E-parliament and Democratic Representation in African States: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

A healthy and credible legislature is indispensable for representative liberal democratic governance. While representation involves informing and listening to those represented and making decisions and exercising influence on their behalf, legislative institutions of many African countries lack the effectiveness to inform and interact with their constituents, thus resulting to serious citizens-representatives disengagement. This pervasive contemporary estrangement is manifested in public cynicism towards political institutions and a collapse in once-strong loyalties and attachment between citizens and government. This research paper draws from case analysis and literature search to examine the potentials and challenges of e-parliament for re-engaging the electorate in the democratic states of Africa. Findings reveal that by leveraging on the exponential growth of ICTs particularly, in the continent, e-parliament provides new strategies for increasing and strengthening deliberative and interactive dialogue between citizens and their representatives. With e-parliament, citizens-representatives estrangement is reduced and new forms of engagement and collaboration created thus making democratic processes more inclusive and transparent. In this process the crisis of democratic legitimacy and accountability is averted for the African states. Though the realization of the full potential of e-parliament in Africa is greatly hampered by such challenges as inadequate infrastructural facilities and capacity building, this paper argues that with effective ICT strategic planning and management so as to judiciously utilize available resources and a mechanism for ICT skill training and development for all stakeholders, e-parliament presents a glimmer of hope for responsive and accountable governance in Africa.

Keywords: Legislature; ICT; E-parliament; Representation; Citizens; Democracy; Africa.

Introduction

The legislature is seen as the accredited political institution that serves as intermediary between citizen concerns and government policy (NDI, 2001; Fish, 2006). As the citizens' representative, the legislature is the primary mechanism of popular sovereignty that provides for the representation in governance, of the diverse interests and differences in a multicultural and subnational society and is responsible for bringing these diversity and differences into the policy-making arena (Gerber, 1996; Johnson, 2005; Heywood, 2007; Oni, 2013). The legislature is, thus, important to the extent that weakness in the representative capacity of the legislature poses a significant threat to democratic advancement (NDI, 2001).

Representation involves informing and listening to those represented and making decisions and exercising influence on their behalf (Goodin, 2004; Brown, 2006), however, legislative institutions of many African countries lack the ability or effectiveness to inform and interact with their constituents (Edigheji, 2006). Citizens' awareness of their political institutions is seen as a prerequisite for accountability in a democratic society, in most African states however, citizens have limited knowledge about their parliaments. They are committed voters but not yet at the point of demanding political accountability from their representatives (Azevedo-Harman, 2011), thus resulting in serious citizens-representatives disengagement (Mattes, Barkan & Mozaffar, 2012; Oni, 2013). This pervasive contemporary estrangement is manifested in public cynicism towards political institutions and a collapse in once-strong loyalties and attachment between citizens and government (Pantoja and Segura, 2003; Rosenthal 2009). New strategies for re-engaging the electorate by interacting with citizens, informing them and providing multiple channels for receiving and disseminating information is, therefore, imperative if the crisis of democratic legitimacy and accountability is to be averted for the African states.

Leveraging on the capability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), e-parliament has been identified as having the potential to reduce citizens-representatives estrangement by increasing and strengthening deliberative and interactive dialogue between citizens and their representatives (Leston-Bandera, 2012). With e-parliament, a new form of engagement and collaboration is created through the provision of new and multiple communication links in the political process to make democratic processes more inclusive and transparent (World e-parliament Report, 2008). While parliaments all around the world have embraced e-parliament, however, its introduction and implementation are often a difficult process, particularly, in developing countries (Leston-Bandera, 2007).

Despite wide recognition and of course, scholarly works on the potentials offered to parliamentary representation by ICT, the geographical focus of these studies has always been limited. In fact, researches on democratic representation through ICT are mostly conducted in the America and Europe (Scully & Farrell, 2001). As observed by Leston-Bandera (2007), in general, Internet studies are still largely dominated by US scholar community and this has an impact on the type of studies developed on parliament. This paper therefore examines the potentials and challenges of e-parliament implementation in the democratic states of Africa. This is imperative at this juncture, in order to reduce the present disconnect between citizens and their representatives in African States.

