

The Impact of Freelancing on the Socio-economic Development of Bangladesh: A Study

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Abstract

Freelancing has immense impact in digital age and has become a popular trend as the alternative job opportunity. Studies have been found rare in this area. This study attempts to explore the connectivity between freelancing and unemployment. Through Google form 45 freelancers were interviewed. In addition to these, focus group discussion (FGD), KII and case studies have been conducted to make the research as the qualitative one also. The present government has laid and paid special attention to assist the freelancers by which strategy they can play a vital role in their family as a whole. Without completing graduate degree, anyone may become a freelancer by attaining certain skills. Freelancing provides independent lifestyle, good salary, high skilled young generation and experts in a certain area within a very short time. As a developing country, Bangladesh and its youth are very much interested in freelancing work over the online. But lack of working quality, lack of reasonable internet and the high price of electronic accessories already make a freelancer's life tough in Bangladesh. Moreover, the social aspects are trickier as so many people here discourage to go for a challenging job rather than finding a government job.

Keywords: Freelancing, freelancer, outsourcing, unemployment, alternative job opportunity, skilled young people, economic-mobility.

Introduction

In recent years, freelance jobs have become one of the most popular career choices and acceptance in Bangladesh that people from different levels of the society are coming into this profession. Instead of working inbound and stiff nine to five routine, people are becoming more interested in working in the shifts of their own choice rather go to the office. Freelance workers can show versatility and mobility according to their expertness to any organization. That is why freelance workers are getting more and more jobs, works and orders. The effects of freelance are real in First World Countries. For example in 2017, more than 50% freelancers worked and contributed 1.5 trillion, which is a significant rise from 2016 and the number is increasing every year. Neighbor Country India has the highest percentage (24%) of freelance workers; their contribution to their economy is almost \$400 billion as of 2017. With the increment of various virtual industries and low-cost labor, Freelance working has become one of the staples in sectors like IT, Administration and Assistance, Designing, Data Analysis and Mining and so many more. So, it can be said that the overall virtualization of the technology will definitely contribute to the

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increment of freelancers all over the world (<https://www.upwork.com>). People in Bangladesh are getting involved in various types of freelancing/ online outsourcing jobs: IT related jobs like Data Entry, Graphics, Design, Software Design, Web Designing, Multimedia, Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

A good number of private freelancing training centers have grown up in Bangladesh. Some of these training centers are not only providing freelancing training but also provide online jobs. These training centers are playing a vital role in producing successful freelancers who can work in the international outsourcing market. Upwork is the world's largest online workplace for professional freelancers.

In May 2017, Bangladesh had almost 2.6 million unemployed working force in which 28 million people were in the age group between 15 to 29 with an unemployment rate of 4.20 (The Daily Star, May 28, 2017). With this number, it can be easily said that the youth of Bangladesh are definitely passing a tough time in competitive world. Though the Private sector creates more job than the Public sector, yet the increment is lower than usual because the opportunity for investment in the Private sector is marginally slower than usual. Corruption is another big problem to get a job or to start a business. However, lobbying, lack of capital, risk in investment, subscription etc. problems are accelerating the total working environment of Bangladesh. To avoid these social and economical problems, students are choosing alternative job. Freelancing or online outsourcing is very much legitimate career than other jobs and business. One can earn independently and can do this job from home. They need not go out. To develop women career it is very helpful because there is some restriction for women to go out and they have a responsibility to maintain family. Many people work regularly on a dream of becoming an independent freelancer. Bangladesh freelancers earn massive US\$ every day. Freelancing is imperative for removing unemployment and corruption.

In this situation freelancing comes as a savior. Bangladesh is also one of the leading countries to accept this challenge. Almost 16% global population is from Bangladesh and every single year, the number is increasing. In recent years, more than 1 lac Bangladeshi freelancers are working across the world. Accumulating all of the cash that Bangladeshi freelancers are earning is about 1 crore BDT per day from various freelancing marketplaces (BASIS, 2014). Government is trying to popularize Freelancing as a job sector for the youth. Projects like SEIP, LEDP, LICT had been taken by the ICT Division of Bangladesh Government in order to make young people more interested with the fact that, they can earn more while sitting in the home and represent Bangladesh in the Global stage. More people are joining to the sites like Upwork, Freelancer.com for a solid and steady career.

Research Questions

1. What is the state of Freelancing/outsourcing as alternative income source in Bangladesh?
2. Can freelance reduce unemployment in Bangladesh?

