STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL SOFTWARE INDUSTRY
… an expert's opinion

The CEO of SOFTtribe, one of the leading software manufacturers and ICT training centers in the country, Mr. Herman Kojo Chinery-Hesse has called for a stronger government policy framework on ICT. He further added that such a policy should contain clauses that compel institutions; both government and private, to patronize locally manufactured software. According to him, a good policy in this direction could go a long way in strengthening the local software market and further offer an equal platform for local software industries to compete with imported or foreign branded ones.

In an interview with Iconnect, Mr. Chinery-Hesse disclosed that in Nigeria, there is an executable policy framework on ICT which seeks to give local software manufacturers an advantage over foreign ones. "This always gives Nigerian industries an upper hand in any tender process and this is not unique to ICT. The policy contains clauses that give Nigerian companies some kind of leverage in any bidding process, so at the end of the day, it tends out that Nigerian companies always win government contracts".

He emphasized the fact, however that, software companies are not begging the government for money. He nonetheless concedes that ICT has come a long way in Ghana, especially compared to most countries in the sub-region and on the continent. This not withstanding, he still maintains that, government support for the industry in the form of a strong policy frame work, could give local software manufacturers unrivaled advantage over foreign ones. He further adds that, the absence of government policy shows a total disregard for the industry. "Many countries have developed both in their social and economic lives since the emergence of ICT. Though government appears to be doing something, we think more can be done in this regard to speed up the process." He said.

To help level the platform, he advised the government, through the ministry of education, to invest in ICT education, so that right from an early age, the school going child becomes adept in the use of ICT facilities. He said one thing his organization has done to contribute its quota to the development of ICT in the country, if for nothing at all, has trained lots of people who have excelled in the area of ICT both locally and internationally. "Once a seed is planted, there is nothing any one can do about it. It always bears fruits in its season. No one can take away from you, knowledge you have acquired. He said, while advocating for government support through ICT education to beef up the already global draining human resource.

Another area he said the government could help the ICT sector as well as local software manufacturers was through the ministry of communication. He asked the ministry to liaise with service providers and telephony companies so that charges on internet and other connectivity are reduced. He noted that the government could do this in the form of subsidies. This he said, will make internet access more affordable and easily accessible, particularly for students who will need it for their research as well as other academic work.

Mr. Chinery-Hesse, who came to Ghana in the early 90's, started his company shortly after that. He has, in his own small way, placed Ghana on the global map of ICT through his various achievements. Called in some quarters as the Bill Gates of Africa, he has won several awards to raise high the flag of Ghana. He was honoured during the Millennium Excellence Awards in 2005. In the same year, he received an award from the Ghana Club 100 as well as a proud recipient of the Ghana Young Professionals Award, also in 2005 in the UK. Just last year, he was honoured by his alma mater, the University of Texas, USA, as being the most Distinguished Alumnus. This was in recognition to his immense contribution to technological growth on the continent.

He has given lectures world wide on issues related to ICT. He has also shared, and continues to share his expert opinion on ICT issues on major international networks like BBC and CNN as well as global giants in print media.

He is committed to contributing his bit to the development of ICT in the country through the training of human resource which he believes will excel in various areas in ICT both locally and internationally. His affiliation to Microsoft, has also contributed, hugely to building the credibility of SOFTtribe, while bringing honour to Ghana.