Democratic Representation and Legislature: A Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The concept of political representation involves a complex combination of elements that is ill-suited to simple definition or application and has become a significant focus of intellectual debate in arguments about diversity and identity politics. As noted by Pitkin (1968: 42), the concept of representation is "inconsistent in meaning and expresses a dichotomous idea". The different conceptualizations are often centred around the different interpretations of the relationship between the representative and his/her constituents, the nature of representation, the functions of an elected representative, the composition, scope of authority of the representative institutions and the conditions under which they act (Pitkin, 1968; Hazan and Rahat, 2000; Weymans, 2005; Pollack, Batora, Mokre, Sigalas & Slominski, 2009; Childs and Lovenduski, 2013; Leston-Bandeira, 2012). As observed by Leston-Bandeira (2012), this old debate centers on who to represent – whether the nation overall or their constituencies and how to represent –whether the representatives should act according to their own judgments or according to the people they represent. Brown (2006) also observed that most theories of representation have privileged some elements of representation over others. It is on this note that Pollack, et al (2009) concluded that debates about representation involve ideological disputes of a kind that cannot be easily settled. Despite this conceptual paradox, representation is generally recognized as a necessary condition and a hallmark of democracy (Dahl, 1989; Mill, 1994; Bishop, 2002; Goodin, 2004; Edigheji, 2006; Brown, 2006; Rosenberg, 2007; Setälä, 2011). Edigheji (2006) for instance, sees political representation as the machinery or process to make democratic government possible. Chamberlin and Courant, (1983) describe representation as the hallmark of democracy. Weymans (2005) conceives it as necessary for a pluralistic democratic society. To Setälä (2011), the principle of representation is a key element in modern democracy. In fact, effective structures and practices of representation are indispensable to a functioning democratic practice (Dahl, 1971, Scully & Farrell, 2001). Brown (2006) however, describes the concept of representation as involving a combination of five distinct elements: authorization, accountability, expertise, participation and resemblance. He noted the three most popular ways of authorizing representatives to include elections, appointments be elected officials or their surrogates and becoming representatives by virtue of professional or technical expertise. For accountability, Brown (2006) asserts that the essence is to ensure that representatives promote the interests of their constituents and act in a way agreeable to them. Brown (2006) goes further to assert that representation enables all citizens to make contributions to political deliberation on complex political questions. In addition, he argues that the expertise component of representation stems from the notion that democratic governments must serve the best interests of their constituents, coupled with the idea that people are not always immediately aware of their own best interests. Citizens, therefore, depend on the technical expertise of representatives for awareness of, and addressing complex issues. On the resemblance component of democratic representation, Brown (2006) holds that by sharing demographic

characteristics, grouped defining attributes and or social identities with their constituents, representatives will spontaneously act in some way favourable to them. In another dimension, Zappala, (1999) views the concept of representation as a key activity, a lifeline or linchpin that connects the citizenry to the government. For Pollack, et al (2009), the idea is to make citizens present in the decision-making process of a democratic political community. The fact that responsiveness, interest aggregation, equality and liberty constitute the core of representation makes the concept of representation a hallmark of democracy (Leston-Bandeira, 2012). This is because democracy is characterized by its emphasis on the values of popular sovereignty (the idea that the majority should rule), liberalism (the idea that all people are equal), and liberty (Bishin, 2009).

