Taking Democracy to the People Using Computers

Challenge

Just fourteen years after independence from apartheid South Africa, Namibia has put in place many democratic institutions, including a bicameral Parliament. Nevertheless, the culture of democracy is still taking root. To encourage civic participation, the Parliament is introducing innovative channels of communication between the people and its elected representatives.

Photo: Foster Mijiga/National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)

Students learn lessons in civic education and are introduced to the Parliament's interactive website.

Results

Namibia has rapidly become one of the developing world's leaders in e-governance. The Namibian experience is one of three such examples cited in the World Bank E-Governance Handbook for Developing Countries.

The USAID-facilitated relationship between the Parliament and Microsoft, which helped found the Mobile Training Unit, resulted in Microsoft's commitment to further expand e-government services by donating more than 4,000 computers for schools and communities, establishing a computer refurbishment center, and launching four "Microsoft Academies" throughout the country.

Initiative

With a 100 percent fiber optic backbone, Namibia has one of Africa's most sophisticated information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructures. Thus, ICT offers an attractive vehicle for promoting democracy. One of the challenges to taking advantage of the existing infrastructure is increasing access among Namibia's widely-dispersed population.

With USAID support, and contributions from Microsoft, Compaq, and the local private sector, the Namibian Parliament has equipped a demonstration bus with thirteen computers and audio-visual equipment. This "Mobile Training Unit" travels to Namibia's far-flung rural areas providing citizens with lessons in civic education and introducing them, as well as civic organizations and regional government officials, to Parliament's interactive website.

"Today our Parliament is among the leading Parliaments in the world using ICT as a tool for democracy. This success story could not have materialized if it was not for the continued support of our partners, both USAID and NDI, including the role played by our private sector partners."

– Mosè Tjitendero, Speaker of the Namibian Parliament

Case Study

USAID
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