Literature Review

Bangladesh population is equivalent to 2.18% of the total world population. Bangladesh ranks number 8 in the list of countries (and dependencies) by population. But the most shocking thing is that the median age in Bangladesh is 26.0 years. Which means, a large number of people are young and ready to work and that is where the problem of unemployment starts. As so many people are young and looking forward to a job, the low growth rate of job opportunities is making the job field more and more scarce and corrupted. Corruption has been one of the bigger issues than any other in the case of unemployment in Bangladesh. In every sector of job seeking in Bangladesh, the corruption is higher than any other countries. As of 2017, Bangladesh has ranked as 143rd in the Corruption perception index from Transparency International. Bribery, rent-seeking and inappropriate use of government funds, excessive lobbying, long time delays in service performance, pilferage, irresponsible conduct from the government officials, bureaucratic intemperance have made public sector departments the most corrupt sectors of Bangladesh (The Daily Star, February 22, 2018; Bdnews24, June 09, 2018).

Youth unemployment issue is crucial for sustainable development of Bangladesh. The youth unemployment has increased significantly over the years whereas the overall unemployment remained stable. The annual rise in population is increasing the share of the working-age population, as a mass of new employees joining the workforce of the country. The BBS reported that, in 2016, the youth population in Bangladesh has been about 52 million which is more than 33 percent of the total population. Over the next 10 years, the working-age population structure has been expected to grow more than 2.2 million annually. As the employment is falling with a simultaneous slow response on job creation, it would be an issue for the Bangladeshi policy makers. The World Bank report found that more than 75% of business leaders claimed that a scarcity of skilled young workers was a challenge to hiring youth. Because investment to generate employment is not in line with demand, he said the country currently must hire skilled workers from India, Sri Lanka and Thailand because of shortage of skilled labor. He said Bangladesh's population under 30 years of age makes up 60% of the total labor force (The Independent, 04 December, 2018).

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) stated in its discussion on the latest budget that the nation is fast headed towards a great depression to be triggered by joblessness. We now have more than 30 percent unemployment rate among the educated class. So we are actually in the midst of a jobless growth where the standard of living for the common people does not improve despite a growing economy. Bangladesh is experiencing a persistent unemployment problem, which is getting worse day by day. Recent media reports point out that the economy creates only two million jobs every year, but a mere 600,000 new jobs were created during 2014 and 2015.

The number of unemployed youths is increasing in the country. In 2011, youth unemployment rate was 7.27 per cent. The youth unemployment rate increased to 11.37 per cent within five years in 2017. The unemployment rate in 2017 was 4.37% which was more than the year 2016 (4.35%). With this median age and the total unemployment, it clearly shows that a majority of the youth is being unutilized (New Age, August, 2018). Perhaps the bigger problem is that a number of

graduates are still being unemployed. As of in 2017, Bangladesh Government has estimated that almost 2.6 million graduates are still now unemployed; with this large number of graduates, both government and Non-government organizations are unable to give them a job as specified jobs aren't so much in common (The Daily Star, May 28, 2017).

Johura Akter Pritu in her writing indicated that 4.4 million youths face unemployment in Bangladesh. She also added that one in ten of the country's 44 million-strong youth population faces unemployment, new research by World Vision Bangladesh has claimed. The organization says barriers to employment include a lack of skills and opportunities, as well as favoritism, social stigma, and a poor quality of training and certificate accreditation (Dhaka Tribune, 25th September, 2018). According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 2016-2017, the unemployment rate in Bangladesh is 4.2 per cent. According to BBS, around 2.68 million youths are unemployed; among them, 1.36 million youths are between 15-24 years of age (The Financial Express, 4 December 2018).

Economic growth will stagnate without inclusive participation in the economy. Increased unemployment rate causes increased economic vulnerability in the country. Around 50 per cent people are youths in the total population of Bangladesh. But youths do not find adequate opportunities to get involved in the economy. There are specific reasons for worsening of youth unemployment in Bangladesh. Dearth of job opportunities is the main reason for youth unemployment. Jobs are not created in the job market of the country in accordance with the supply of fresh graduates every year. Investment is the main source for creating jobs in the market. 'Education' is another issue in the area of youth unemployment. There are two problems in education, which are related to increasing youth unemployment. These are: 'education system', and 'lack of inclusive participation in education'. Education system of the country neither creates sufficient scientists, scholars and social scientists, nor does it groom qualified and skilled inputs (students) in line with market demand. As a developing country with this much problem, young people often try to search alternative job sectors for their livelihood. A large number of students chose to go to foreign countries for both study and job. In the last 10 years, the number of students heading for foreign countries has been doubled and the main actor playing here is the reason of low-quality education and unemployment. The number of foreign university-bound students has more than doubled to 33,139 in 2016. The return rate of these students is very low and that shows how Bangladesh's Market is unable to provide a job to a large number of graduates. In so many cases the students who have gone abroad are from a good economic status. But where the majority is from the lower class, they cannot afford that. So, as an alternative, a large number of young people are considering freelance working over the online workspaces (New Age, January 14, 2018; Dhaka Tribune, 28 January, 2018).

