

RWANDA PARLIAMENT IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY: STRATEGIES TO BRIDGE THE GAP AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO AND FROM CITIZENS

A presentation by:

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***Development of an Equitable Information Society:
the Role of African Parliaments***

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e-Democracy

Managing information: citizen's need to be informed

- Enhanced quantity, quality and cost effectiveness of information helps making sound decisions;
- Participative democratic processes:
 - Public space creation; debating opportunities
 - Co-production and feedback
 - Decentralization, rapidity of interaction, scalability (from individual to communities)
 - Low barriers to entry, no gatekeepers!

e-Parliament

- MPs: representatives (moral authority to act on behalf of their constituency); delegates or (mouthpieces)?
- ICT led strategy: conveying views to & collecting ideas from constituencies more easily; representatives more empowered to make decisions, increased knowledge needs for government activities oversight;
- Risk of information overload, transforming representatives into delegates !
- Democracy and development, the link:
 - Socio-economic development based on participation : (ownership & accountability).

Civic engagement



Civic voice

- Community problem solving; volunteering and active membership in groups/ associations; Participation in not -for -profit activities,...

Electoral voice

- Regular voting; Displaying signs, stickers; Campaign contributions; Volunteering for candidate or political organizations.

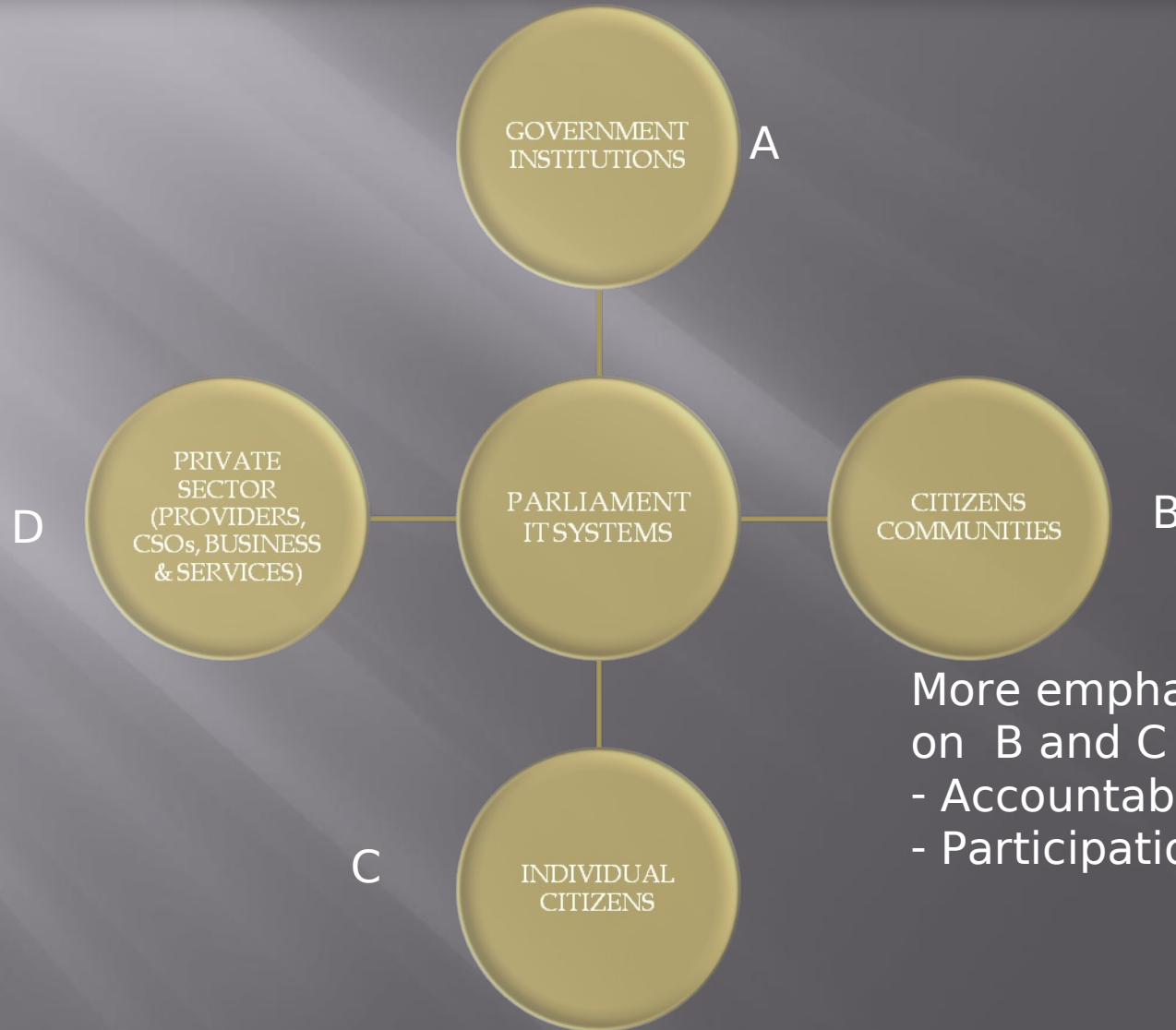
Political voice

- Contacting officials; Contacting the media; Protesting; petitions; Boycotting; ...

