

3 JULY 2018

THEME: POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS WITH AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS: THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES IN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY. LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

Distinguished participants and dear colleagues,

It is my honour to participate, on behalf of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, in this event organized by SoCATT and to lead this session.

First, I wish to congratulate SoCATT for coming up with this very important theme and linking the notions of the knowledge economy and 4th industrial revolution to the role of parliaments.

This really speaks to the strategy we have adopted at the level of the SADC Parliamentary Forum. Indeed, as part of our strategy to promote inter-parliamentary cooperation, we probe into the possibilities to contribute to the knowledge economy and to use technology to reinforce parliamentary process.

I. The impact of technology on our lives

In line with the notion of the 4th industrial revolution, technology has indeed trickled down in our lives and work-places and technology has gone beyond just digital. Technology has evolved and overcome our expectations to include areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics and furthermore biotechnology. Technology offers us new possibilities in a manner that's unprecedented hence there is a need to embrace its benefits and yet remain competitive. However, at the same time, care should be taken to ensure that technology remains safe and environment-friendly. Sophistication should never come at the price of safety.

II. Experience with national Parliaments on use of technology

From the experience we have garnered with national Parliaments of the SADC region, most Parliaments are indeed staying up to date with technology upgrading their systems and introducing technologies such as biometric scanners. For example, it has become common

practice in some Parliaments for staff of Parliament to record attendance using fingerprint scanners. This innovation is in line with uplifting the level of security required to keep the premises of Parliament safe and to record attendance efficiently.

Furthermore, some national Parliaments have implemented e-Parliament projects which infuse technology into business management processes of Parliament, such as Hansard reporting, procurement, live debate recording and sharing of parliamentary documents such as Order Papers and Bills online. These developments are of course in addition to website maintenance and use of emails, and they speed up the processes of Parliaments, thus making Parliaments more efficient and transparent. Efficient and transparent Parliaments in turn mean that the democratic agenda of the State is further advanced, as Parliaments represent the sovereignty of the State and the voice of the people.

From the perspective of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, we thus encourage such parliamentary initiatives which advance democratization and participatory processes in the region.

Nonetheless, it is also a concerted view that technology, especially biotech such as fingerprint technology should remain safe, be human rights compliant and adhere to the principle of informed consent. Moreover, the management of sensitive personal or bio data should adhere to data protection principles in place.

On a general note, the 4th industrial revolution should thus be addressed with prudent enthusiasm by balancing interests and carefully weighing the implications of the use of technology with the benefits it can bring to the parliamentary process.

III. Importance of building the capacity of Parliaments on issues pertaining to the 4th Industrial Revolution (digital technology, biotech etc)

I now turn to address the separate but yet connected issue of capacity building through cooperation of Parliaments in order to build parliamentary knowledge and address emerging issues such as use of technology.

Parliament as an institution needs to keep abreast of the latest trends in technology in order for MPs to assess whether technology needs to be regulated and if yes, to what extent.

I am sure you must have all heard about the recent community outburst which followed after alleged sharing of information through Facebook in the United States of America. This resulted in Congressional and Senate Committee hearings for the owner of Facebook and it represented

a good example of how Parliamentarians need to understand complex technological issues in order to come to a decision whether there is a need for regulation. Parliament is often referred to as the Legislature, but beyond coming forward with legislation, Parliament has numerous other functions, such as approving budgets and performing oversight.

Parliament, as a central governance organ for the State, needs to heighten the knowledge of MPs in all areas through continuous capacity building in order to promote parliamentary level interventions. Certainly, the issues emerging from the 4th industrial revolution are priority areas, particularly as technology permutates at an astonishing pace.

There is therefore a paramount need to build competencies and knowledge of MPs in order to enhance their representative, oversight, legislative and budgetary roles with respect to issues emanating from the use of technology for effective participation in and facilitation of the 4th industrial revolution.

As democratic representatives and leaders, MPs will be called to convey into the House the voice of their constituencies and electorate on issues pertaining to technology which directly affects them.

In the exercise of their oversight functions, MPs can query the actions of the Executive, either individually or through Standing Committees, on particular aspects of technology. In this juncture, it is not solely the Ministries responsible for Technology or ICTs which will be involved, but queries can extend to virtually any sector as technology permeates throughout. For example, the use of tablets for school going children will be a technological matter which is relevant for the Ministry responsible for the subject of education.