One of the important organs of representation in a democratic political system is the legislature. This is because the legislature is the primary mechanism and institutional arrangement for the representation in governance, the different interests in a plural society (Heywood, 2007), and for bringing these differences into the policy-making arena (Scully & Farrell, 2001 & Johnson, 2005). These differences may be rooted in geography, ethnicity, religion, political identification, gender, or other characteristics (Johnson, 2005, Miler, 2010). Thus Fishkin (1995) avers that the legislature is a mirror of the nation, substituting for ordinary citizens and acting as they would have acted. As observed by Davies (2004), the legislature is a representative institution that exercises sovereignty on behalf of the people. The legislature is therefore, the realm of citizens' representation (Miler, 2010), and the platform for articulating and expressing the collective will of the people (Heywood, 2007; Bernick & Bernick, 2008). As the citizens' representatives, legislators are responsible for representing the differences in society. They serve as a vital link between the government and the governed, the elected and the electorate, the rulers and the ruled (Jewell, 1997; Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). As observed by Bishin (2009), the concept of constituent representation embodied in the legislature is therefore, an important and indispensable principle of any democratic state. In this view, the legislature is charged with the responsibility of ensuring good governance through constituent representation in the decision making process especially in a pluralized society characterized by differences and heterogeneity (Johnson, 2005).The legislature is thus, seen as occupying fundamental place in democratic governance and performing crucial role of citizens' representation for the advancement and well being of the citizenry (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). Effective governance therefore requires legislatives effectiveness in performing the vital role of constituents' representation essential for democratic sustenance in complex and diverse societies.

The idea of democratic representation is situated within the theoretical perspective of the theory of deliberative democracy which argues that voting is not the best or at least, not the only political mechanism for ensuring that policy decisions conform to the interests of the citizens, rather, political decisions should be based on public discussions among autonomous, equal and rational citizens (Setälä, 2011). A political decision-making process that fails to create the opportunity for or take advantage of the benefits of deliberation is bound to raise questions about the legitimacy of the resulting outcomes (Landa and Meirowitz, 2009). Deliberative democratic theory is thus seen as a normative theory that suggests ways in which we can enhance democracy and criticize institutions that do not live up to the normative standard (Chambers, 2003). According to this theory, the core of legitimate political decision making and self government is public deliberation of free and equal citizens (Bohman, 1998). The legitimacy of law therefore, depends on the democratic character of the legislative process that makes possible a consensus of all citizens. Political equality, i.e., equal opportunities of citizens to influence political agenda and decision-making, is therefore, a central idea in all conceptions of democracy (Dahl, 1989). It is equal representation of citizens in a public discussion aimed at aggregating citizens' preferences and in which all participants are motivated to find solutions acceptable to all (Beitz (1989). This ideal procedure that embodies norms of freedom, equality and publicity would produce an outcome that everyone in principle could accept and the decision reached is fair and acceptable to all (Bohman, 1998). It anchors on accountability of representative institutions through communicative processes of opinion and will-formation. Accordingly, deliberative democracy has direct effect of better information and deliberation which enhances the legitimacy of policy choices and the underlying political institutions. As observed by Chambers (2003), deliberative democracy is not an alternative to representative democracy, rather an expansion of it, being concern with issues of rights, equality, popular sovereignty and constitutionalism which are foundational to democracy.

The Legislature and Democratic Representation in African Democratic States

The history of political representation in most independent States of Africa has been characterized by absence of the institutions of vertical and horizontal accountability leading often to political instability (Edigheji, 2006). Citizens in a democratic society want to exercise democratic freedoms by engaging with elected representatives to improve the quality of life. In much of Africa however, communication and other links between the state and society are weak and public policies and government actions do not always, and in some cases rarely, reflect the high priority concerns of the citizens and particularly, the rural people, who comprise about 65 percent of the continent's population (Veit, 2008). The common positions of the poor and the specific needs of marginalized minorities are not systematically recognized or structurally incorporated into government decisions and public policy (Azevedo-Harman, 2011). Despite wide recognition of the representative role of the legislature, parliaments in many countries of Africa have been historically weak institutions and lack capacity to meet the new responsibilities being entrusted to them, as well as to represent their people effectively (Edigheji, 2006). With the exception of very few countries such as Ghana, Kenya and Uganda where the legislature has taken significant steps to develop the capacity of representation, African legislatures have not been able to fulfill its role as a representative body for the diverse states of the continents (Mattes, Barkan & Mozaffar, 2012). They also lack the skills and knowledge to set implementable goals and interact with constituencies and citizens to promote sustainable development (Oni, 2013). For the legislators to effectively fulfill their representational role they require regular communication and easy access to their constituents in order to exchange views (Rehfeld, 2005). In African countries, inadequate, inaccessible meeting facilities and insufficient time for legislators to regularly interact meaningfully with constituent serve as hindrances to legislature-constituent relations. For instance, while in many western democracies, legislative buildings are accessible and parliamentary proceedings, and parliamentary debates open to the public, in

