

Briefing Note

The Secretariat General of the Senate of the Kingdom of Cambodia

Information and Communication Technologies in Parliaments: Situation and Perspective

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I. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become an important strategic tool for promoting competitiveness and encouraging economic growth.¹ It has also helped to lower delivery costs for public services to all sectors.² However, parliaments face challenges in keeping up with the rapidly changing ICT tools available. As part of their efforts to modernize, parliaments are constantly looking for modern ICT tools to support their legislative, representation and oversight functions.

The Parliamentary Library in Cambodia, under the Secretariats General of both houses, is the main body for keeping parliamentary documents³. It is also the resource center that supports research that is delivered to members of parliament, parliamentary staff and may also be open to serve the public.⁴ In addition, the Cambodian Senate encourages the use of e-library that can considerably enhance the services provided to its clients.

In brief, Parliament took the initiative to review the use of ICTs and explore ways that enhance its core functions (legislative, representative and oversight) in order to improve their transparency, accountability, accessibility, effectiveness and connection with the electorate. The Senate focuses on the use of modern technology to facilitate the work of parliamentarians and parliamentary commissions. The establishment of ICTs in parliament will give parliamentarians reliable information that make the work of parliament more effective, efficient, trusted and transparent .

This briefing note highlights the need for ICT application and its use by the Cambodian Senate to strengthen its role and functions. The key findings of the desk review try to address four main research questions. Those questions are:

1. What are the current policies relating to ICT?
2. What does ICT currently do to address the needs of the Senate?
3. What are the roles of the library in the Senate?
4. What are the challenges in implementing ICT in the Senate?

II. ICT Policy

The Senate does not have its own customized ICT policy but instead follows the government policy based on the ICT Master Plan 2020 developed by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).⁵ The Royal Government of Cambodia is responsible for implementing adequate ICT policies to ensure that adequate mechanisms are put in place to maintain the national information security system.⁶ The RGC's priorities are to achieve the following objectives for developing national ICT infrastructure:⁷

- Development of services to increase the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting technology to citizens, by making it easier and cheaper in rural areas;
- Increasing ICT infrastructure through government assistance and giving an opportunity to the private sector to invest in ICT; and
- Setting up the basic tools of ICTs such as voice and data capability, wire and wireless communication and telecom and broadcasting services.

In developing national ICT infrastructure, the RGC set out the following five strategies:⁷

1. The government initiates the use of ICT;
2. RGC provides opportunities for all citizens to access ICT;
3. Establishes the environment where the private sector actively participates in national ICT development;
4. Establishing the environment for the easy adoption of ICT to create added value; and
5. Development of ICT infrastructure needs to be comparable to international standards.

ICT policies and related laws are still in draft form and include:⁷

❖ Draft Policy/ Law

- National ICT policy⁸ of the National Information Communications Technology Development Authority (NIDA) and Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MPTC);
- Telecommunication law⁹ of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MPTC);
- E-commerce law of the Ministry of Commerce (MOC);
- Law on Management of Radio Communication¹⁰ of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MPTC);
- Cybercrime Law¹¹ by NIDA MPTC; and
- Law on Copyright and Related Rights¹² of the MOC, Mitsui O.S.K Line (MoI) and Ministry of Culture and Fine Art (MCFA).

Recently, both the government and parliament are considering using ICT linked to social media in order to communicate with citizens.

III. ICTs Implementation in Parliament

Parliamentarians and the government are beginning to see the impact of ICTs and social media in elections¹³ and the growth of e-parliament and e-government at the local, regional, national and sub-national levels.¹⁴ Parliament is using new technologies to build their relationship with citizens by implementing information technology and communications incorporating the values of social sustainability that relies on citizens' participation in the policy processes as result of knowledge sharing and dialogue. As a result, ICT has become a main priority in many parliaments with greater attention being-paid to planning and implementation and increased investment in ICT tools.

