

COMMON APPROACH TO CAPACITY BUILDING IN AFRICA

By
Dr. Ladi Hamalai *MFR*

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Introduction

Setting up a common agenda for development in Africa is a familiar strategy. This approach may not have produced the most desired outcomes yet but has its advantages.

Examples of such common strategies include:

- **The Strategic Industrial Development Masterplan under the auspices of OAU – AU.**
- **SAP and later PRS guided by IMF/ World Bank**
- **NEPAD and the APRM.**
- **MDGs under the auspices of UN etc.**

The rationale behind the common approach to agenda setting and implementation has been commonality in terms of development setbacks and need to pool resources to maximize utility, increase level of economic interactions with positive pay-offs and accelerate growth and development.

Reasons have been proffered as to why such programs have failed short of expectation. The most referred to are:

- **Lack of sufficient political will and commitment by participating states.**
- **Poor resource backbone**
- **Weak institutional capacities to effect the reforms and effectively implement the agenda. The major problems here are poor level of technical support and poor attitudes.**
- **Lack of sufficient support from the advanced countries.**

State Document/Information Management in African Parliaments

African Parliaments have more peculiar commonalities in their short histories relative to other arms of government, often dependence on the executive for resources, and weak institutional capacities. Consequently, more grounds need to be covered to attain effective growth of the most important organ of democratic rule.

State Document/Information Management in African Parliaments (Cont.)

Parliaments are the most democratic institutions of governance by their structure. The Parliaments is the only institution where power is decentralized. Each member represents a constituency and each member has a vote. Thus of the 469 parliamentarians in Nigerian National Assembly is a unit of power.

State Document/Information Management in African Parliaments (Cont.)

The Parliament is also the only organ of governance that works with tons of information on a daily basis. The legislative process demands the processing of minutes of daily sittings and other information in form of votes of proceedings, hansards (verbatim reports), circulation of committee reports, bills, research reports etc.

The magnitude of information processing, can be appreciated further by an example.

The Nigerian parliament has 469 members

Daily, each of the members must be forward copies of:

[a] order paper,

[b] votes of proceedings and verbatim report of the previous day's sitting,

[c] committee reports if any tabled that day, bills tabled etc.

One verbatim report can take up to 100 pages (more often more than that), a bill can be 5 pages or over 100 pages, committee reports can reach 100 pages. On most days, each of the 469 parliamentarian may require up to 300 pages of documents to read.

These documents are manually processed and photocopied.

The Parliament is also the only organ of governance that operates publicly and its units of power (parliamentarians) account directly to their constituencies.

Sittings are done in full glare of the press and its proceedings should be accessed by citizens.

Therefore, development and utilization of information management technologies for the parliament are a necessity and not luxury.

Modernization of legislative processes, ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in its role of representation cannot be attained without revolutionizing information management skills and technologies.

The parliament is essentially an information processing organ. Just view its main processes, right from generating research reports, studying and enacting laws, conducting public hearings, committee reporting down to communicating with constituencies.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UTILIZATION IN AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS

Current Status:

Most African Parliaments do not meet the minimum standards in IT infrastructure and systems provision.

A few have no internet access.

Many cannot afford the basic infrastructure. Most don't

have skilled personnel to maintain infrastructure even if it is donated.

Basic requirements – good LAN (for internet and

Stumbling Blocks

We mentioned earlier poor resources, low appreciation levels, weak technical capacities and general state of underdevelopment.

WHAT TO DO

Networking:

Examples abound of networking experiences for development. We earlier mentioned the Strategic Industrial Development Masterplan under the auspices of OAU in the 1980s.

Even though it was not implemented by most participating African Countries including Nigeria, a blue print was designed.

Several other examples of networking in knowledge/information management in other continents can be cited.

The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) is a good example. Knowledge sharing and attending technologies seem to be the basic focus of the network outfit for European Parliaments.

However, while ECPRD started at a vantage position where most of the participating parliaments have developed some basic IT infrastructure/systems, information management network in Africa though overdue has to start from the scratch. So its initial functions may be quite unique.

First step is to develop a common agenda (blueprint) for IT infrastructure and skills development for African Parliaments.

It is assumed, Akomo Ntoso and Bugeni provide a near ready solution for software development.

The agenda should include:

- minimum standards for infrastructure: LAN (or wireless solutions), internet and intranet access, websites and workstations depending of size of categorization of parliaments
- Accessing and utilization of Akomo Ntoso and Bungeni.
- Knowledge management capacities - information generation – research outputs and information sharing
- Funding issues
- Technical capacity requirements – basically training requirements and the implementation.
- Maintenance requirements (to include regular upgrades).
- Identification of international donor support

While the African Network for ICT in Parliaments can develop the technical Proposal, APU (African Inter-parliamentary Union) and AU may have to endorse so as to ensure commitment of political leadership. The network should be responsible to APU.

At Initial stages, the network would focus on monitoring progress in building facilities and capacities and reporting to APU in an APRM style.

At a later stage, information sharing becomes a primary function.

Secretariat

There is an urgent need to establish a secretariat with an agreed upon TOR. This workshop should issue a communiqué to that effect.

The Secretariat should be domesticated in one of the African Parliaments that is willing to provide office and take-off furnishings/equipment. Membership should be drawn from heads of IT divisions of parliaments.

Preparatory work should include:

1. Gaining approval of APU,
2. Development of Masterplan for ICT in Parliament for African Countries,
3. Approval of the Masterplan by APU and
4. Monitoring of buy in by African Parliaments.
5. Development of implementation manual
6. Monitoring of implementation adopting Peer review mechanism