Abstract— The research project has been developed to conduct an assessment on whether the current website of the Mongolian Parliament is used, who uses it, what information they are seeking and whether the information and resources are found, and if there is a demand for making website more interactive. Based on the outcomes of the assessment, the Parliament website had been further enhanced to enable distribution of website information to citizens, in particular, to underserved communities of Mongolia.

Therefore, this paper is to discuss and present the background, methodology, research results of this research project and policy recommendations from it.

It is expected that this paper will contribute to current knowledge and practice in use of ICTs in democratic governance, public administration and legislative processes that are presumably being accelerated throughout the world.

Keywords— Citizen e-participation, E-parliament, Governance, ICT4D

I. INTRODUCTION

Parliaments today find themselves at a crossroads. The rapid growth of ICT is changing the environment within which they operate and influencing how they are perceived by the citizenry. Rather than being mere witnesses to these transformative effects, parliaments are exploring ways to use technology to strengthen democracy and encourage political participation [1].

The process of e-government implementation is divided into three phases: Publish – using ICT to expand access to government information, Interact – broadening civic participation in government and Transact – making government services available online. Currently, Mongolia is mainly in publish and interact phases of egovernment implementation [2].

In Mongolia using the Internet is considered as an effective approach to deliver the decisions of the government to the public and to encourage the eparticipation of citizens in the Parliamentary legislative, since the country has a vast territory and one of the lowest population densities in the world. Citizens, who live in rural parts of the country and in particular those from underserved communities, do not obtain government information timely and reliably, and their comments and suggestions are not considered effectively by lawmakers.

The Mongolian Parliament opened its website in 1998. The website www.parliament.mn contained a range of information on the Parliament activities, such as sessions’ full notes of the Parliament, laws, law bills, archives, galleries, information of Parliament members, plan of sessions and discussion on them, etc. Mainly citizens, businesses, government and nongovernment organizations, donor and international organizations had been used information and resources from the website.
The Parliament’s promotion centers were established in 20 aimag (administrative unit in Mongolia) centers and 7 districts of Ulaanbaatar to serve as access points for citizens to information and resources of the Parliament. The Parliament website had been transferring one-way flow of communication, i.e. from Parliament to users, and had not been making use of new website technologies to improve communication flows.

This research project, entitled “Engaging Citizen E-participation in Parliamentary Legislative Processes” had been implemented for one and half year in 2009-2010 by the Secretariat of the Parliament of Mongolia under the supervision of the DREAM IT project, which is supported by the International Development Research Center, Canada.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the project is: To improve citizens’ participation in the parliamentary legislative process through online engagement. Its specific objectives were:

1. To understand what factors motivate or inhibit users and non-users from using the Parliament website
2. To study the accessibility of the Parliament website to citizens of Mongolia regardless of gender, age, education, geography or socio-economic status, in particular, those who live in rural parts of Mongolia and specifically those of underserved communities.
3. To determine whether existing information and resources from the Parliament website are meeting the demands and needs of citizens and identify information gaps and ways of delivering information to citizens to address the needs and demands.
4. To develop, pilot and evaluate a revamped website and complementary services
5. To design and test training programs for end users to use the parliamentary website to provide feedback
6. To identify what effect, if any, the revamped parliamentary web-site has, on Parliamentary legislative practice.

III. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods such as needs assessment using questionnaire, focus group discussions and evaluation of the revamped website were used in conducting the project.

A. Needs assessment

To do needs assessment, different segments of citizens were surveyed to identify who use the Parliamentary website, where they access it, what information they are seeking, whether they find necessary information and resources, and what other information and resources they would like to have access to. Furthermore, the study tracked non-users to determine why they do not access the website or access via an intermediary and to understand barriers facing the underserved communities and populations. The study also assessed whether there is a demand for an interactive website as two-way communication channel, to include forums, discussions, feedback, comments, suggestions and others on the hearings of the Parliament, draft bills to be discussed at the Parliament, activities as well as some matters related to Parliament members.

This survey was conducted among 1023 respondents in the capital city-Ulaanbaatar and 5 provinces of Mongolia.

It revealed that 568 /69.1% of the total 821 people, who has frequent Internet access, use the Parliament website permanently and 253 /30.8% use occasionally. 132 /16.1% of them check the ongoing draft bills, 528 /64.3% never checked the ongoing draft bills and 161 /19.6% answered that draft bills of their
Engaging Citizen E-Participation in the Parliamentary Legislative Processes

interest are not available on the Parliament website. The main reason why public does not use the Parliament website is the information and resources from the website does not meet their demands and needs.