With regards to budgetary functions, MPs are able to not only vote on public IT projects but projects which bring protection against cyber-crime and prevent the adverse risks of such practices as hacking.

Finally, legislative functions entail regulating areas which relate to technology through primary and subsidiary legislation. Critical questions which will definitely arise throughout the debate is the content of what needs to be regulated, the degree or dosage of the regulation required and whether some areas of technology should be left unregulated.

IV. Experience garnered by the Forum on capacity building

At the level of the SADC-PF, several capacity building initiatives are organized for MPs and other key stakeholders under the Parliamentary Capacity Development Programme run under the auspices of the Forum, in particular to heighten knowledge and competencies on key focus areas which are most relevant to the region. Moreover, capacity building on thematic areas is regularly being organized in collaboration with Member Parliaments under particular donor-funded Projects.

I will now turn to share some experience garnered during our capacity development initiatives.

- 1) Experience has demonstrated that during all capacity building initiatives, it is necessary to get on board knowledgeable resource persons who are able to share different perspectives in order to ensure that all facets of the issues at stake are considered in a holistic manner. This is in line with the importance to maintain the neutrality of Parliament and ensure that debates in Parliament remain impartial, well-informed and balanced. For these reasons, we try as far as possible to include academic, civil society as well as practitioners' perspectives to capacity building, while bearing in mind the pedagogical approach required for information to be appropriately transmitted.
- 2) Moreover, there is a need to ensure that the information surfaced during such capacity building exercises is up-to-date and accurate. Parliamentarians who are responsible for enacting legislation and conducting oversight functions need to be appropriately briefed and accuracy of information is thus critical. On the issue of technology, I am certain you will all agree that accuracy of information needs all the more to be verified prior to capacity building since technology keeps evolving at a relentless pace.
- 3) Additionally, capacity building initiatives need to be consistent and reasonably paced in time in order to keep issues alive in the mind of MPs. Regular capacity building also ensures the distillation of ideas which can only occur after mature reflections on the subject.
- 4) We have also observed that it is not only MPs but the whole partnership framework of Parliament which needs to be capacitated. This includes capacitating Line Ministries and Civil Society Organisations which frequently interact with the institution of Parliament, as well as capacitating staff of Parliament who are at the frontline to support MPs. It is good to note that capacity building is best achieved through a multi-stakeholder approach so that information is appropriately and regularly shared and communication gaps are reduced through prompt interactions.
- 5) Moreover, cooperation with like-minded organizations such as other regional parliamentary bodies is of paramount importance in order to develop synergies and promote the cross-

fertilisation of ideas. This level of cooperation is particularly important because regional parliamentary bodies are aware of issues which are of interest to Parliaments from a macro level and it allows the finding of linkages between inter-parliamentary agendas and the streamlining of common objectives.

- 6) One of the main deficiencies of the knowledge economy is the lack of innovation and therefore capacity building needs to support innovation both in terms of structure and substance. With regards to structure, there is a need to continue to develop methods for capacity building which are innovative and which rely on convenient and accessible technology. With regards to substance, there is a need to lay emphasis on research in order to remain updated, develop personal skill sets and ensure that knowledge never remains stagnant.
- 7) Through this experience in capacity building, we have furthermore found that there is a need of a structured platform to ensure that capacity building occurs in a constructive and meaningful manner. In order to encourage and crystallize consistent capacity building initiatives, the SADC Parliamentary Forum has resolved through its policy organs to proceed with the establishment of a Parliamentary Studies Institute. As I speak, arrangements are being made to establish the institute in a host country. The idea for a PSI originally stemmed from the perspective that capacity building should be consistent and targeted and would be best delivered with a pedagogical approach and a proper syllabus. Emphasis has also been placed on the need to not only conduct capacity building for MPs but also for staff of Parliament, including Clerks-at-the-table, and other key stakeholders.

With these words, I wish to conclude by saying that, against the backdrop of the 4th industrial revolution, capacity building of Parliaments in the knowledge economy remains a priority for the Forum.

Thank you.
