Legislative Research Services Adaptation to a Dynamic Political & Institutional Environment: Case of Uganda
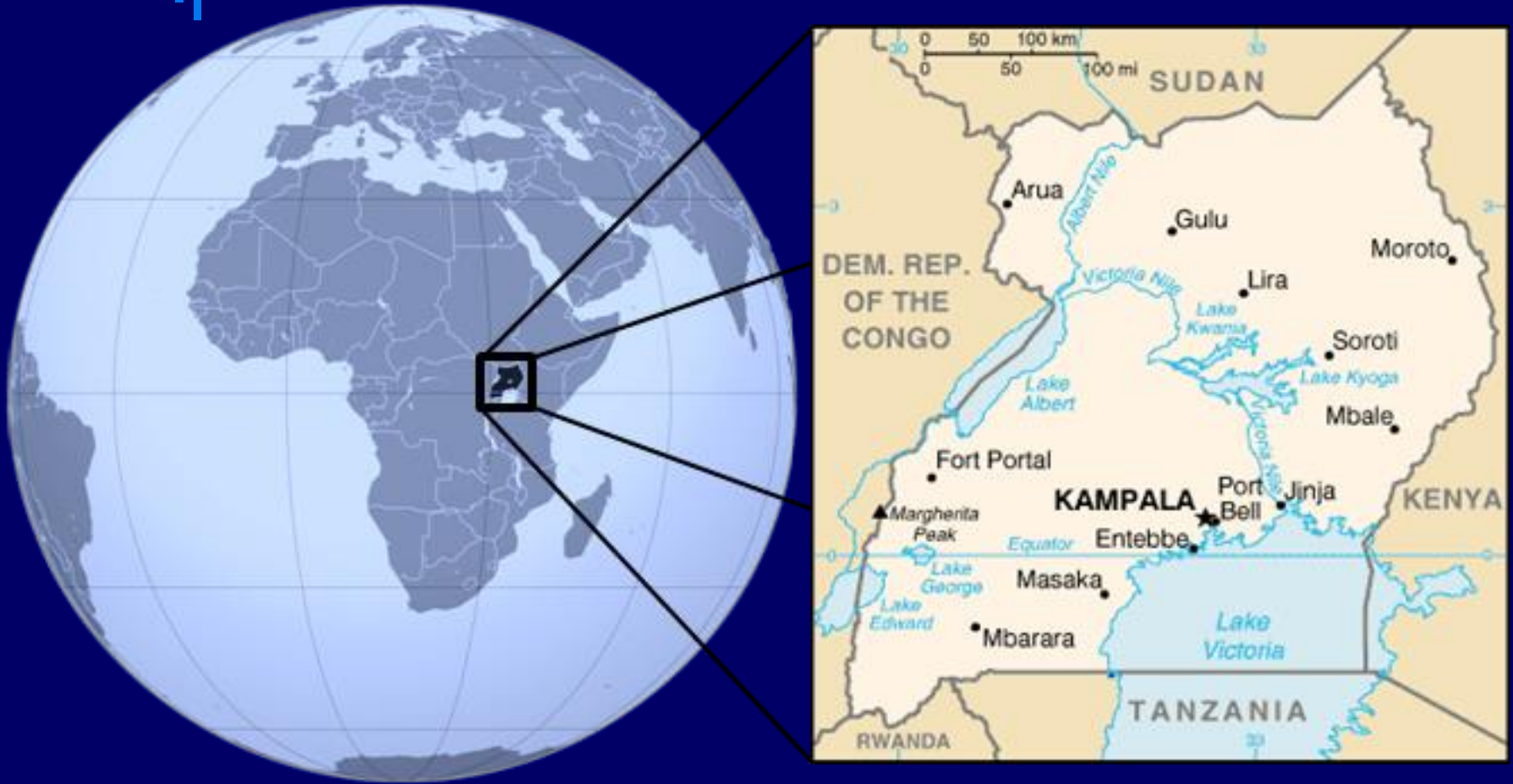
Francis Kintu & Jonathan Enamu
Dept. of Research,

Parliament of Uganda

Presentation Outline

☐ Overview of **Uganda**, its **Parliament** & its Research & information services

☐ **Dynamic changes** in Legislative environment & **impact on Research** & information services

☐ **Response** of Research & information services, challenges & lessons drawn

1. **Introduction:** UGANDA - <u>**Location**</u>

Introduction: UGANDA –cont'd
Population & economy

☐ **Population**: 34.9 million – Census 2014

☐ Popn rate: 3.24%.