The Cambodian parliament is beginning to develop its ICT tools that support its primary work. By doing this, the Senate has created three criteria to allow for the effective dissemination of information to the public¹⁵. The Senate is providing three main tools to support the parliamentary process:

1. **Website**¹⁶: the website provides a general platform for connecting people to information services. In the Senate, the website has two functions; one is providing general information and the other is information on laws. It also provides information on parliamentary activities.
2. **Mobile Application** Tools (Android and IOS version): Internet applications designed to run on smartphones and other mobile devices. These devices will help people by connecting

them to internet service more commonly accessed on desktop and computers. It is one of the ICT tools that supports the Senate News application.

- 3. Senate News¹⁷:** It is a mobile application used in smartphones which is more useful and faster than the website. It provides access to information related to the activities of the parliamentarians and the Secretariat General of the Senate.

The Cambodian Parliament also provides supporting services such as internet, intranet, and library as follows:

- **Internet¹⁸:** It is the most important service for facilitating the work in the Senate. It provides access to search engines, allows staff to download documents, and makes it possible to easily print documents. In addition, wireless connections are an easy way to connect to mobile phones, in order to stay in touch with the Telegram Application, the Senate News, What App, etc. In addition, Parliament has some basic ICT equipment and provides wireless connections to all Departments, so that they can access the internet.
- **The Senate Intranet:** this is a network based on the internal internet belonging to the Parliament for use in internal operations and is only accessible by parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. It is used to share internal information. However, the intranet is not used very much. Many Senate staff use “Telegram”; a mobile app for social communication with possibilities to chat, voice call, send photos or videos, among other functions. They prefer it to the intranet because it is faster, does not require one to log in, can be used easily between departments, and allows for efficient and quick file sharing. Telegram was not developed specifically for parliamentary use, but is a publicly available app. The app does support private messages, which is secured. However, end-to-end encryption, a safety measure which ensures the information sent is not seen by staff of Telegram or stored online, is only an optional feature that has to be turned on in the settings mode.¹⁹
- **The Senate Library:** the Library plays an important role in providing documentation, information, parliamentary publications and research services to parliamentarians, parliamentary commissions and to citizens. The National Assembly established an e-library since the end of 2014²⁰ while the Senate recently began in June 2016. The Senate e-library²¹ is the newest tool that contributes to the effectiveness and efficiency of parliamentary functions. However, the e-library is for internal use only. However, the library continues to face significant challenges, such as: systems to manage traditional human resources, lack of qualified human resources, lack of e-data management systems, and lack of participation in networks for the exchange of information, ideas, and best practices.



Example of staff sharing a Document on “Telegram”

IV. Challenges of ICT in the Senate

The Senate has been further challenged with regard to improving the design and usability of their websites in order to receive comments from citizens. The general issues related to ICT development in the Senate are:

- Lack of support from international donors;²²
- Lack of ICT equipment;
- Lack of ICT budget and technical support; and
- Lack of ICT human resources

The Senate Website provides information and one-way communication²³ via ICTs from Parliament directly to citizens²⁴. The citizens also want opportunities to express their views and to engage their members on national issues. The lack of ICT facilities and suitable infrastructure in Parliament and limited knowledge and skills of staff with regard to ICT application needs to be addressed. The Senate's website does not provide Commission email addresses or feedback tools or any application tools for submitting enquires and comments from citizens²⁵. Because it is difficult for parliaments to respond to large volumes of emails from the public, the establishment of a special unit to deal with this may resolve the issue. An example of two-way communication through online platforms is Prime Minister Hun Sen's recent initiative to receive and respond to public comments and feedback on his personal Facebook page.²⁶

V. Conclusion

ICTs in the Cambodian parliament are improving with a well-established information security system. Through this system, it is possible to provide a considerable amount of information on the country and parliament, which facilitates two-way communication between parliament and citizens.²⁷ The Senate could consider various things to improve ICT use, such as: developing ITC strategies for infrastructure; human resources development; improving e-library functions; upgrading technical skills of ICTs personnel; and improving data management to make parliament more effective, efficient, trusted, and transparent. Additionally, ICT in the Senate could be improved by additional equipment and a larger budget for promoting ICTs.

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- ¹⁸Use to find out what level the respondent can browse the Web using links and URLs (web addresses) and use of search engines and commands such as download and print.
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