25th November, 2022

To,

Shri (Dr.) D. Ravikumar,
Lok Sabha Member of Parliament for Viluppuram, Tamil Nadu.
A-7, Sindhu Apartment,
Dr. B.D. Marg,
New Delhi-110001.

Email: writerravikumar@gmail.com

Subject: Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) Policy for Tamil Nadu

Dear Sir,

1. FOSS United Foundation is a registered non-profit founded in 2020, dedicated to the cause of building Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) projects and communities in India. The foundation aims to provide grassroots support to FOSS projects and events, and evolve into a community-industry collaboration with a diverse group of members and patrons. The foundation's goals are:

   - To enable and evangelize the use of FOSS in academia, social sector, industry and government.
   - To promote the spirit of hacking and tinkering.
   - To build quality FOSS for public good.

2. We note with sincere appreciation the strides that Tamil Nadu has made in the industrial and IT sectors, and its intention to, *"Make Tamil Nadu the numero uno destination to invest, innovate and create products and associated services."* We have reviewed your industrial policy and your R&D policies and feel that a policy/guidelines on FOSS in Tamil Nadu will help your state's enterprises and government agencies promote innovation, reduce costs, grow TN's startup ecosystem, and encourage skill development and capacity building. In the next sections, we elaborate on these points.

3. Encouraging Innovation: Most emerging technologies like blockchain, big data and analytics are built as FOSS. Fifteen years ago the proprietary model of software development, where one company built and marketed a software program was the norm. However, the growth of the Internet led to the rise of Collaborative Innovation and decentralised software development. FOSS licences enabled communities to converge online and collaborate to build technologies together. Today, such collaborative development has replaced

proprietary software development as the "new normal." From microprocessors to mobile phones, every technology has some element of FOSS inside it. FOSS enables all the emerging technologies that underpin Industry 4.0 like enhanced computational power, Internet of Things (IoT), business analytics, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, elemental design, simulation, advanced robotics, additive manufacturing, and sensor based technologies. Therefore, state policies that encourage FOSS will have a broad ranging impact on innovation in TN.

4. Reducing Costs: FOSS has helped Indian enterprises and government agencies reduce software acquisition costs and stretch every rupee to the maximum possible extent. The money saved by using FOSS helps organisations invest more money into other critical areas. India has implemented population scale IT projects like Aadhaar, UPI, GST, CoWin and others at costs that are far lower than other countries around the world, thanks to adroit use of FOSS. Encouraging skills development around FOSS, and the growth of companies that help TN based organisations implement FOSS will help bring down technology costs across the board.

5. Growing TN's startup ecosystem: We note in TN's R&D policy that Tamil Nadu Start-up and Innovation Mission (TANSIM) has set an ambitious target to establish approximately 10,000 start-ups in Tamil Nadu by 2026. We also note that Tamil Nadu Technology Hub (iTNT) is building India's first DeepTech Innovation Network connected to the world and plans to solve complex challenges in different sectors, such as agriculture, health, or education, using emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics, and blockchain. FOSS is the bedrock on which all these emerging technologies are being built. Therefore, encouraging a FOSS ecosystem in TN will have a direct impact on the growth of startups in TN.

6. Encouraging skill development and capacity building: As we mentioned earlier, almost all emerging information technologies are being built as FOSS. Availability of talent is a foundational requirement for global R&D centres, Global Captive Centres (GCCs), Software Development Centres (SDCs), startups and others. Without availability of talent, fiscal incentives alone may not make a state attractive as an investment destination. FOSS skills are some of the most sought after skills in IT today, to the extent that some Indian blockchain startups are hiring talent from countries like Romania and others. Therefore, scaling up FOSS skills development and capacity building would help TN attract organizations that are at the cutting edge of technologies.

7. FOSS United recommends that the TN Government set up a FOSS program office that coordinates closely with TANSIM, iTNT, and other programs to enable skills development, capacity building, deployment of FOSS in Government and coordination with academic institutions to make TN a FOSS leader in India and the world. At FOSS United we are happy to extend our support for TN Government's initiatives for attaining leadership in FOSS technologies.

With warm regards,

Venkatesh Hariharan
Public Policy Director
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