

AFRICAN ICT GURUS, WHERE ARE YOU?

By Mawutodzi K. Abissath

An African proverb that seeks to motivate and inspire the youth says: “A child who knows how to wash his hands very well, eats with elders.”

It is common place that the 21st century belongs to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In other words, it is a century of knowledge. The Internet has even made this knowledge widespread and accessible to anybody who seeks information.

Thus, if other technological revolutions such the industrial revolution had bypassed Africa with impunity, it will be unpardonable for the continent to allow itself to be overtaken by this Information revolution. This ICT revolution is the only one which has reduced the entire globe into a miniature world, commonly referred to as a global village.

If countries like India, Singapore, Malaysia, Finland, all of them developing world are using ICT to march or upstage some of the industrialized nations, then there is no earthly reason why Africa must not live up to technological expectations in this century.

The purpose of this piece is to identify a single outstanding African ICT figure to be used as role model for all African youth in the ICT industry. While still looking for a global African ICT expert, this writer has no choice but to present Bill Gates of America for that purpose. (If any reader knows of any African ICT Guru of Bill Gates' status, he or she should not hesitate to contact me: abissath3@yahoo.co.uk).

There is a French adage which says that, “Aux âmes bien nées, la valeur n'attend pas le nombre des années avant de passer”. Literally translated, “Gifted people do not depend on age before achieving their goals in life.”

Bill Gates was born in 1955, precisely on October 28, in America. After his secondary education he had admission to the Harvard University as a freshman. Information available on the Internet about him has it that, while at the University, “Gates developed a version of

the programming language BASIC for the first microcomputer-the MITS Altair.”

It is stated that, in his junior year, “Gates left Harvard to devote his energies to Microsoft, a company he had begun in 1975 with his childhood friend Paul Allen’. It seems to me that the man was endowed with some rare creativity and ingenuity. The report says that Gates was guided by a belief that computer would be a valuable tool on every office desktop and in every home one day. So, they, he and his friend, began to develop software for personal computers.

“Gates’ foresight and his vision for personal computing have been central to the success of Microsoft and the software industry.” If Gates had been a Ghanaian and left the University without obtaining a certificate, he would have been referred to as “a drop-out”, in our society.

Today, Gates is the chairman and chief software architect of Microsoft Corporation, the worldwide leader in software, services and Internet technologies for personal and business computers. Microsoft is said to have had revenues to the tune of US\$36.84 billion for the first fiscal year ending June 2004. Microsoft employs over 55,000 people in 85 countries throughout the world.

I was fascinated when I learned that in 1999, Gates wrote a book titled:” Business @ the Speed of Thought”. This book is said to have shown how computer technology could solve business problems in fundamentally new ways. The book was published in 25 languages and is available in more than 60 countries. This is fantastic!

Earlier in 1995, he wrote a book titled, “The Road Ahead”. Both books were listed on the best-seller lists of the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal* and *Amazon.com*. It is inspiring to note that the proceeds of both books were donated to non-profit organizations that supported the use of technology in education and skills development. This is a mark of one of the selfless richest human beings on earth.

“Under Gate’s leadership, Microsoft’s mission has been to continually advance and improve software technology, and to make it easier,

more cost-effective and more enjoyable for people to use computers.” The company is reported to have invested approximately \$6.2billion on research and development in the 2005 fiscal year.

Respected reader, just pause for a moment and reflect upon the achievements of this creative soul called Bill Gates and meditate on his contribution to the technological advancement of mankind in this incarnation. (Those who may want to know more about him should visit the website www.microsoft.com).It is the opinion of this writer that this is the type of information the Ghanaian youth must be encourage to read on the Internet for them to be inspired and motivated.

It is the conviction of this writer that African ICT experts can rise to the occasion and revolutionalise the continent with this technology and dismantle the accursed poverty tormenting African souls once and for all.

India is one typical developing country that has used ICT to reduce poverty considerably in that country. As a matter of fact, India is an exporter of ICT experts to Europe and other parts of the world. The other day, BBC did a wonderful programme on the ICT industry in India.

It was disclosed that almost all the junior secondary school drop-outs who should have been polishing and shining shoes or selling dog chains in the streets of India were given ICT training. And with those technological skills, they have been employed by American ICT companies in that country.

The American firms find these ICT literate youth of India very useful and cheap labour for their work as compared with what pertains in America. But the Indian workers are happy for the \$100.00 dollars they were being paid. Their American employers are also happy to invest in the ICT industry in India. So there is mutual happiness here and there because of ICT. Can't this happen in Africa? If yes, then where are the African ICT Gurus?