

# 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.

## 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

## Learn more

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