

Regional FOSS Communities:

The View from Dhaka, Bangladesh

Research Question

Studies of code repositories often suggest little open source activity originating in South Asia, yet regional communities continue to form around major projects.

What is the nature of participation in open source software in these regional communities? What drives their formation? How might we leverage and better support them to strengthen the open source ecosystem?

Methodology

This ethnographic study centers on two regional open source communities in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a major Asian city with a growing information-technology sector. Findings are based on **25 individual interviews** and **two focus groups** with community members in Dhaka and their interlocutors from adjacent projects and regions. **Field notes** from observation of online community pages and a two-week field visit to Dhaka in August 2019 help situate the findings.

Key findings

Dhaka has a strong culture of forming *communities* around technology projects, driven primarily by university students. Participants seek opportunities for **socialization, leadership and technical skills-training**, and **reputation-building** through travel and global communications.

The earliest communities were formed in the 2000s around open source projects (Linux, Mozilla, Wikipedia), **but now encompass a range of open and proprietary technologies**. Few students distinguish between open and closed source projects.

Communities are organized to perform traditionally “peripheral” activities: translation & localization, user support, bug testing, evangelism.

Learn more

Contact **Anushah Hossain** with comments, or to be notified of the release of a summary report: anushah.h@berkeley.edu

Recommendations

The activities of regional community members can be conceptualized in several possible frameworks, each with their own recommendations and goals:

Framework	Recommendation	Outcome
Novice code contributors	Encourage mentorship and social ties with central members; highlight introductory issues for newbies to work on	Evolve participants into “central contributors,” writing and maintaining code
Brand ambassadors	Encourage (localized) promotion of project; offer benefits to ambassadors such as swag, titles	Establish an expanded user base and increased loyalty
Gig-workers or crowd workers	Further modularize tasks; consider systematic compensation and/or recognition for gig work	Expand the labor force and reach of open source project

Calls to action

Conduct additional close studies of socio-cultural dynamics around open source projects in other locales

Evaluate the impact of core community activities such as translation/localization on the success of projects

Support open source curriculum development and outreach to student populations