Africa, however, it is not uncommon for legislative buildings to be barred by blockade and armed securities making it difficult for the ordinary citizens to access. Parliaments are the branch of government closest to people, and need to be aware of their constituents needs and respond to those needs accordingly. Their representation role involves listening to those represented and making decisions and exercising influence on their behalf. Moreover, the election of members of the legislature from single member districts, a practice in most African countries, means spending considerable time back home in their districts with their constituents (Mattes, et al., 2012). In Africa however, many individuals and groups in civil society do not understand the workings of the legislature, and are often unskilled in articulating their needs to the institution (Nwanolue, & Ojukwu, 2012). Moreover, most African countries are faced with dysfunctional constituents and many African legislators do not operate constituency offices (Edigheji, 2006; Oni, 2013).

The rare citizens-representatives interaction, thus resulting to serious disengagement between them (legislators) and the people they represent (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010, Oni, 2013). When opportunities for citizens-representatives engagement are ineffective in affecting government policy or when citizens feel that governmental institutions do not represent them, support for democracy is eroded and such society could risk individuals or groups resorting to extra-legal mechanisms air their voices. New strategies for re-engaging the electorate by interacting with citizens, informing them and providing multiple channels for receiving and disseminating information is, therefore, imperative if the crisis of democratic legitimacy and accountability is to be averted for the African states.

Democratic Representation and the Imperative of E-parliament for African States

E-parliament, according to United Nations (2008), is a legislature that is empowered to be more transparent, accessible and accountable through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Bwalya, Du Plesis & Rensleigh (2012) describe e-parliament as encompassing the harnessing of information communication technologies into the government value chains, thereby promoting large-scale citizen engagement across the different socio-economic sectors. ICTs encompass the full range of electronic means of processing and transmission of information including the Internet, computers radio, television and telephones (fixed and mobile) (World e-Parliament Report, 2008).

Leveraging on the capability of ICTs, e-parliament has been identified as having the potential to reduce citizens-representatives estrangement. As observed by Ferber, Foltz, & Pugliese (2005), ICTs can increase and strengthen deliberative and interactive dialogue between citizens and their representatives and create new forms of engagement and collaboration through the provision of new and multiple communication links in the political process to make democratic processes more inclusive and transparent (Xiudian, & Norton, 2007). It empowers people, in all their diversity, to be more engaged in public life by providing higher quality information and greater access to its parliamentary documents and activities (United Nations & Inter-parliamentary Union, 2014). E-parliament is an organisation where connected stakeholders use information and communication technologies to support legislature's primary functions of representation, law-making and oversight more effectively. Strategic utilization of information communication technologies (ICTs) has been identified to enhance parliaments' roles in democracies by strengthening linkages among legislators, their constituents, and civil society (UNDP, 2006). For African democratic states therefore, ICT can help parliaments be more responsive to the concerns of their constituents and improve their representative capacity to take into account the variety of views of the people (Bishop, 2002). ICT enhances transparent and accountable legislature and citizen engagement in parliamentary work which are recognized as cornerstones of healthy democratic representation (United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014).

As observed by Leston-Bandeira (2007), the Internet opens up the possibilities of bilateral and multilateral communication with citizens, with pressure groups, between parliamentarians, and with governmental bodies. It can provide the means for more efficient and thorough work in committees or for a speeder consideration of bills. It can make scrutiny more detailed and more up-to-date by making information available for them to effectively scrutinize government. Capitalizing on the benefits of ICTs, Parliaments can enhance their interaction with the public and collaborate with other parliament. As documented by Leston-Bandeira (2012), the Internet provides more opportunities for direct channel of communication to exist between parliament and citizens, effectively bypassing traditional party machines which has an effect of creating a level playing field in terms of opening up access to parliament. In this regards therefore, e-parliament has the potential of boosting citizens' participation in the democratic governance in African states. With African's governance challenges and massive corruption in public institutions, e-parliament serves as catalyst for facilitating openness, efficient public service delivery, social inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and citizens' participation in public decision process (Bwalya, et al., 2012; Leston-Bandeira, 2012; United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014).

