

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 01/06/2007</p> <p>Effective Partnerships in Parliamentary Library and Research Services: A strategic Intervention for Survival in the 21st Century</p> <p>Innocent Rugambwa <i>Director, Library & Research Parliament of Uganda</i> e-mail: irugambwa@parliament.go.ug</p>
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Simultaneous Interpretation:	
<p>WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL</p> <p>19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm</p>	

Abstract:

If a Parliament is establishing a Library and Research Service or enhancing the capacity and scope of the existing service, there is much to be learned from the experience of international counterparts and partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Each segment of society has a specific role to play and resources to share. This paper explores opportunities for building effective partnerships between parliamentary library and research services and relevant stakeholders with a view to achieving best practices. Examples of partnerships are cited with reference to Parliament of Uganda.

1.0 Introduction:

In a parliamentary democratic system, the representatives of the people need objective, factual and timely information with a view to making informed decisions and ensuring executive accountability to the legislature. This presupposes that Parliament should have its own information reservoir and information management system, away from the control of the Executive Branch. Almost all organizations are using some form of resource sharing through networks and partnerships both within and even beyond, to join the Global Society. There's need for access to information sources other than those found in one's establishment, region or country. One also needs to reach out and communicate with other colleagues in a faster and more efficient manner.

The phenomenal growth in the range and dimensions of the sphere of the government has made it impossible for the modern legislator to be self-reliant in the field of information that he needs in the discharge of his duties as an effective representative of his people. The situation has necessitated the establishment of not merely a well-stocked Library but also an efficient research and reference service to which members of Parliament can always turn for help and assistance.

In an age of rapidly changing technological developments, it would be surprising if Parliaments, as central institutions of democratic representation, were not to undergo change. Remarkable of these developments is the field of information management. The Information Society has dawned on us. Undoubtedly, an informed electorate and legislature are invaluable assets to a successful democracy.

2.0 The Need for Partnerships in Library and Research Services

- The concept of partnerships implies removal of barriers to information resource sharing; and ensuring easy access by clientele to the sum total of the world's knowledge resources.
- No parliament can ever be self-sufficient with regard to information resources.
- Motivated by the strong desire to improve, revitalize, and strengthen the library and research services, especially within developing countries; sharing resources, data, functions, human and ICT resources.
- Blending requisite competencies;
- Building synergy with stakeholders and sharing resources.

3.0 REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTNERSHIPS:

Notable of the developments in Information Technology is the widespread use of e-mail, Internet and Intranet technologies. It is evident that the emerging technologies are being exploited to enhance information management and dissemination among parliaments worldwide.

Electronic mail is an effective tool that enhances communication between individuals, groups, and organizations. E-mail offers the potential for Parliamentary Library and Research Centers to enhance information resource sharing with other institutions; offer quick reference services; offset postage costs and facilitate correspondence. Using Internet, the following routine library and research functions can now be offered on-line: acquisition of new information materials, information processing, and reference service; creating archives on the net /Institutional Repositories; marketing of information services and products via the World Wide Web (Websites); research services via surfing, etc

Borrowing the experience of Britain, Germany, India, Uganda, etc. ICT potentials have been exploited to enhance information management in Parliamentary Libraries. Special emphasis has been put on developing databases to suit the increasing need for objective and non-partisan information for members.

4.0 PARTNERSHIPS WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATIONS

International organizations and/or parliamentary associations have become important instruments for the dissemination of information and good practices. For example, Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association produce a lot of literature (conference proceedings, world wide elections reports, directory of parliaments, etc) that have enriched the information resource base of Parliament of Uganda.

4.1 The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the preeminent international library body that provides an opportunity for staff from Parliamentary library and research services from around the world to meet annually. The Library and Research Services Section of IFLA offers invaluable opportunity for sharing vast experiences and best practices to participants.

4.2 AWEPA is an *Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa* that works for democratization and respect for human rights through supporting the functioning of African Parliaments. Several workshops facilitated by AWEPA-Uganda have enabled parliamentary library and research staff to acquire knowledge and skills in Monitoring and Evaluation of Government Programs; Research Methods; Analysis of Bills and Policies; Parliamentary HIV/AIDS toolkit; development of a Research Information Management System, etc.

4.3 The World Bank

As part of its governance program, the Poverty Reduction and Economic Reform Division of the World Bank Institute has sought to strengthen parliamentary oversight by improving parliaments' representative function and its accountability to the electorate. Efforts have been made to promote the greater access to information as a key component of good governance. Since 2000 the Parliamentary Library (Uganda) has benefited from the World Bank Regional Depository Library program. World Bank Publications on Africa Region are deposited in the Parliament Library (free of charge).

4.4 The United Nations

Under the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Project the Parliamentary Library (Uganda) has acquired 10 computers to enable MPs access the Internet, among others. An additional 10 computers have been installed outside the library to ease MPs access. An integrated library software known as Koha has been installed to expedite information management and generate reports.

4.5 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

The meetings of the Committee on Development Information (CODI) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) are held every two years in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These have been used as a forum at which major issues affecting libraries and information services in Africa are discussed. The Director, Library and Research (Parliament of Uganda) has participated on two occasions.

4.6 The African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN)

The African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN) is a network of Internet-based information and knowledge resources and services that form a web of virtual libraries and knowledge exchanges, and will link African libraries, information Centres and specialized networks. An enhanced platform of knowledge and information among researchers and policy makers, it will be accessible to the people of the region and to others engaged in African development sectors (<http://www.uneca.org/disd/library/AVLIN/about.htm>).

