



Enhancing Democracy and Good Governance: The Role of Parliamentary Library and Research Services

Innocent Rugambwa

(President Uganda Library & Information Association)

Director, Library and Research Services

Parliament of Uganda

Kampala, Uganda

E-mail: irugambwa@parliament.go.ug

Meeting:

141 — Library and Research Services for Parliaments

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 76TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ASSEMBLY

10-15 August 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden

<http://www.ifla.org/en/ifla76>

Abstract:

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. To that effect, Parliament of Uganda established a fully fledged Library and Research Department in 1999. This is an information service that is independent from the control of the Executive Branch. As a tool of democracy the parliamentary library does not work in isolation. Collaboration with other stakeholders is cited with a view to enhancing information resource sharing and effective dissemination to the citizens. Parliamentary support staff in sufficient numbers and with the appropriate professional skills is crucial for building effective democratic institution. This paper underscores the role of information in building effective legislatures; the need for information networks within and across organizations to join the Global Society; and emerging trends in library and research services for parliaments. Examples of unfolding programs are cited with reference to Parliament of Uganda. Through trainings and promotion of use of parliamentary information, citizens can be more effectively engaged in legislation process.

1.0 Introduction

Under the Independence Constitution of 1962, the First Parliament of Uganda, the National Assembly was formed. Today we are serving the 8th Parliament that comprises 215 Constituency Representatives; 79 District Woman Representatives; 10 Uganda People's Defense Forces Representatives (army); 5 Representatives of the Youth; 5 Representatives of Persons with Disabilities; 5 Representatives of Workers; 13 Ex-officio Members. Parliament

is presided over by the Speaker, and in his absence, by the Deputy Speaker both of whom are elected by Members of Parliament from their number.

Article 87A of the constitution establishes a Parliamentary Commission, which is a body corporate. The responsibility for the organisation and strategic guidance of the Parliament of Uganda rests within the Commission.

It is chaired by the Speaker of Parliament and has seven other members, namely, the Leader of Government Business, Leader of Opposition, the Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, and four Commissioners elected among the Members of Parliament. The Administration of Parliament Act, 1997 provides for the organisation and administration of the Parliament of Uganda and for the employment and remuneration of staff of the Parliamentary Service. Parliament of Uganda inherited the Commonwealth Parliamentary Model.

Now, more than ever, Parliamentary Libraries are expected to serve and promote democracy in their countries; play a crucial role in reorganizing, realigning and reshaping information services and products to preserve and deepen our democracy. As agents of democracy, librarians have to assist in creating an informed nation as well as to increase an awareness and use of libraries as community centers which will assist the nation with the democratic way of life.

Parliamentary Libraries are today right at the heart of democracy, helping to build an informed nation. Increasingly Libraries are now open and accessible to all. They will assist in unleashing the potential of individuals to awaken the sleeping genius in each individual to live according to his dream/purpose/potential.

Literally, democracy means power of the people. It is a form of government of the people, by the people, for the people. Democracy features a constitutional government where the majority rules, a belief in individual freedom, equal rights for all, freedom of expression, freedom of choice and political freedom. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the 2005 UN World Summit is that *'there is no single model of democracy'*.

According to Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone has a right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Likewise in 2005 an Act to provide for the right to access to information pursuant to article 41 of the Constitution of Uganda was enacted by parliament. This Act applies to all information and records of government ministries, departments, local governments, statutory corporations and commissions, etc. Increasingly citizens are grappling with the need to broaden sources of information; question the pap fed them by the mainstream media; and questioning their governments and demanding thoughtful, intelligent answers.

2.0 The Department of Library and Research

The department of Library and Research established in 1999 comprises of the Library Division and Research Division; responsible for provision of Library and Information Services; and provision and coordination of Research Services respectively. It is currently staffed with 8 librarians and 20 research staff. Staff provide information services and products and access to sources of information; assist Members of parliament (MPs) in

analyzing bills and policies; assist Parliament to monitor and evaluate government programs; assist Parliament to ensure that Government is held accountable for its activities; and conduct Legislative Research.

The outputs of the department include generation of written reports of specialist subject information that is required in connection with the duties performed by Parliamentary Committees, individual Members and Staff of Parliament; Briefing papers on major topics of current interest; Registers of official sources of specialized collections and other subject area material; Efficient Library reference services for Members and Staff of Parliament; and Up-to-date relevant collections of official publications, books and other reading materials.

In conducting library and research activities staff interact with MPs and the public during field visits in the constituencies; Committee sittings; workshops and seminars; and routine office work. This has minimized the gap between parliament and the citizens.

Every Member of Parliament has been equipped with a desktop computer in his/her office. MPs can also access internet in the Parliamentary Library where 10 computers have been reserved. 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. Library staff on routine basis have offered troubleshooting services to MPs to enable them fully utilise internet to reach the citizens and the globe via e-mail and online social networks, e.g. face books, etc.