According to the Word e-Parliament Report (2012) the growth and penetration of ICT has continued unabated with total mobile-cellular subscriptions reaching almost 6 billion by end of 2011, corresponding to a global penetration of 86 per cent. The report revealed that developing countries particularly, African countries accounted for more than 80 per cent of the recent subscriptions. While most countries particularly the western industrialized countries have leveraged on the exponential growth of ICTs to foster new relationships between citizens and their representatives (Xiudian and Norton, 2007), in developing countries such as Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries however, e-parliament implementation is still in its introductory stage which, together with its implementation still poses a difficult process (Leston-Bandeira, 2012; World e-parliament Report, 2012). Over 91% of national parliaments have website, therefore, the question is no longer whether parliaments are using the Internet, but more is in what way this is happening and what impact it is having on parliamentary activities (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). As noted by Leston-Bandeira (2007), the implementation of ICT in parliament is not just about deploying the latest electronic mechanisms, it is also a comprehensive understanding of the way in which parliaments operate and about changes in procedures and culture.

Most African nations like the developed countries have established e-government implementation strategy and have given their legislative bodies online presence (World e-parliament Report, 2012). Most of these countries are however, currently using the Internet as a medium to provide information on legislatures' activities to the citizens. Parliaments in Africa such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, South Africa, Rwanda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Botswana and Ethiopia, have their Websites populated with information on parliamentary functions such as Acts, Bills, Order papers, Hansards, Votes and Proceedings. Documents on these parliamentary businesses are available for download in portable document Format (PDF) format on the parliament Web sites. Citizens can access the other parliamentarian oversight function such as committee membership and reports.

However, adequate provision has not been made for members of the pubic to have easy access to or communication with their representatives. Very few of the parliament Websites visited have means for electronic interaction with the legislatures. Only Federal Republic of Ethiopia House of Federation web site has a functional online forum and Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. It also has provision for chatting. Only Angola Parliament has a fully implemented online petition submission while Zambia Parliament merely generalized its electronic submission platform. The website of South Africa parliament calls for submission and petition from the public. The process of submission is however, completely manual. Kenyan parliament web site also allows searching and viewing of petitions but the process of submission is manual. Phone numbers and emails address of the parliamentarians cannot be gotten from the websites except for South African which gives the official emails of the parliamentarians alongside their names. Kenya, Zambia, South Africa give details of committee activities including their sitting time. Zambia goes a step further to include details of time, venue and accessibility status to the public.

There is more to which parliaments in Africa can do to promote accessibility and citizens' participation by taking advantage of the Internet. Using Web 3.0 for instance, parliament can provide online streaming of parliamentary session, advance search parliamentary business documents, extraction of all debates on specific bill, online submission of petition/document upload from citizens, online discussion etc.

According to the e-parliament report (2012), audio and video capture of proceedings remains the most useful technology by parliaments in developing countries (Figure 1). Most African countries belongs to the least group in the use of document repositories, mobile communication devices, mobile communication application for citizens, speech-to-text dictation software, TV broadcasting of plenary sessions, open standards such as XML and webcasting and ranked second to the last in e-parliament score (Figure 2). It is evident that African parliaments have not adequately employed the Internet as a medium to give voice to the people and making them to be part of their decision making and conducting their oversight function. This is also evident in the Global Centre for ICT in parliament report (2012). Most African countries falls into the category that least use variety of ICT tools for citizens-representative communication and interaction.