☐ **Economy:**

 65% agric-based.

☐ **GDP**: US$26.31b

Introduction: UGANDA –cont'd
Historical overview

- Got **independence** from Britain -1962

- Undergone various **political systems** - military rule, single (Individual Merit) & multi-party.

- **Current political dispensation:** a hybrid multi-party system with republican & presidential attributes.

Parliament

☐ **Parliament**: Unicameral - has 1 legislative chamber

☐ **Composition**: **386 MPs**, directly elected thru' universal suffrage on 5 year-term.

Introduction: Research Services in Uganda Parliament

☐ Research services introduced in 1999

☐ Introduced with support from USAID - Uganda Parliamentary Technical Assistance Project & implemented by the SUNY University;

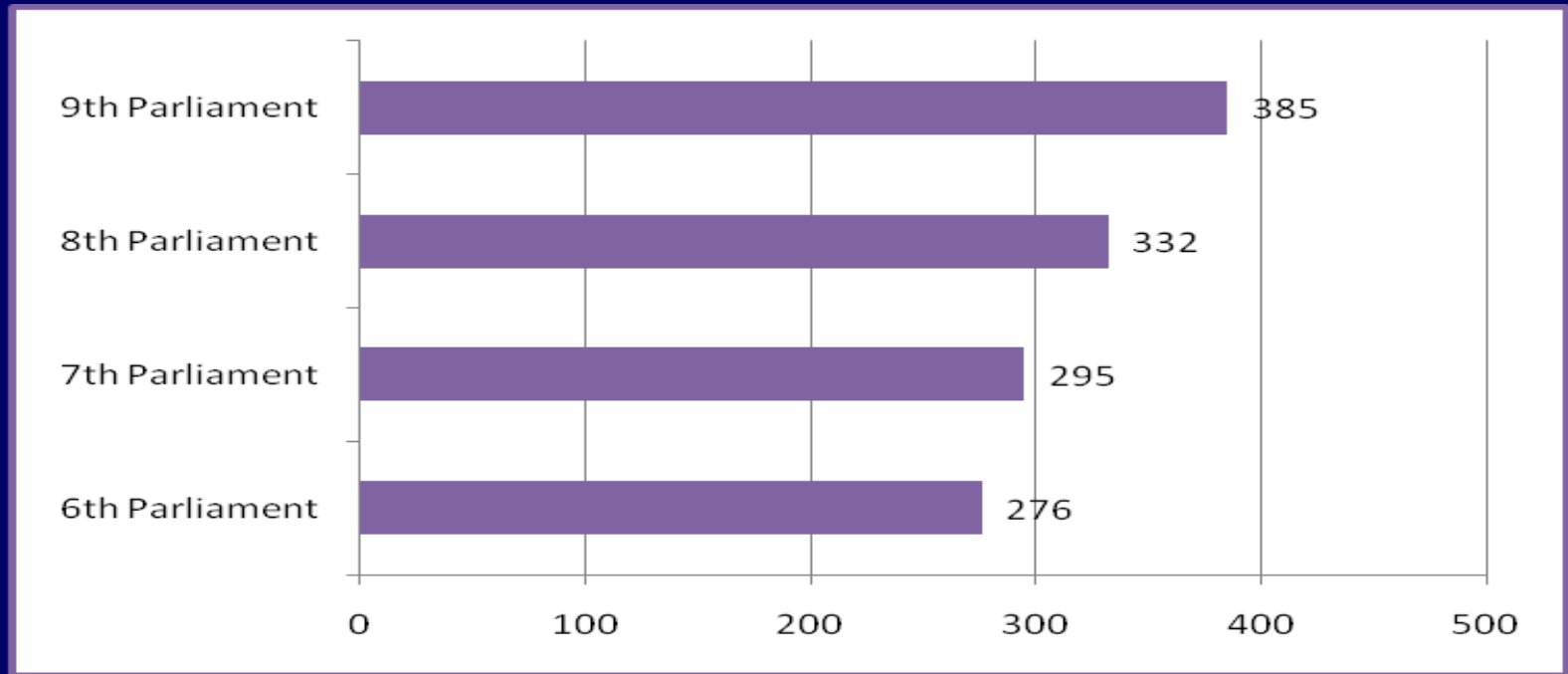☐ Started as a section in the dept. of Library, Research & ICT Services.