The term "outsourcing" became popular in the 21st century in the United States. Now outsourcing is becoming more common in information technology and other industries for services (<https://advanceitcenter.com>). Outsourcing means giving opportunity or hiring a group of people or an organization for doing a specific task. This hiring process can be done in different ways, via tender or any random process and can hire internationally or domestically. Organizations

outsourcing their job as competitive market gives these organizations more opportunity for choosing budget and time. Organizations outsource for cutting costs. Recently, outsourcing is not only about reducing costs, but it is also about accessing skilled expertise in the global market to achieve quality works. When online technologies are used in outsourcing as a way to provide service delivery business which can be done virtually anywhere and anytime-it is known as freelancing and people working on it are known as freelancers. 'Free' is derived from a Germanic word that means to 'love', while 'lance' is akin to the French word that means to 'launch', or discharge with force. Other words similar to freelancer are independent worker, and independent contractor (<https://www.freelancer.com>). Freelancer or freelancing is terms currently used to mean a person who is self-employed, and is in the business of selling their services and skills to different employers for a specified time period. Online outsourcing or freelancing allows reducing the need for hiring and training specialized staffs.

The Ngram chart shows how the word 'freelance' has changed over time. From being two distinct words 'free lance' in the early 1800s, to the hyphenated 'free-lance' in the 1920s, and finally the integrated 'freelance' that became popular in the 1970s, and is currently used. 'Free Lance', was changed into a noun in the 1860s, it was used to mean journalistic freelancing in 1884, and became recognized as verb in 1903 by the Oxford dictionary (<https://www.freelancer.com>). Today freelancing is dominant in industries like music, writing, programming, web design, and translating. Though the term has evolved through time, the root meaning of the word remains unchanged.

Freelance working is already popular worldwide. Often referred to as the "Gig Work", freelancing is a very much staple in not only big industries, but also in small industries. As of 2015, 35% of the workforce in the United States consists of freelancers. And this number is getting higher and higher each year. Asia, especially south-eastern and south region are active in freelance workers. PayPal's "Global Freelancer Survey" polled 11,324 freelancers across 22 markets worldwide, of which 1,602 were from Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. This booming rise in the freelance economy is due to the fact that the face of industries is continuously changing. Even jobs that are paying so high weren't even existed 10 years ago. More enterprises are starting to recognize the benefits associated with an on-demand workforce of highly skilled professionals, including faster service and lower costs. Also, industries who cannot afford big money for their technical workloads can easily be doing their work with part-time freelancers and grow (Dhaka Tribune, 20 September, 2017).

World's renowned and leading management consulting firm AT Kearney Global has selected Bangladesh as one of the best spots for IT jobs outsourcing. It has ranked 51 countries worldwide as the best destinations for freelancing of software and IT-enabled services. In the index Bangladesh has got the 26th position, India obtained the 1st position, Pakistan 25th position, UK GAINED 27th, Canada 37th, Australia ranked 49th position. AT Kearney Global also says that Bangladesh has become the 3rd country for contractors on oDesk. Bangladesh has moved quickly to the forefront of entrepreneurial activity (<https://advanceitcenter.com>). It has been estimated that

there are almost 650,000 freelancers in Bangladesh who are earning 21 million Dollars only from Upwork.

Theoretical Framework

Mass communication is the process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences. Mass communication is a particularly powerful, pervasive and complex form of communication. Our level of skill in the mass communication process is therefore of utmost importance. The skill is not necessarily a simple one to master (it is much more than booting up the computer, turning on the television set, or flipping the pages of favorite magazine). But it is, indeed, a learnable skill, one that can be practiced. This skill is media literacy- the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use any form of mediated communication (Baran, 2012).

Mass communication spread information to the audience through both traditional and convergence medias. Computer technology and social media is often trumpeted as the newest and best tool for increased mass involvement and participation. Freelancers use and are dependent on the Internet for increasing economic participation. Thus, freelancing becomes popular specially to the youths since using mass communication's convergence mood in order to get order from the clients.

Theories of mass communication have changed dramatically since the early 1900s, largely as a result of quickly changing technology and more sophisticated academic theories and research methods. Many people were optimistic about the mass media's potential to be a business opportunity, an educator, a watchdog, and an entertainer. For example, businesses and advertisers saw media as a good way to make money, and the educator class saw the media as a way to inform citizens who could then be more active in a democratic society. To test the theories, researchers wanted to find out how different messages influenced or changed the behavior of the receiver. This led to the development of numerous theories related to media effects. Media businesses were invested in this early strand of research, because data that proved that messages directly affect viewers could be used to persuade businesses to send their messages through the media channel in order to directly influence potential customers. An overview of some of the key theories can help us better understand this change.