Communication Method	Currently Using				Planning or Considering			
	Low Income	Lower middle Income	Upper middle Income	High Income	Low Income	Lower middle Income	Upper middle Income	High Income
Alerting services	0%	13%	18%	56%	56%	55%	41%	29%
Blogs	0%	3%	17%	26%	50%	58%	37%	24%
e-Consultation on bills	5%	23%	40%	18%	53%	65%	33%	40%
e-Consultation on issues	5%	13%	38%	23%	58%	60%	30%	34%
e-Petition	0%	12%	32%	21%	28%	58%	27%	33%
Online discussion group	0%	6%	7%	15%	50%	58%	44%	40%
Online polls	6%	24%	18%	20%	28%	55%	27%	18%
Parliament radio channel	17%	9%	15%	20%	44%	45%	22%	5%
Parliament TV channel(s) (broadcast TV)	17%	24%	45%	43%	44%	50%	24%	12%
Parliament Web TV	0%	14%	26%	43%	53%	66%	24%	18%
Radio programs (on other radio channels)	50%	28%	31%	13%	28%	38%	17%	8%
Satellite channel	0%	9%	20%	29%	41%	36%	10%	7%
Social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace	24%	38%	31%	31%	29%	38%	36%	36%
TV programs (on other TV channels)	71%	35%	47%	38%	12%	35%	12%	7%
Twitter	17%	10%	36%	40%	22%	53%	27%	29%
Videos within e-mails	0%	0%	10%	5%	33%	29%	22%	20%
Webcasting of committee meetings	6%	7%	20%	63%	53%	57%	41%	11%
Webcasting of plenary sessions	6%	31%	54%	87%	67%	54%	39%	11%
Webcasting of special programs	6%	15%	40%	59%	61%	58%	33%	14%
YouTube or other video sharing service	6%	17%	23%	21%	33%	41%	35%	45%

Figure 1: Other methods of Communicating with Citizens Used or Being Considered by Parliaments Grouped by Income level (Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, 2012)
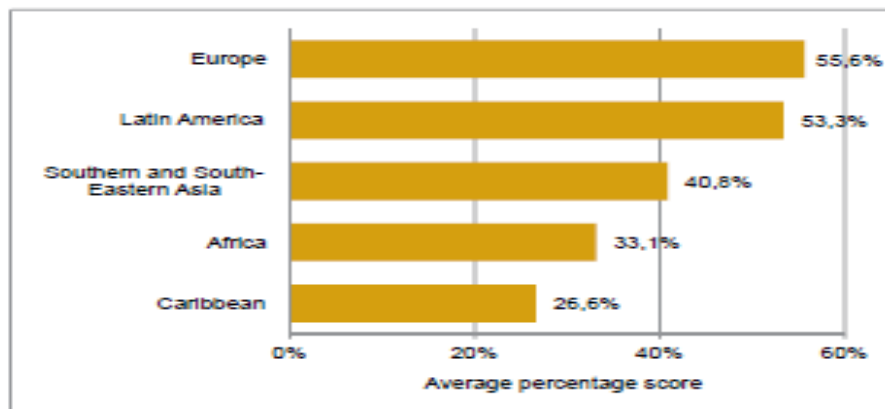
Figure 2: Average Total E-parliament Scores by Region (Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, 2012)

The Challenges of E-parliament in Africa

Most African nations like the developed countries have given their legislative bodies online presence. As observed by Leston-Bandeira (2007) however, the implementation of ICT in parliament is not just about introducing electronic mechanisms and using emails, it is also about changes in procedures and culture which should include communication and engagement with citizens. It is about openness, transparency, accountability, technology services for members, management of parliamentary documents etc. Some challenges therefore constitute hindrances to deriving the full potential and benefits of e-parliament in African states. Prominent among these challenges include poor vision and lack of strategic plan for, and access to best practices in ICT. Coupled with the challenges of poor governance, lack of accountability and transparency, most governments in African States therefore, lack the capability to put in place adequate infrastructure for e-parliament implementation. Inadequate infrastructure occurs in two ways; citizens limited access to ICT tools needed to take advantage of multiple channels of political participation that e-parliament offers and government inadequacy to drive full-fledged e-parliament implementation by not given enough resource allocation to full implementation of e-parliament (Bwalya, , Plessis, & Reinsleigh, 2012)