2. Dynamic Political & Institutional environment & impact on Research services

- (i) **Rapid change** in **size** & composition of Parliament

- (ii) **Changing political systems**: from single to multi-party system

- (iii) **Changing operating system** : evolution of committee system

Dynamic change– cont'd …

1) **Rapid Change in Parliament Size -** from 276 MPs in 1996 to 386 to date.

➢ To increase by 65 new MPs next year

Dynamic change – cont'd …

2) Rapid Change in Political Systems

☐ From **military rule** to **single party** & to **multi-party** system in 40 yrs.

☐ **Multi-party** system introduced in Parliament since **2006**

Dynamic change– cont'd …

3) Changing operating system of Parliament

➢Evolution & increasing role of **Committees** as engine rooms of parliamentary legislation & oversight

Dynamic change– cont'd ...
Key impacts: Size of Parliament

☐ Increasing size of Parliament putting pressure on services: researchers: **MPs ratio – 1:10**

➢ **High turnover of** MPs from one parliamentary session to the next -- 70% -- **constant loss of user research experience & know-how.**

➢ Increasing No. of MPs with low education backgrounds & research absorption skills.

Dynamic change– cont'd …
Key impacts: Political Systems

□ **Adoption of multi-party system** - legislative research increasingly being rendered in a **partisan political environment**;

□ Legislative decisions increasingly being taken around **political interests**, often in **disregard of objective research**

Dynamic change– cont'd …
Key impacts: Operating Systems

☐ **Committees'** increasing demand for **independent**, **specialized** & **localized** programmes information.

☐ **Unavailability/unreliability** of info. from govt. – the only gatekeeper of info. relevant to decision-making.

☐ Increasingly **shorter info deadlines.**

Research Adaptation to Dynamic changes & challenges

(1) **Creation of an independent** Research dept. – from October 2012 – to provide specialist research services.

(2) **Putting in place a multi-skills research** team with technical orientation in govt. sectors : scientists, lawyers, economists, accountants, engineers,

Response of Research to dynamic changes & challenges ... cont'd

☐ **Assigning subject-area specialist** researchers to each of the committees -- undertake monitoring & evaluation studies on behalf of committee.

☐ Carrying out **anticipatory research**

Response of Research to dynamic changes & challenges … cont'd

(3) **Enhanced capacity building** for research staff **–** building a skills base in two critical areas - **systematic scientific skills** & **creative skills.**

(4) Personal engagement with clientele across political divides.

Response of Research – cont'd – <u>Results</u> & <u>challenges</u>

❑ Adaptation outlined above has gone some distance in addressing the challenges at hand.

❑ **However, major challenges remain:**

  ➢ Adjusting to a pluralist parliamentary democracy;

  ➢ Inadequate expertise & resources for more advanced research/information services;

Lessons drawn

☐ To remain **relevant & effective**, legislative **Research services** must deal with dynamic political & institutional environment –

   – **for it affects relationships, demand & use** of research/information services by our Parliamentary clients.

Lessons drawn, Cont'd

☐ **Services can respond to Parliament needs in a dynamic environment by:**

a) Functional restructuring & re-alignment;

b) Continuous capacity building - to deliver high quality research to a diversity of MPs & to engage partisan clientele in a non-partisan & politically sensitive way.
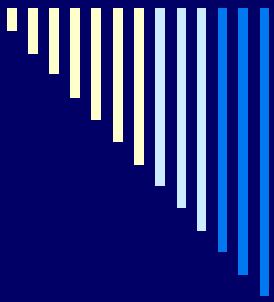
Lessons drawn, Cont'd

☐ **Systematic scientific** & **creative skills are required of research officers --**

 -- to be able to deliver sustained support tailored to the specific information requirements of a parliamentary clientele with limited education & skills.

Questions asked:

□ **How best can Research & information services** deal **with a dynamic political & institutional environment** & **in a context of limited expertise & resources**?

□ **How can Services best adapt in a partisan legislative environment** where decisions are taken around **political interests in disregard of objective research/information?**

THANK YOU VERY MUCH