More information access to engage citizens...

- Need to facilitate open and free communication between communities & with institutions.
- People and technology at cross-roads: better and more quickly addressing societal values through IT towards ***collaborative direct*** democracy
- For Parliaments, a new hybrid representative democracy utilizing ICTs.

PARLIAMENT INFORMATION FLOW



More emphasis is needed
on B and C axes:
- Accountability
- Participation

Virtual communities... affordable access

- Virtual communities benefits:
 - Spread formal/informal knowledge and information
 - Increase democracy and transparency by bringing out issues into the open;
 - Build closer educational ties between teachers and their students;
 - Build closer professional ties within professional communities;
 - Reduce the digital divide and other disparities by exposing communities to one another.
- The idea is to build such communities using available infrastructures: tele-centers, PIK, OLPC...

Where are we today ... ?

- Parliament has an operational ICT steering committee
- ICT sectoral PoA, 5 main axes: RH training, software, communication, equipment and material, R&D...aligning with NICI Plan;
- Parliament outreach activities include networking, database development for open accessibility, e-library, radio, videoconference syst...
- Services digitalization plan (under implementation): Parliament equipped with 200 desk-tops, every parliamentarians has a laptop;

...at Parliament House

- Integrated Information management system, optic fibre in both chambers, inter-connected intranet systems;
- Both houses fitted with WIFI LAN system and cable network: connecting points in every room at Parliament Building
- 3 main weaknesses: lack of trained staff, call for increased capacity for MPs, mains shortage (generator backup)

