56TH PLENARY ASSEMBLY

OF THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

LIVINGSTONE, ZAMBIA, 4TH TO 15TH DECEMBER, 2024

"LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION FOR SMART, INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE PARLIAMENTS IN THE SADC REGION"

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) region faces numerous political, social, and economic challenges that affect the ability of its Parliaments to be fully responsive and inclusive in their legislative, oversight, and representational roles. Rapid technological advancements and innovations offer unprecedented opportunities to strengthen parliamentary institutions by enhancing transparency, citizen engagement, and accountability[1]. However, many Parliaments in the region are still grappling with limited resources, digital infrastructure, and capacity-building issues, which hinder the full exploitation of these tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgent need for Parliaments to adapt to new realities by adopting digital technologies to ensure continuity of legislative processes. As Governments increasingly invest in digital transformation, Parliaments must keep pace by integrating innovative solutions to modernise their operations and foster inclusive governance. By leveraging technology, Parliaments can not only improve their internal

---

[1] http/www.press.un.org

efficiency but also ensure greater accessibility for marginalised groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, thus promoting more inclusive democratic processes across the region.

2. Role of Parliaments in Leveraging on Technology and Innovation for inclusive and responsive Parliaments

Parliaments acknowledges the fact that technologies and innovations are essential in the delivery of parliamentary functions. They are constantly exploring ways in which more technologies can be integrated into operations to make transparent, open and efficient in their works. Examples of these technologies and innovations include, Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Threads and YouTube which provides an effective channel of communication to the public, Artificial Intelligence (AI), which enhances interaction with members of the public and Blockchain Technology which helps manage employee information, in compliance with privacy and confidentiality requirements.

Parliaments play a crucial role in democratic governance, serving as the primary institutions for lawmaking, oversight of the executive, and representation of citizens' interests. In the context of the SADC region, Parliaments face unique challenges, such as ensuring that the voices of diverse constituencies are heard, upholding transparency in governance, and safeguarding human rights. These challenges can be addressed more effectively by incorporating technology and innovation into parliamentary practices.

Key functions of Parliaments that can be enhanced through technology include:

- **Lawmaking**: Use of digital platforms to streamline legislative drafting, debate, and voting processes, improving the speed and accuracy of decision-making.

- **Oversight**: Adoption of data-driven tools to monitor government policies, expenditures, and services more effectively, enabling parliamentarians to hold the executive accountable.

- **Representation**: Expanding access to parliamentary proceedings through digital platforms (e.g., live streaming, online consultations) and social media to enhance citizen participation and engagement, especially from rural and marginalized communities.

By embracing technological solutions, parliaments in the SADC region can become more responsive to the needs of the population, particularly in contexts of rapid social change and technological disruption. This transformation will help build trust between citizens and their representatives while strengthening democratic governance structures.

3. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Objectives:

(i) **Promote the use of technology to enhance parliamentary functions**: Encourage Parliaments across the SADC region to adopt digital tools that streamline legislative processes, improve oversight, and facilitate better engagement with citizens.

(ii) **Strengthen inclusivity in parliamentary processes**: Leverage technology to ensure greater participation from underrepresented groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in legislative decision-making[2].

(iii) **Enhance transparency and accountability**: Promote the use of innovation and digital platforms to make parliamentary proceedings and decisions more accessible to the public, improving transparency in governance and holding elected officials accountable.

(iv) **Build capacity for technology adoption**: Provide training and resources to parliamentarians, staff, and stakeholders to improve their capacity to use digital tools effectively in their roles, ensuring a smooth transition to technology-enhanced parliamentary operations.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Increased use of digital platforms for legislative activities**: Parliaments will adopt e-parliament solutions that improve the efficiency of legislative processes, such as virtual meetings, digital documentation, and electronic voting systems and transforming the way parliaments operate in the SADC region.

- **Greater citizen participation in parliamentary activities**: Increased use of social media, live-streaming services, and other communication platforms will enable citizens to engage with their representatives more

---

[2] [8.O-ENG-Report-of-the-RWPC-to-the-54th-Plenary-Assembly.pdf (sadcpf.org)](#)

easily, fostering greater public involvement in governance, transparency and accountability

- **Enhanced accountability and transparency**: With the aid of technology, parliamentary oversight mechanisms will become more robust, enabling parliamentarians to track government actions more effectively and ensuring that decisions are transparent to the public, which can increase citizen trust, improved governance and enhanced legislative effectiveness.

- **Improved inclusivity in governance**: The use of technology will facilitate more inclusive participation[3], ensuring that marginalised and underrepresented groups can participate in parliamentary processes and have their voices heard. For example, the South Africa's People's Assembly has a platform that allows its citizens to track parliamentary activities[4].

4. PROPOSED EXPERTS TO FACILITATE THE SYMPOSIUM

Proposed experts to facilitate the Symposium will be drawn from the following Institutions.

i. The National Assembly of Zambia

- The National Assembly of Zambia being the host Parliament is a key player in discussing how technology could be integrated in order to make parliamentary processes more transparent, efficient, and inclusive. Therefore, it is proposed that Experts are drawn from the Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Institute of Parliamentary Studies and Training Departments.

ii. Ministry of Technology and Science

- The Ministry of Technology and Science was established in 2021 under the Government of the Republic of Zambia Statutory Instrument No. 19 of 2021 with the mandate to promote and coordinate the use of Technology and scientific research to foster socio-economic development.

- The Ministry is critical to Zambia's digital transformation agenda thus, experts from the Ministry could discuss policies and strategies to put in

---

[3] http/www.sadc.org
[4] http/www.pa.org.za

place for implementing technology in governance, including parliamentary functions.

- The focus Areas include, E-governance initiatives, innovation policies and digital infrastructure development.

iii. Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA)

- The Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority (ZICTA) was established in 2009 under the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Act, No. 15 of 2009 with the mandate to regulate the telecommunications, postal, and ICT sectors in Zambia, ensuring fair competition, consumer protection, and the development of ICT infrastructure throughout the country.

- ZICTA plays a critical role in ensuring the development, regulation, and efficient management of ICT services in Zambia. Their focus area are digital infrastructure, data management, and cybersecurity.

iv. Smart Zambia Institute

- Smart Zambia institution is a Government agency which was established in 2016 with the mandate that falls under the broader Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Act, No. 15 of 2009, which governs ICT policies and regulatory frameworks in Zambia.

- It is the leading Zambia's E-Government initiative. The institute provides insights into digital governance, public service delivery, and enhancing public participation through technology. Its focus area includes, E-Government platforms, digital public services, and capacity building in technology adoption.

5. VENUE

The 56th SADC Parliamentary forum Plenary Assembly Meeting to be held at Radisson Blu, Mosi-Oa-Tunya Resort, from 7th to 15th December, 2024 in Livingstone, Zambia.

6. CONCLUSION

By leveraging technology and innovation, Parliaments in the SADC region can become more dynamic, inclusive, and responsive institutions, capable of meeting the diverse needs of their populations and adapting to the challenges

of a rapidly changing world. In the face of ongoing political, social, and economic challenges, parliaments in the SADC region must capitalise on technological advancements to fulfil their legislative, oversight, and representative roles more effectively. By integrating innovations such as AI, blockchain, and digital platforms, these Parliaments can enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. The adoption of these technologies not only streamlines legislative processes but also ensures more inclusive governance, giving underrepresented groups greater access to decision-making platforms.

_____DMM/2024_____