3.0 Parliamentary Library Support to Public Participation in Democratic Processes

3.1 Open Access Policy

Since 1999 Parliament of Uganda established a fully fledged Library that operates as an information reservoir and information management system, away from the control of the Executive Branch. The parliament library is 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 reference. Aware of the limited access to information in the public sector the library has strived to acquire copies of documents from government departments, statutory bodies, national archive, civil society organizations, etc. The publications are well processed and readily accessible to the clientele. Extra copies of documents are donated to other libraries with a view to enhancing public access.

3.2 The MP- Scientists Pairing Scheme

Parliament of Uganda in collaboration with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS) are implementing Phase II of the MP-Scientists Pairing Scheme following a successful implementation of the pilot phase. The objectives of this scheme are:

1. To help scientists recognize the potential methods and structures through which they can feed their scientific knowledge to parliamentarians and the Government of Uganda;
2. To provide an opportunity for MPs to forge direct links with a network of practicing research scientists;
3. To give MPs the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the process of scientific understanding and topical research and ultimately bring this new knowledge into better informed discussions and policy decisions; and
4. To help practicing scientists understand the pressures under which MPs operate.

It is expected that the MP and a Research staff of Parliament will visit the scientist's research institution for a day; and the scientist and staff of Parliament will visit the MP in his/her constituency office for a maximum of three days depending on the constituency of the pairing MP. Thereafter, the MP, Scientist and staff of Parliament will be required to prepare a policy brief and participate in a public engagement event. This has helped bridge the gap between policy makers and scientists, and the citizens at the grass root level. This initiative is supported by the Royal Society and the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST).

3.3 School Outreach Program

In liaison with the Public Relations Office the department of Library and Research has launched an Outreach Program that will enhance dissemination of legislative information materials to school libraries upcountry. This will bridge the information gap between parliament and the grass root community. Students are educated on how to access government information on websites and appreciate its real value; students will also be sensitized on their rights as citizens in regard to accessing information as enshrined in the constitution and other legal documents.

3.4 Parliamentary Research and Internship Program

Since 2006 the Department of Library and Research has been actively involved in the ongoing Parliamentary Research and Internship Program. This is a program by which Interns are selected from three universities, given an orientation by parliamentary staff, MPs and former interns and then placed in offices in parliament where they work on research, legislation, legal issues and administration. This program helps foster partnerships among Ugandan Universities and Parliament, as well as between State University of New York (SUNY- the Project implementer) and academia. The program has contributed to increasing the capacity of Ugandan institutions of higher education to play a more active role in fostering good governance and social and economic development in Uganda.

3.5 Parliamentary Fora

As a tool of democracy the parliamentary library does not work in isolation. Collaboration with numerous parliamentary fora and other stakeholders has helped to enhance information resource sharing and effective dissemination to the citizens. The Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association(UWOPA); The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank Uganda Chapter(PNoWB); Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Children (UPFC); AMANI Forum; African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption (APNAC); Parliamentary Forum for Climate Change (PFCC)-UGANDA, etc, have spearhead issues that directly affect livelihoods of citizens. The library and research staff have worked closely with MPs on these parliamentary fora in generating pertinent information and disseminating it to citizens through seminars, conferences, visit to parliament library, etc.

3.6 Collaboration with International Organizations and Parliamentary Associations

International organizations and/or parliamentary associations have become important instruments for the dissemination of information to citizens. 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. Increasingly, the public (citizens) approach parliament library to access these invaluable reference sources.

3.6.1 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. AWEPA has facilitated printing of research reports to enable distribution of copies to our vast clientele. It has also sponsored training of staff in application of web 2.0 technologies with a view to enhancing citizen's access to knowledge about parliament.

3.6.2 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). This has enriched our information support to MPs and the public. Parliament library actively participated in the recent World Bank paradigm shift '*Towards Greater Transparency: Rethinking the World Bank's Disclosure Policy*'. Discussions emphasized maximum access to information; clear procedures for processing requests; and an appeals mechanism.

3.6.3 Partnership with Academia

In a bid to expedite democracy 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. Parliament library invited and hosted lecturers from Universities in Uganda for a joint training in Koha Integrated Library System.

3.6.4 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. To that effect, the library has donated extra copies of parliamentary proceedings and reports and other government documents to resource centres of some CSOs. Similarly, parliament library receives copies of reports generated by established CSOs. Nevertheless, in dealing with CSOs parliament library should stick to objective information and not be swayed by lobbying and advocacy.

3.6.5 APLESA Fraternity

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. Parliamentary Library (Uganda) has been very instrumental in steering activities of the Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa

(APLESA). At present Parliament of Uganda hosts the Secretariat of APLESA. APLESA members are Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The aim of APLESA is to foster resource sharing and networking among parliamentary libraries in Africa with a view to enhancing access to information. This has fulfilled the need for parliaments to keep track of foreign legislation and sharing experiences/implications on the globe.