Other important findings from the survey are: only 17.7% of the participants who sent e-mail or mail to the Members of Parliament received response. Only 9 out of 1023 participants use law discussion section of the Parliamentary website frequently, 193 use the section occasionally and 821 answered that they never used the section.

Besides that, open questions were asked in order to find out what kind of information users want to get from the website. The participants responded that they need information about the MPs, the implementation progress political agenda of the ruling party and legislation policy and procedure of the Parliament. Also, the participants wanted to review discussion notes of draft bills and the minutes of the standing committee meetings.

B. Focus group discussions

The project team members conducted focus-group discussions in rural as well as in urban areas of Mongolia. Participants in rural areas were public servants, local residents and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Focus-group discussions were also conducted in Ulaanbaatar city, focusing on the usage of the website and e-participation in Parliamentary legislative process. Participants were representatives of non-governmental organizations, IT experts and scholars. The main results of the focusgroup discussions were feedbacks from users, suggestions for improvement and examples of citizen e-participation in legislative processes in the State of Hawaii, USA.

C. Revamping the website and its evaluation

The bill discussion section was created on the main page of the website to obtain opinion of the public regarding a certain bill and to provide information about a certain bill, and it was a beneficial outcome.

The suggestions and comments section is located in the main page of the website, so everyone who accesses to the website can see them. The statistical data of how many users access to the website is shown to the users instantaneously. In addition, the new technology enabled the opportunity to contact directly to Members of Parliament and to make an online discussion about a certain bill.

The Secretariat of Parliament of Mongolia books the comments from the public and supervises the response process every month. Also, it reports on how many comments were received from the public and how many of them being responded on monthly basis.

Users were most interested in following draft bills: Election law, Public health insurance law and Parliamentary act on Tavan Tolgoi coal mine.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the past decade the objectives of parliamentary websites have become more complex and more challenging. They began with the goal of providing basic information about the history, the functions, and the members of the legislature. They were soon tasked to provide copies of official texts of proposed legislation, then the verbatim accounts of debates and summaries of plenary actions, and copies of committee documents. As the interactive web has emerged they have added tools that encourage two-way communication between members and citizens, inviting them to share their views and possibly engaging them in the policy process [3].

The main outcome of the project is the revamping of the Parliament website to better enable the public online participation in the Parliamentary legislative processes. However, in overall Members of Parliament
are not responding to the comments and suggestions of the public as expected. Policy recommendations were developed and delivered to relevant policy and decisionmakers. The main point of the recommendations is to enhance and put in place procedures on two-way communications through online methods.

As the increased use of the information technology enabled direct public participation in the Parliamentary legislative processes, the following recommendations are essential to sustain the results of project further:

1. It is not clear whether the public receive a response, their opinions and comments place in a bill or the Members of Parliament review the opinions and comments of public even if the number of users who access to the website increased and the public used to participate in the Parliamentary legislative process. While the officers of the Secretariat of Parliament book the comments and suggestions of the public, they only assign these comments and suggestions to the relevant Standing committees or the Members of Parliament. Responding the comments and suggestions of the public takes a lot time, therefore, it needs to be improved. Also, the relevant rules which regulate the method of responding the comments and suggestions of public needs to be adjusted.

2. The Members of Parliament don’t respond the comments and suggestions. The Members of Parliament needs to respond the comments and suggestions of public, and the Secretariat of Parliament has to make it a formal.

3. The Secretariat of Parliament has to assign one of its officers to be responsible for placing a draft bill on the bill discussion section of the website.

4. Currently, the website is full of reports of the departments of the Secretariat of Mongolia which are needless for the public; therefore, the website needs to be enhanced based on the outcomes of the project. A time, arrangement and effort are needed in order to enhance the information content of the website. In other words, the purpose of the website is to deliver bill related information such as date of a public and bill debate and the opinion and conclusion of the relevant standing committees to the public immediately. This issue is settled technically in the scope of implementation of the project, but the organizational matters are still staying behind.

5. The Secretariat of Parliament should promote the Parliament website further for the public, and also, it is better to link the Parliament website (www.parliament.mn) with the website of Press and promotion department of the Secretariat (www.open-parliament.mn) with the intention of eliminating the public confusion.

REFERENCES

