

Executive Summary

The extraordinary advances and rapid social and economic diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT) have had a profound impact on the lives of individual citizens and on the functioning of public institutions. As technology, citizen engagement, and the political process have come together, parliaments have been confronted with growing demands to be more open and more responsive to citizens. Currently, however, global economic conditions are forcing many legislatures to work with fewer resources. Technology alone cannot address all the challenges, but when planned and implemented strategically, it can generate gains in efficiency and effectiveness throughout the legislature's operations, while fostering the parliamentary democratic values of transparency, accountability and accessibility.

The *World e-Parliament Report 2012* documents the efforts of legislatures to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to support their constitutional functions. The Report is based on the Global Survey of ICT in Parliaments 2012 conducted by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament between February and May 2012, which is the third in a series of surveys that began in 2007. The number of parliaments responding to the surveys has increased over time, from 105 in 2007 to 134 in 2009 and 156 in 2012. These 156 parliaments represent a membership of 28,613 legislators.

The goals of these surveys and their accompanying World e-Parliament Reports are to present the latest data on the worldwide use of systems, applications, hardware and tools in various parliamentary services, to provide readers with concrete examples of the adoption of ICT in the most significant areas of parliamentary business, and to promote the sharing of knowledge and experiences in technology among legislative bodies.

This Report covers the following topics:

- Developments in ICT and parliaments since 2010
- Communication and engagement with citizens
- Achieving openness, transparency, and accountability through websites
- Technology services for members
- The management of parliamentary documentation
- Libraries and research services
- Human resources and technical infrastructure
- ICT strategic planning and implementation for e-parliament
- The state of e-parliament in 2012
- Advances in international cooperation

While many of the challenges to the effective use of ICT noted in the previous Reports are still present in the 2012 edition, the findings of the latest survey suggest that there has been limited, but nevertheless important progress in the state of e-parliament in the past two years. Data

indicate that: more political leaders are engaged in setting the goals and objectives for ICT in the institution; mobile devices and applications are being adopted more rapidly than expected; the implementation of XML for managing bills has increased; more parliaments now have systems for managing plenary and committee documents; and, both the intent and the actions of parliaments to share information and to collaborate on improving technology have risen substantially. One example is the considerable progress made towards establishing an international parliamentary and legislative XML standard.

From a development perspective, particularly significant is the finding that despite the challenges faced, parliaments in the lowest income level are closing the technology gap. While still very large, the gap between the average e-parliament score in the highest and the lowest income groups has decreased significantly, by over 25 per cent in the past two years.

A majority of parliaments reported that the three most important improvements in their work made possible by ICT were: 1) more information and documents on the website 2) increased capacity to disseminate information and documents; and, 3) more timely delivery of information and documents to members. While these three enhancements serve members well, they also help parliament to be more open and transparent to citizens.

Other positive findings can be found in the area of basic ICT services, such as personal computer support, systems administration, web publishing, and network operations. Of the nine services assessed by the survey, six are provided by 75 per cent or more of parliaments. Furthermore, Internet is available in almost 100 per cent of parliaments and most have wireless access to it. In assessing the short term goals (2010-2012) of the e-Parliament Framework 2010-2020¹, findings suggested that 8 of the 12 targets appeared to have been met by early 2012.

Despite these signs of progress, however, many parliaments still face substantial obstacles in their efforts to enhance the state of ICT to support the work and purposes of the institution. For example, many members are not provided with personal computers and are not connected to the parliament's local area network (LAN); many libraries still lack the technology that would enable them to provide better services; XML has been implemented by only about one quarter of all chambers; and best practices in the use of the new media for two-way communication with citizens have still not emerged. An additional challenge is that the use of XML continues to be highly correlated with the income level of the country.

In the area of communication, there is a technology gap between citizens and parliaments, as well as a knowledge gap. Almost one fifth of parliaments reported that citizens do not use ICT to communicate with them. Nearly one quarter said that citizens do not have access to the Internet, and more than one quarter reported that citizens were not familiar with technology. However, the knowledge gap affected even more parliaments. Most noted that their major communication challenge was not a lack of access to technology, but a lack of knowledge. Over half of all parliaments cited citizens' lack of understanding of the legislative process as a primary obstacle, while just under half cited members' lack of experience with technology.

Most parliaments identified two challenges that were particularly difficult to overcome: lack of financial resources and lack of adequate staff. Parliaments at all income levels reported that they face financial constraints. And it is especially telling that even parliaments at the highest income

1 Proposed by the Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament; see *World e-Parliament Report 2010*, Chapter 10.

level said that an adequate ICT staff was the biggest challenge. Many parliaments also face serious external problems. These include their country's limited access to high speed Internet, the lack of public access to technologies such as personal computers, and parliament's lack of an independent budget and hiring authority.

There are a number of strategies which parliaments, working individually and collectively, and with the support of the international donor community, can undertake to address these obstacles. Based on the experiences of those that have reached the most advanced levels of technology, there are at least seven good practices to pursue.

The first of these is to invest in people. Parliaments need to establish an ongoing training programme for internal staff and/or employ contract staff who already have the necessary skills and experience and can transfer know-how to the organization. Members too need to understand how technology can serve both the institution and themselves as representatives of the people. And, other parliamentary staff need to acquire knowledge about ICT that goes beyond just how to operate a system designed to support their work.

Training needs to be framed within a strategic approach to technology. A strategic plan serves many purposes: affirming goals and priorities; identifying intended outcomes; estimating costs and schedules; assessing progress and making changes as needed; and communicating the parliament's primary objectives for technology to all internal and external stakeholders, including funders. A well-executed implementation plan encompasses all technology projects; maps their relationships, interdependencies, and potential synergies; and leads to a more rational allocation of time and resources.

Parliaments also need to capitalize on recent advances in ICT. The benefits of mobile technologies for parliaments are becoming increasingly evident. They are more flexible, can be fast to implement, and are able to be used for connecting and communicating with growing numbers of citizens in new ways. Exploiting cloud services also offers many advantages to parliaments, although there may be obstacles to doing so where reliable and high speed Internet access is still lacking.

Sharing experiences and solutions can help greatly in identifying which technologies work best in the legislative setting and what approaches are most productive. As a public institution, it is too expensive and an inefficient use of scarce resources for each parliament to create its own unique solutions given the extensive research, evaluation, development, testing and implementation often required. The findings from the 2012 survey strongly underscore that the time is right for collaboration as many parliaments seek opportunities for greater cooperation and sharing of knowledge.

Finally, transforming legislatures into modern institutions capable of using technology effectively requires a strong commitment to transparency, accountability and accessibility. Political leaders and members must make this a high priority strategic goal. Establishing a culture of transparency is consistent with the responsibility of parliament as the peoples' representative, and with the values of citizens who live in the information society. Promoting genuine dialogue with citizens and not just one-way communication goes hand-in-hand with greater transparency. The use of new communication tools can help parliaments to focus less on *talking to* citizens and more on *listening to* citizens, and engage the public in a productive dialogue that promotes citizen participation in the political process.