

Sowing the Seed of ICT in Ghana: “Baah-Wiredu’s Computer a Child” is Fantastic **By Mawutodzi K. Abissath**

This popular adage that “Rome was not built in a day” or the famous Chinese proverb which says that “A journey of a thousand kilometers begins with one step” is self-evident.

All Information and Communication Technology (ICT) minded countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, India and others, that are becoming super ICT nations on this planet of technology did not achieve their feat overnight. Singapore, for instance, embarked on her ICT revolutionary journey over 30 years ago.

On Tuesday, October 7, 2008, hardworking Ghanaian teachers were rewarded with mouth-watering prizes. The event took place at Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana and coincided with the 14th National Best Teacher Award/World Teachers’ Day, celebrated globally. This writer wishes to join hands with the Government and people of Ghana to say kudos to the Ghanaian Teacher. The days when a teacher’s reward was supposed be in heaven must be over forever. (Somebody say Aaamennn!)

As a matter of fact, Ghana Government must be commended for the magnificent prizes presented to the award winning teachers. The first prize of 60,000 Ghana Cedis which went to Mr Sadique Boateng of T.I. Ahmadiyya Senior High School in Kumasi to be used for the construction of a house of his choice must be motivating enough to lure any youth to want to embrace teaching as a profession. There is still room for improvement, though.

For instance, in the very near future when Ghana’s oil boom takes off, it should be possible for all ten best teachers from each region to be awarded houses at ago Then all 170 best district teachers must be given cars each, too. In view of the key role education plays in national development, and the fact that teachers constitute the foundation upon which all other professionals are educated, only the best should be good for the teacher. Therefore, teachers must be among the best paid professionals in the country.(True or false?)

But what actually motivated this author to write this piece was the revelation by the President of Ghana, H.E. John Agyekum Kufuor, on the day of the award ceremony that very soon all Ghanaian children between the ages of five and 12 in public schools will be provided with personal computers by the government.

The *Daily Graphic* of Wednesday, October 8, 2008, carried a front page banner headline: “COMPUTER PER CHILD – *Govt’s initiative to boost ICT skills in public schools.*” According to the story, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States of America (USA), had designed some computers that would enable Ghanaian children to acquire skills in Information and Communication Technology, “which is currently the most critical basic instrument of education world-wide,” the paper stressed.

President Kufuor used the occasion to disclose that the deal for the supply of the computers was negotiated on behalf of the Government by the late Finance Minister, Hon. Kwadwo Baah-Wiredu about two years ago. That the very day the creators of these unique machines from the MIT, dubbed “Magic Computers for children” came to demonstrate the computers to him during his recent trip to the US, he received the agonising news of the transition of our beloved Finance Minister. So, in order to honour his memory, therefore, the President said the machines shall be christened as “Baah-Wiredu’s Computer for a child.” Another fantastic posthumous award for a worthy soul.

With this magnificent technological legacy bequeathed Ghana by the affable and humble late Minister, when it comes to write the history of ICT advancement in the country, Hon. Baah-Wiredu’s name shall not be written in water, but etched on the rock of technology. For he had sowed a seed of ICT that shall germinate, grow and produce fruits that shall feed Ghanaian children of today and those yet unborn.

It is most reassuring to learn from the President that the first batch of 10,000 units of the wonder machines is already on the way and will sooner than later arrive in our beloved country. Well, this writer is not in any position to know how these computers will be distributed equitably for the benefit of all public schools in the country. But the country’s educational authorities know best what to do.

Nevertheless, I shall take the liberty to make the following suggestions for consideration:

1. Even before the “magic computers” land on our soil, there must be “magic” ICT teachers who can use the machines to teach the children in the first place. So, if this is not yet done, then one or two experts who manufactured the computers must come down to provide some kind of “Train-the-trainers” programme for ICT teachers in Ghana without delay.
2. Where possible, all public schools in the 170 districts in the country must be supplied with these computers for children. One does not know whether the computers will use electricity power or solar energy or dry cell batteries; so that whether a school is located in a district connected to the national electricity grid or not, the children there must be given the opportunity at least to see and touch a computer in their life for the first time. The truth is that some Ghanaians are yet to see a computer in some parts of our country let alone use one.
3. Some of the Community Information Centres (CICs) that are currently in operation in some of the deprived rural areas in the country must serve as resource centres where some of the computers can be installed for the benefit of school children in those communities. It may be better that way rather than some school heads, suffering from “computer phobia” to dump the machines in some uncompleted buildings somewhere with the excuse that there are no computer laboratories in their schools.

For Ghana to make headway in the global market as far as employment opportunities are concerned the country must vigorously embark on mass production of ICT literates like India and unemployment and poverty shall gradually take care of themselves.