3.6.6 Collaboration with the National Library of Uganda and the World Digital Library

Parliamentary Library has bridged the information gap between parliament and citizens by ensuring that copies of parliamentary proceedings are deposited with the National Library. This has enhanced public access to legislative information. Collaborative efforts have been made by which rare government publications from parliamentary library will be digitized (under the World Digital Library project) and made available on-line by the national library. The World Digital Library (WDL) makes available on the Internet, free of charge and in multilingual format, significant primary materials (including manuscripts, maps, rare books, recordings, films, prints, photographs, architectural drawings, and other types of primary sources) from countries and cultures around the world. The principal objectives of the WDL are to:

- Promote international and intercultural understanding;
- Expand the volume and variety of cultural content on the Internet;
- Provide resources for educators, scholars, and general audiences;
- Build capacity in partner institutions to narrow the digital divide within and between countries

4.0 Future plans

- Plans are in offing to establish regular parliamentary seminar series on science and technology or other network events bringing together staff/MPs and scientists and the public.
- Piloting of an “parliamentary internship” scheme for scientists to spend 3-6 months in Parliament.
- Outreach to Local Governments: District officials will be trained in legislative process to understand the stages of legislation; who is responsible for sponsoring legislation; and when their in-put can be most effective. Librarians at local government levels will be trained on how to access legislative information and dissemination of information to the citizen.
- The web site of the Parliamentary Library should be an excellent starting point for briefing papers about Parliament and vital issues seminars. The library homepage is being developed to enhance dissemination of information to the citizens.
- Ongoing initiatives towards digitization of parliamentary grey literature for onward dissemination into the public domain.
- Ongoing establishment of a parliamentary archive with a view to enhancing access to historical records and safe custody for posterity.
- Mobile phones and web penetration rates are increasing faster in Africa than they are in China and are being used as conduits for both information and money. Farmers can access market information and weather forecasts; health workers can access information on drugs to treat complaints and migrant workers can transmit funds

home much more cheaply than via the banks. There is still much untapped potential for the use of mobile phones in furthering well-being and development on the continent. Having leapfrogged landline technology, Africa is better placed to capitalize on new telecommunications infrastructure to advance good governance and democracy.

Conclusion:

In a nut shell, effective democracy is impossible without a library. The library is the storehouse of the world's knowledge, the record of humanity's achievements, the history of mankind's trials and sorrows and sufferings, of its victories and defeats and of its gradual progress upwards in spite of frequent fluctuations and failure. Increasingly, the public finds it easier/convenient to obtain information from parliament library (Uganda) than other government departments. This is attributed to dedicated staff and open access policy. The political function of consolidating and disseminating the knowledge contained by parliamentary libraries requires strengthening of their openness and their capacity for dialogue.

Parliamentary libraries should take the lead in the process of digitizing their collection, which is the new frontier of access to knowledge. This will ultimately reinforce the roots to democracy.

References:

African Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy: A Framework for Action. Economic Commission for Africa. 2005.

Beetham, D. (2006). *Parliament and democracy in the twenty first century*. Geneva, Switzerland: Inter-parliamentary Union.

Building Information and Research Capacity in Emerging Legislatures: A parliamentary reference guide. (1999). Ottawa, Canada:Parliamentary Centre/CIDA.

Coleman, Stephen, Taylor John and Donk Wim van de (eds.). *Parliament in the age of the Internet*. Oxford University Press 1999.

A guide to parliamentary practice: Mobilising parliamentary support for the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. (2009). Geneva, Switzerland: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

A guide to parliamentary practice: a handbook. (2003). Geneva, Switzerland: Inter-parliamentary Union.

Global best practices: a model annual state of the parliament report. A strategic monitoring and reporting tool for promoting democratic parliaments worldwide. (2005).

Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. (2008). *World e-Parliament Report*. Report of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Inter-Parliamentary Union through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament.

A handbook on effective legislative representation: a compendium of conference proceedings held at the Uganda International Conference Center, Kampala, August 24-25, 2000.

Informing Democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs. (2008, October). *Background paper*. Reports and documents no.59. Retrieved November 4, 2009, from http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/inform_dem_en.pdf

International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Publications 87: Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services in Central and Eastern Europe: Building more Effective Legislatures, by K.G.Saur, Munchen 1998. Edited by William H. Robinson and Raymond Gastelum under the auspices of the Section of Library and Research Services for Parliaments

Laundy, P. (1989). *Parliaments in the modern world*. USA: Gower Publishing.

Parliament in the age of the internet. (1999). New York: Oxford University Press.

Parliamentary Centre/CIDA. Building Information and Research Capacity in Emerging Legislatures: A parliamentary reference guide.

www.globalissues.org/.../united-nations-world-summit-2005