Establishing a network for IT Managers from SADC Parliaments

Building blocks for the strategic use of ICTs in Parliaments
SADC PF and the PLC

- The Forum is a regional inter governmental, parliamentary institution of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) established in 1997 through article 9 of the Treaty of SADC.

- Established in response to the SADC requirement for the participation of the people of the region, in its development brings together over 2800[400 women] popularly elected representatives of the people from 13 SADC member states..

- With 5 standing Committees, the Forum focuses on Democracy and Governance, Gender, HIV and AIDS, Regional Integration and trade and Inter Parliamentary Cooperation and Capacity building

- The Forum with support from ACBF established a Leadership Centre that focuses solely on training and capacity development of Parliaments.
The SADC IT Managers Network

The Network was established in March 2006 as a response:

- to a recommendation of an ICT survey conducted in 2002 that pointed to the need to have support mechanism for IT staff of Parliament to fully engage with the strategic use of ICTs.

- to the need to develop parliamentary ICT capacity that meets the information, communication and knowledge needs of parliaments in the region.

- to the need for a Regional ICT entity to advise and consult on ICT matters, for IT staff of parliaments to have a Forum to share with other ICT professionals, learn and come together to discuss latest trends and be with people with the same passion and focus.

- To the need to utilise economies of scale.
Thematic issues identified by the Network.

1. **ICT Governance in Parliaments** – issues of establishing an institutional framework to mainstream the use of ICT’s to strengthening Parliamentary systems and processes. The forum is championing the building and strengthening of parliamentary ICT capacity in the enhancement and facilitation of democratic governance and practices.

2. **Capacity development** -capacity to fully exploit the capabilities of ICT varies is different in each of the parliaments the forum members are taking a lead in building ICT skills in Parliaments . This is crucial to the development of the information society capacity of the region.

4. **Parliamentary technological capacity**- The technological capacities of the parliaments of member countries vary from one country to another. Furthermore, the different technological platforms used in most of these parliaments bring into sharp focus issues relating to interoperability and the need to distribute the costs and share the benefits through economies of scale.
2. **ICT studies and initiatives** - ICT studies conducted on various aspects of ICT in the respective member countries are not readily accessible. As a result, the recommendations are hardly used and then new studies are commissioned duplicating what already exists. A number of ICT initiatives that are ongoing in both government and parliament in each member country are not known outside the domain of their applications resulting in expensive duplications and no sharing of best practices.

3. **Strategic partnerships** - While ICT has become a strategic resource in development, governance and service delivery, it is still viewed as an administrative support tool in most parliaments in the region. Consequently, the full value of the technology is not fully exploited to strengthen the performance of parliamentary business. Furthermore, strong strategic alliances and partnerships with existing key stakeholders have not been established to support the development and institutionalization of requisite parliamentary ICT capacities.

4. **Sustainability** - A study conducted in 2002 in SADC parliaments pointed out that the ongoing ICT initiatives in parliament were too expensive, too techno-centric, or too dependent on external consultants to be sustainable on internal institutional resources of the respective parliaments. These situations compromise considerably the sustainability of ICT applications and infrastructure in parliaments.
Action Plan

An action plan was developed in Feb 2006 to support the establishment of the Network and focused on the thematic areas discussed, more specifically the action plan provides for:

- The issue: What is the issue?
- Rationale/justification: What makes the issue important? Why should the issues receive the attention of the group?
- Tasks: what should we do about the issue?
- Roles and responsibility: Who should carry out these tasks?
- Approach: how do we accomplish this?
- Timeframe: by when should this be done?
Results to date

- Electronic exchange of information though emails, the information can be on training opportunities, latest trends in technology, useful resources for ICT use in Parliaments
- Two workshops been convened on ICT Policy and Governance (with MPs) and regional ICT strategy planning workshop (IT Managers, staff and partners from the SADC Region and beyond)
- A workshop planned for later in the year on technology planning but still looking for resources
- All Parliaments are represented and its interesting to note that when we started in Feb 2007 – Botswana and Lesotho were represented by non IT staff but they have since recruited staff
As a result of reports from the Network activities, the Forum has realised importance of ICT at a Policy level and established a sub committee for ICT within its structures with 3 MPs running it and support from ICT officer.

ICT has been put on the agenda- A session dedicated to ICTs at the next Plenary Assembly and a training session for MPs where the IT staff of hosting Parliament will facilitate.

Registering for the GNIT and Our presence here at this workshop- and sharing this experience.

Involving private partners such as GIJIMA AST in the activities of the network.
SADC IT Managers Network at the Regional ICT Strategy Meeting Feb 2007
Lessons learnt

- A network for like minded professionals is crucial for sharing ideas, learning and moving agendas - influence decisions of parliament to strategically position ICTs as an equal partner in the development of Parliaments.

- A network is important for the creation of awareness of ICT use in Parliaments since it creates champions and advocates.

- A network has the ability to increase professional knowledge on ICT4D and the use of ICTs in Parliament, and at constituency level.

- A network has the potential to increase communication among and between Parliaments.

- Having a network can accelerate the achievement of set plans through the meshing of ideas.

- Creation of relationship amongst members of the network fundamental to successful communication and sharing of ideas.
Major setbacks

- Resources, resources and resources— we have not managed to attract funding to implement our action plan, but we have sourced ad-hoc funding for some of the activities.
- Our plan has not been integrated into national parliaments IT plan to be able to have national parliaments fund their staff to some of the workshops or fund and host some of the activities agreed in the regional plan. We hope to conduct the Technology planning workshop but still need to complement the funding.
- One parliament out of the 13 still not sending the IT manager for the meetings instead we get the Clerks office coming for the meetings—this could be a case where IT is not yet a stand alone department.
- Absence of Standing Committees on ICT for most parliaments making it difficult for the strategic positioning of ICTs—no political support for ICT initiatives.
Way forward

- Integrate the regional action plan into national IT plans
- Continue resource mobilisation for the network
- Integrate our plans with those of the Global Centre initiative and the African Knowledge Network