

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP
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

For many of us the word revolution meant many things, for those of us in the liberation struggles of our countries this meant the attainment of freedom from oppression and the realisation of representative democracy.

Today we are all confronted with a new and exciting revolution known as ICT, which will enable all elected representatives, their institutions and electors to be in the 21st Century.

Our African Parliaments are currently faced with the following electronic democracy challenges:

- Elected Representative, need institutions that are responsive and supportive to their knowledge and technical requirements and that support the development of best practices and procedural developments which are informed by the experiences of other established democracies.
- Parliaments regularly ratify International Agreements and Protocols that require further information than the Executive provide.
- Parliaments pass laws that are transformatory in nature and their institutions are required to provide them with the most recent and up-to-date research information and transformation as an ongoing project.
- Modern Parliaments are seeing their Executives becoming more, efficient, complex and sophisticated.
- Oversight over Executive Action and the scrutiny thereof is becoming a very complex challenge with the need for real time information and analysis.

- Networking at a local, regional, continental and international level becomes a real need, to be an effective Parliament.
- Sharing of experiences in so far as our evolving democracy's are concerned and the development of best practices is crucial for the future of our institutions.
- Democracy has evolved to be one of greater demand for participation and accountability. And we have a responsibility to continuously improve and enhance the public interest.

Modern ICT, whilst cognisant of all its ills, is the only option available to us as Parliaments to close the information, networking, knowledge sharing and communicating gap.

Elected representatives in Government and in Parliament need to ensure that policies, legislation and budgets are aligned to ensure that the democracy that we all fought for is a beneficiary of this “new revolution” that is rapidly unfolding and making our world more accessible and user friendly from the office, home, pocket PC cellphone or wherever you are.

We need to transform the mindset of those in the Parliamentary Service, modern day politicians and society and at the same time ensure that ICT does not replace representative democracy nor render the elected obsolete, but that it makes the elected accessible and directly communicable with.

We need a new thinking “elected representative” that will stop at nothing to utilise the information highway to access information, best practice, best legislation passed around the globe in whatever language to achieve a “better life for all and a better world” We all need good laws that are in keeping with international best practice and agreements.

In modern day democracy, with the introduction of various models of the separation of powers, parliaments are experiencing new challenges of being more persuasive to the executive arm of government.

Therefore Parliaments have to develop new tools of overseeing and scrutinising executive action of decisions taken, implementation and the impact of policy and impact and implementation of legislation passed. Parliaments in this phase need ICT to network internally and externally.

These “tools of trade” will enable us to achieve this enormously complex task over an ever increasingly sophisticated arm of government.

Elected representatives need more real time information and accessibility on best practise internationally and this should be achieved across boundaries and all cultural barriers with no restrictions in the way of getting information fast and which is relevant. As municipal governments are evolving the world over as important spheres of government, taking decisions that impact on the lives of people, they are at the forefront of service delivery.

It is important that all these spheres of government are effectively networked and function cooperatively and use ITC to foster good inter-governmental relations. The 21st century challenge for all parliaments is to move away from old fashioned paper driven systems to ways of representation of people to a modern day parliament that is responsive to the needs of people and that offers them the participatory democracy that we all strive for.

To facilitate Africa i-Parliament Action Plan and to bring our Parliaments into the 21st century we need firm proposals from this Workshop and International Conference that would encourage the Pan African Parliament to consider collaborating with African National Parliaments, to facilitate and coordinate the establishment of a platform and to encourage discussions in member Parliaments on the following aspects of the action plan:

- The political desirability of the proposed network, the hosting thereof and the fostering of better relations between legislative information systems management
- Promoting discussion on policy development on levels of cooperation and accessibility
- Promoting the consideration of mechanisms to facilitate levels of cooperation
- Legislating – existing and what may be required to enable cooperation
- Budgeting and funding proposals
- Infrastructure development and facilitation
- Language
- Capacity building
- Promoting discussions around the concerns of Intellectual Property and Security
- The Pan African Parliament should explore ways of facilitating discussions at a political level with the leadership of the African

National Parliament and other African Regional Assemblies with the aim of securing political support as a first step in what would culminate in collaboration with the European Parliaments, United Nations Economic Commission and United Nations agencies and programmes.

“Moreover, politics operating as a “network” offers the ancient institution of Parliaments not an opportunity to undergo rejuvenation but to establish links enabling different Parliaments, straddling national boundaries, to acquire a common consciousness of the problems to be addresses. Cooperation between Parliaments is no longer a formula but a real opportunity, thanks to the ever greater possibility of acquiring common knowledge and the ongoing circulation of information. This is where a new worldwide public sphere can be brought into being, no longer left solely to market dynamics, but restored to the rationale of democratic power” (Professor Stefano Rodotà)