AVLIN's overarching objective is to help bridge the digital divide between Africa and the developed world by:

1. providing access to, policy documents and reports, bibliographic databases, general information and expert and institutional profiles of African universities, research institutions, libraries and information centres;
2. building capacity at institutional, national and regional levels on development of integrated virtual library services;
3. promoting regional cooperation on standardization and virtual library system developments; and
4. Facilitating research and developmental activities in both infrastructure and development of digital and virtual libraries.

4.6.1 Operational Framework

AVLIN is a collaborative project of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), other interested regional institutions, and the African library community;

1. Ownership of content, hardware, in-house software, operational strategies and human resources will be vested in partners and participants. ECA's role will be facilitative and integrative;
2. Membership and participation shall be voluntary;
3. Implementation efforts will seek to ensure seamless complementarities with related projects and initiatives of the ECA, for example, the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) and the African Knowledge Network Forum (AKNF);
4. Main focus will be on capacity building at institutional, national and regional levels; regional cooperation on standardization and system development; and the facilitation of research and development activities in both infrastructure and development of digital and virtual libraries.

4.6.2 Technical Framework

AVLIN will be a distributed network, meaning that its databases of information resources will not all be loaded onto a computer system of a single institution;

1. Available databases, digital libraries and other information resources and services will be housed and operated locally, but connected to the Internet;
2. AVLIN will provide the necessary interfaces for users to access the variously developed virtual libraries, knowledge exchanges, and other information networks;

3. Its physical structure will include powerful search engines, collaborative software (knowledge exchange engine), and links to a variety of information objectives and platforms;
4. Information related to the various economic and social sectors will be covered including agriculture, population, education, transport and communications, health and environment and other emerging issues.

4.6.3 Partnership Arrangements

ECA will forge close collaboration with organizations that have known interest in development information and institutional networking. Co-operation with a wide range of African institutions including Africa Union (AU), African Development Bank (ADB) and the Association of African Universities (AAU), international and multilateral knowledge-producing Centres of excellence in the development sector will also be sought.

4.7 Partnerships within the APLESA Framework

Since its inception in 1994 the Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA) has enabled networking and information resource sharing for member parliaments. APLESA members are Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Individual member parliaments facilitate their staff to participate in APLESA activities.

APLESA in partnership with the House of Commons – UK, SABINET and Finnish Parliament organized a workshop on Information Management and annual Conference 19-23 July 1999, Windhoek, Namibia. Twenty three Librarians from 12 member parliaments benefited from this training. In partnership with the Parliamentary Centre of Canada, APLESA website was developed and hosted; APLESA Strategic Planning Workshop (attended by 14 library and research officers from 13 member parliaments) held in Kampala, Uganda, July 30 – 3rd August 2001; APLESA Logo designed; directory of members designed.

4.8 The House of Commons

In partnership with the House of Commons Library – UK, the Librarian Parliament of Uganda was facilitated to attend the IFLA Pre-Conference in London and main Conference in Glasgow, August 2002. Similarly, the House of Commons Library facilitated the Director, Library and Research, Parliament of Uganda to present a paper (panelist) at the IFLA Pre-Conference and participate in the main conference, Seoul, S. Korea, August 2006. Internship of staff has also been organized enabling library and research officers to learn from long experience of the House of Commons.

4.9 The British Council

The Parliamentary Library and Research staff are members of the British Council Management Centre (Uganda). This has enabled staff to access a wide range of current

information resources within and abroad. Also the Management Forum, a discussion group under the aegis of British Council presents an opportunity for professionals to share work experiences as well as network for professional enrichment. The British Council facilitated the Parliament Librarian for attachment to the House of Commons, February 2001.

4.10 Partnership with Embassies/Foreign Missions

Through working relations with the United States Information Centre (Uganda), the library has acquired numerous current journal articles in a bid to enhance good governance in Uganda. Library and research staff have free access to Lexus Nexis Database among other on-line resources offered by the Centre. In May 2002 the Parliament Librarian was facilitated by the Department of State to participate in an International Visitor Project (IVP) focusing on how Legislative and Information Research is carried out in the United States, namely, Washington D.C.; Louisiana; Wisconsin; California; and Pennsylvania.

4.11 Partnership with Academia

There's need for Parliament to enhance its working relations with academic and research institutions (universities, etc) with intent to developing partnerships in areas of research, consultancy, sensitisation, capacity building, etc. This would bridge the gaps in skills, knowledge, expertise (think tanks), logistics, and information resource sharing. It would also minimise undesired duplication of resources. The Parliamentary Library (Uganda) has joined the Consortium of University Libraries, thereby subscribing for on-line resources at discounted rates.

4.12 Partnership with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

With their good understanding of communities and groups, and substantial funding, CSOs conduct lots of research activities and generate a lot of information relevant to the mandate of parliament. They serve as interfaces between donors, Governments and citizens to promote sustainable development. Partnering with CSOs would strategically position library and research services of parliaments to address issues at grass root level of society.

4.13 In-house Collaboration

Library and Research Services for Parliaments would perform better if strategically positioned at institutional level. There's need to build synergies with the Committee Secretariat, Budget Office, ICT specialists, among other staff of parliament. In-fighting of roles among staff is detrimental to best practices. Collaboration with government departments enhances information sharing.

5.0 Conclusion:

The Information Age has dawned on us. Application of the emerging ICT potentials in Parliamentary Library and Research services is not a matter of choice but a visa to the 21st Century and beyond. Nevertheless, effective partnerships for the survival of Parliamentary Library and Research Centres require staff/management with good interpersonal skills, project planning and management skills, managerial/leadership

qualities; marketing, lobbying, negotiation skills; ability to follow-up action plans, just to mention a few. Staff should employ a team approach; build an environment of mutual respect and trust; communicate effectively; seek out challenges and capitalize on new opportunities. Best practices result from a committed workforce operating in an enabling environment enriched by relevant stakeholders.

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