PARLIAMENT BUSINESS AUTOMATION SYSTEM



Public



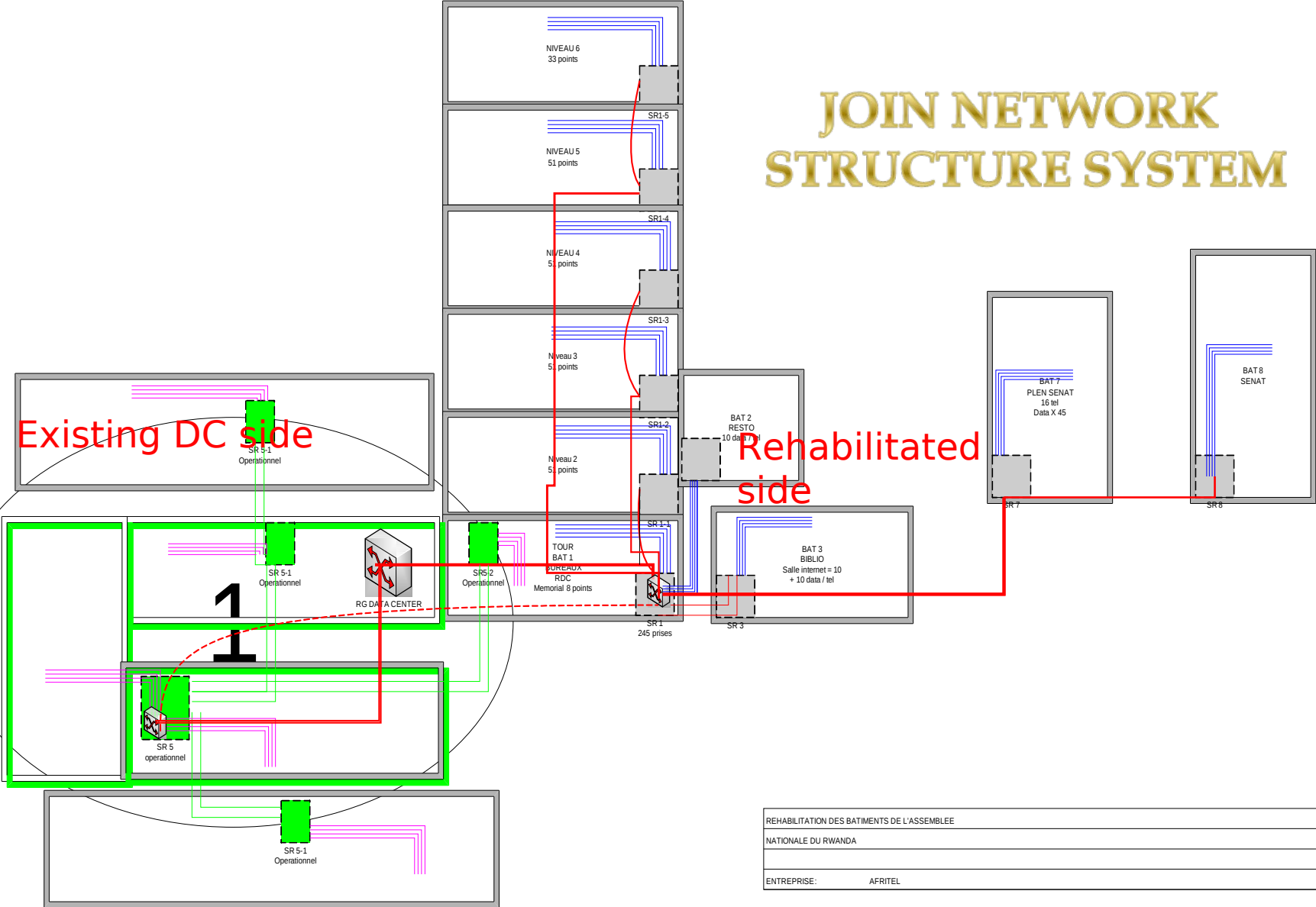
Data Entry/Administrators



Members



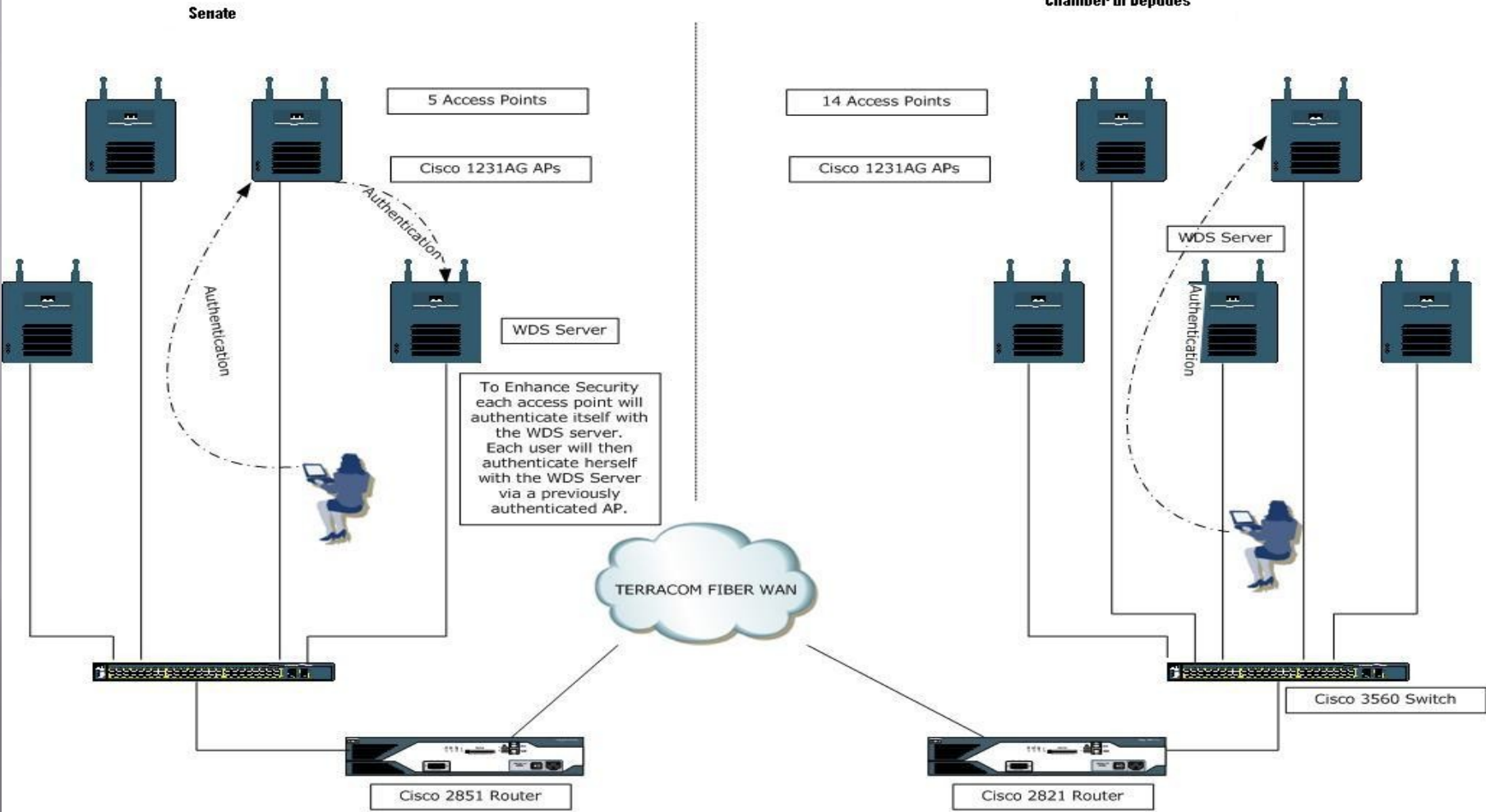
JOIN NETWORK STRUCTURE SYSTEM



REHABILITATION DES BATIMENTS DE L'ASSEMBLEE
NATIONALE DU RWANDA
ENTREPRISE: AFRITEL
CROQUIS: BACKBONE ET ROCADES INFORMATIQUE/ TELEPHONES

Parliament TCP/IP Wireless Network

Secure Wireless Network (SWAN) Connectivity



Mitigating power shortage effects

CENTRAL 40 KVA UPS



65 KVA
GENERATOR



How to bridge the gap.

- The Parliament Priorities:
 - (1) law-making exercise with citizens participation;
 - (2) monitor laws enforcement and take into account citizens' feedback;
 - (3) represent interests of citizens & exercise government oversight; and
 - (4) use ICT for development and act as a leader in this field
 - For the Senate in particular: research and document constitutional fundamental principles.

How to bridge the gap.

- Mechanisms:
 - Develop better accessed website with the use of new customized parliament software (MP's & institution websites);
<http://inteko.perspectivehost.com/>
 - **Increase reachability** (large number of users reached thru facilitation of processes)
 - Take stock of existing IT infrastructure facilities to provide affordable access to parliamentary services;
 - Set-up parliamentary radio broadcasting station and diversifying media for better citizen participation;
 - **Reduce the gap** within the Parliament, other institutions and the common citizen (social inclusion)

Conclusion

- It has been proved beyond doubt that ICT can be an engine for citizen participation, an enabler not the solution, however!
- Rwanda Parliament has gone a long way in digitalizing its services but loopholes still exist: interaction between Parliament and citizens still need a push, mainly owing to poor public communication.
- Initiatives are developed to enhance Parliament public visibility; added value shall be obtained thru the use of ICTs

Recommendations

- **Networking with entrepreneurs** (providers, dealers in hard and software, other Ict developpers,...) for citizens participation enhancing
- **Enhancing training and public access:** a broader population base to be knowledgeable
- **Local content:** user friendly approach
- **Laws and policies:** intellecual property, taxation, digital contracts, consumer/privacy protection, cyber crimes,...

Recommendations

- **Increased affordability:** price regulation, flat rates for local calls, free calls system for official outreach...
- Parliament to quickly set forth dynamic citizens interaction and consultation mechanisms provided for in its PoA.

MURAKOZE !!!

