic voting systems remain dreams.

Slowly and step by step, we will realize our dreams.