Chapter 3
ICTs for Information Capabilities of Parliamentary Stakeholders
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ABSTRACT
Parliaments are central institutions in democratic government systems. Parliaments in some developing countries are closed institutions. Efforts for improving the “representation function” of the closed parliaments can also result in information freedom for the citizens, members of parliaments, and other stakeholder groups. I discuss, using the concepts of Capability Approach, how different ICT interventions can assist in improving the representation function of the parliaments by expanding the information capabilities (i.e., freedom of realizing functionings of acquiring, using, and disseminating information) of parliaments, citizens, and members of parliaments. The ICT interventions discussed in this chapter include developing or enhancing parliamentary website, webcasting system, telecasting system, media center for members, resource centers for members, reporting center for external reporters, and printing press.

INTRODUCTION
Those days are over when legislation was considered a secret and citizens were kept unaware. Globalization, growth of electronic media, and the diffusion of the internet have made people more knowledgeable and instilled them with a desire to know more about their representatives’ work. Citizens in the developing countries have also started to aspire for more parliamentary information as they think that legislators do not perform their duties properly. There is a compelling need that parliaments to be open and their representation functions to be improved. It is the citizens right to express themselves freely (e.g. see Beetham, 2006, p. 4) and be able to communicate with the legislatures. However, the world e-parliament report 2010 identifies that communication with the citizens ranks lower in many of the parliaments’ priorities. On the other hand, the demand for transparency from the citizens is increasing (Griffith & Casini, 2010).
The parliament needs to observe democratic norms, by showing itself open, accessible, and accountable to the electorate in its own mode of operation (Beetham, 2006). One of the main democratic ideals is that citizens via their representatives should have control. Political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspective “present” in the public policy making processes (Dovi, 2006). Representation is about collecting, aggregating and expressing the concerns, opinions and preferences of citizen-voters (Hudson & Wren, 2007). “The role of citizens in a democracy is not exhausted by the act of electing a government; they need to be continually engaged with it if it is to remain in touch with the people and their needs” (Beetham, 2006, p. 5). Representation function of the parliament involves representing the will of people during law making, oversight, budget approval and other functions. Substantive Representation is the actions taken by the representatives as agents of the citizens (Pitkin, 1967). For substantively representing the citizens, 1) parliaments as institutions, 2) members of parliaments (MPs) in their individual capacities and 3) political parties should be in close contact with the citizens, civil society, and other stakeholder groups. Close contact means that they should communicate, interact, and get feedback from the citizens and civil society. The input and the feedback should be reflected in the final decisions.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide the e-means and e-tools to the MPs, parliaments, and parties to interact and communicate with the citizens. In this chapter, I discuss, using the concepts of Capability Approach, how different ICT interventions can assist in improving the representation function of the parliaments by expanding the information capabilities (i.e., freedom of realizing functioning of acquiring, using and disseminating information) of parliaments, MPs, and the citizens. The commissioning of ICTs for improving the access to parliamentary information would help citizens in understanding the parliamentary matters. It would result in informed citizens. It would assist parliaments as institutions and MPs, to be in better contact with the informed citizens and get valuable views.

**CAPABILITY APPROACH AND INFORMATION CAPABILITIES**

The underlying theory behind the concept of information capabilities is the Capability Approach (CA). Capability Approach has been developed by (Sen, 1980; 1985; 1999; 2002) and later enriched by many researchers in different fields. Some of the prominent names in advancing the CA include Nussbaum (2000), Alkire (2002) and Robeyns (2003; 2006). CA stresses that the focus of development should be on human development, agency, well-being and on providing freedoms to the people (Sen, 1999) instead of only on economic development or utility maximization. Economic development is considered as one of the means to reach the ideal of human development (Sen, 2002). CA focuses on what people are able to do and to be (Nussbaum, 2000) in a given society.

Recently attention has been given on Technology in general and Information and Communication Technology in particular as potential Capability Expansion means (Ahmed, 2010a; Garnham, 1999; Johnstone, 2007; Kleine, 2010a; Madon, 2005; Mansell, 2001; Musa et al., 2006; Oosterlaken, 2009; Zheng, 2007). There have been several attempts to make the CA operational in the field of ICT for development (e.g. (Alampay, 2006; Kleine, 2010a, 2010b; Zheng, 2007; Zheng & Walsham, 2008)). Some studies – for example, Madon (2005), Prakash and De’ (2007) – have used the concepts of CA for analyzing the e-government projects. ICT initiatives, which are taken to improve the representation, function of the parliaments fall under the umbrella of e-parliament or e-government projects. Parliamentary stakeholders include parliaments as institutions,
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