According to World e-parliament Report (2012) mobile broadband has become the single most dynamic ICT service, recording more than 1 billion subscriptions worldwide. Developing countries however continued to witness dismal penetration in terms of 3G coverage accounting for paltry 8% of the world's total subscriptions. Similarly, the report shows that despite the growth in fixed (wired) broadband subscriptions in developing countries, the penetration remains low in the region of Africa. Furthermore, while the rate of individual's usage of the Internet continues to grow worldwide including African countries, report shows that, with exceptions of few countries like Lebanon and Malaysia with 62 per cent and 61 per cent of households with Internet respectively, over 70% of households in developing countries do not have Internet access (World e-parliament Report, 2012; Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, 2012). This dilemma of digital divide continues to pose great challenges for successful e-parliament in Africa. According to the World e-Parliament Report (2008), the level of a country's income determines the extent to which ICTs can be adopted in that country's parliaments. The developing countries are at the top in inadequate financial resource. According to the economic classification of Global Centre for ICT in Parliament (2012), most African countries except South Africa and Libya are within the low middle income and low income category. Inadequate financial resources thus, constitute a big challenge for some parliaments in Africa.

To a large extend however, finance is not the "real" issue but a consequence of lack of "vision" and strategic planning and implementation (Sobaci, 2012). While some African countries are financially incapable of driving full implementation of e-parliament, some are suffering from lack of vision and strategic planning to adequately finance projects that will bring about sustainable development. Successful implementation of e-parliament dependent not on resources alone, it also requires strong political leadership, a continued commitment to the strategic e-parliament planning and implementation and a vigorous commitment of Members of Parliament to engaging ICT in its legislative process (Leston-Bandeira (2012). Most political leaders in Africa do not actually appreciative the strategic role of ICT in parliament, thus ICT is seen as for publishing and not for managing information (Zeni, 2013).

According to the World e-parliament Report (2012), one of the challenges of e-parliament implementation not just in Africa but the world, is inadequate staff capacity. E-parliament requires skilled secretariat and well-trained ICT technical staff. Most African parliaments however, lack quality and adequate ICT knowledge and skills which make them resist the adoption of ICT in their legislative setting (Bwalya, Plessis & Rensleigh, 2012). These aforementioned factors pose great challenges to successful realization of e-parliament potentials in African states.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The foregoing analysis highlights the need to enhance citizens-parliament relations in order to reduce the present disconnect between citizens and their representatives and avert the crisis of democratic legitimacy and accountability for the African states. New methods for re-engaging the electorate by interacting with citizens, informing them and providing multiple channels for receiving and disseminating information is, therefore, imperative. Leveraging on the capability of ICT, e-parliament is very promising in facilitating democratic representation by enhancing citizens' engagement, deliberation and other forms of inclusion and hence avert citizens' apathetic political involvement, public distrust and aversion towards

elected representatives. With e-parliament, African parliaments will become more transparent and accountable to the public.

Most African nations like the developed countries have given their legislative bodies online presence. However, adequate provision has not been made for members of the public to have easy access to, or communication with, their representatives. Thus Internet in Most African states largely remains a medium for providing information to the citizens on legislature's activities while a large segment of the population suffer the problem of digital divide.

With most African states among the poorest countries, there is the need for more effective ICT strategic planning and management so as to judiciously utilize available resources to address the inadequate infrastructural facilities in the continent. Political leaders in African states must be committed to addressing the issue of corruption and misappropriation of fund if the goal of democratic representation is to be realized in the various countries of Africa. African parliaments must also be seen to be genuinely committed to the adoption of ICTs in their mandated representative responsibilities. Importantly also, since capacity building is indispensable to successful e-parliament implementation, it is imperative that African parliaments embrace personal ICT acquisition while government should put in place programmes for ICT skill training and development for the administrative staff. With these appropriate measures aimed at addressing the factors hindering the full realization of the potentials of the application of ICTs to parliamentary democracy in Africa, e-parliament presents a glimmer of hope for inclusive, responsive, transparent and accountable governance in Africa.

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