

*Towards the establishment of an African Parliamentary Knowledge Network on ICT,
legislation and documentation*

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THE IMPORTANCE OF A BROADER POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Participants,

All protocol observed,

Let me take this opportunity to warmly thank the organisers of the present workshop for the timely initiative and the warm welcome received by the delegation from Cameroon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My able colleagues have clearly depicted the political and institutional framework within which the Africa Knowledge Network could be established, I will therefore focus on the importance of the necessary political support for ensuring ownership, sustainability and effectiveness.

In July 2005, G8 Members made a commitment to **“helping develop skilled professionals for Africa’s private and public sectors through supporting networks of excellence between African’s and other countries’ institutions of higher education and centres of excellence in science and technology institutions”**

UNECA and UN/DESA have embarked in the process of establishing such networks involving, Governments, Parliaments, Academic partners, institutional bodies and have come up, as far as UN/DESA is concerned with Africa-i Parliament and all subsequent developments, and to some extent, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament.

All these initiatives were supposed to move us directly into modernity.

But, where are we today?

We are lagging far behind all expectations and my wish is that the present workshop and tomorrow conference help us move not a step, but many steps forward in order to make up for lost time.

What do we need to do?

- Establish an African coherent legal framework, taking into account the different national existing legislations;
- Clearly address the capacity building and sensitization issues;
- Strengthen partnerships involving governments, the private sector, multilateral development agencies and civil society as well as applying strong leadership, resources, innovation and attention.
- Involve the Diaspora.

As President KAGAME of Rwanda put it in an address to a gathering at the Royal Society, in London, last September: **“We have to build African knowledge institutions quickly. We have to build domestic and regional capacities to produce a critical mass of knowledge if we are to render science and technology tools of socio-economic and cultural transformation. There are no shortcuts; neither are there alternatives.”**

From the above, it is clear that only a strong political will and tenacity on the part of African states can ensure the establishment of the long awaited Networks of Excellence.

The following is necessary:

Awareness

Through capacity building and sensitisation; what can knowledge networks bring us in terms of economic, social and political transformation of our societies?

Ownership

By appropriating experiences from other regions and customization;

Sustainability

By involving various stakeholders (Private and Public sectors, Civil Society and NGOs...) and taking appropriate legislation; making available necessary funding;

Effectiveness

By ensuring that the goals set are achieved.

Without a clearly expressed commitment and political will, it is just like trying to fit a brand new car, without engine, with the most sophisticated DVD device and hope it will deliver high quality sound or picture.

Parliaments have a key role to play in this process:

- As lawmaking bodies, they have to ensure that adequate legislation is enacted;
- As representatives of their constituents, they must ensure that enacted laws protect socially weaker groups, guarantee fundamental rights;
- As Watchdogs of government, they are institutional guarantors;
- As Diplomats, they must develop international cooperation (regional, continental, transcontinental...), thus paving the way to enhancing clear and unquestioned political will from the Executive.

Because of the particular nature of Parliaments, as Parliamentarians, let us foster inter parliamentary cooperation to support the present initiative with an ambitious plan of action for the establishment of Africa Knowledge Networks of Excellence. We have the will, we have the power to make things move.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Participants,

All protocol respected,

Thank you for your kind attention