Hypodermic Needle theory and Beyond

The hypodermic needle theory of media effects claimed that meaning could be strategically placed into a media message that would then be "injected" into or transmitted to the receiver. This early approach to studying media effects was called the hypodermic needle approach or bullet theory and suggested that a sender constructed a message with a particular meaning that was "injected" or "shot" into individuals within the mass audience.

The concept of the gatekeeper emerged, since, for the first time, the sender of the message (the person or people behind the media) was the focus of research and not just the receiver. By the 1960s, many researchers in mass communication concluded that the research in the previous

twenty years had been flawed, and they significantly challenged the theory of powerful media effects, putting much more emphasis on individual agency, context, and environment (McQuail, 2010). In the 1970s, theories once again positioned media effects as powerful and influential based on additional influences from social psychology. From sociology, mass media researchers began to study the powerful socializing role that the media plays but also acknowledged that audience members take active roles in interpreting media messages.

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, a view of media effects as negotiated emerged. This view sees the media as being most influential in constructing meanings through multiple platforms and representations. For example, the media constructs meanings for people regarding the role of technology in our lives. Additionally, mass communication scholars are interested in studying how we, as audience members, still have agency in how these constructions affect our reality, in that we may reject, renegotiate, or reinterpret a given message based on our own experiences. For example, a technology geek and a person living “off the grid” have very different lives and very different views of technology, but because of their exposure to various forms of media that have similar patterns of messages regarding technology, they still have some shared reality and could talk in similar ways about computers, smart phones, and HD television. Given the shift of focus to negotiated meaning and context, this view of mass communication is more in keeping with the transactional model of communication (Self, Gaylord, and Thelma, 2009).

Media Effects

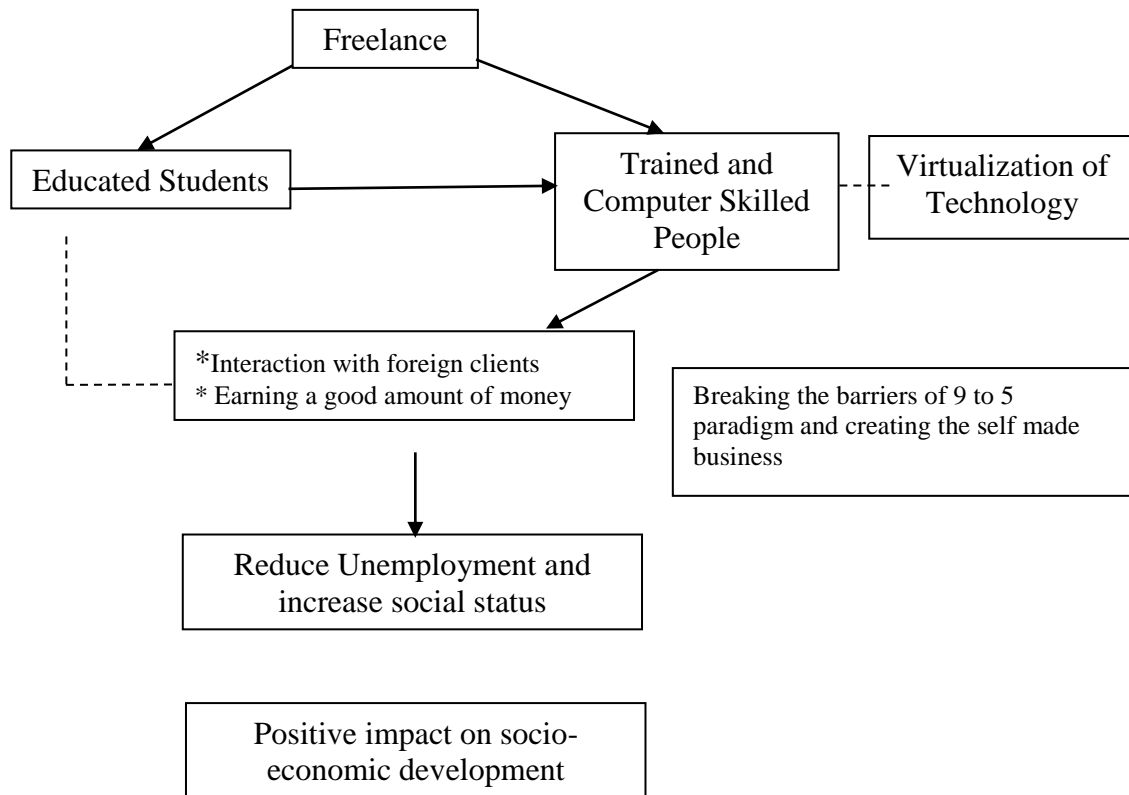
Media effects are the intended or unintended consequences of what the mass media does (McQuail, 2010). Many of the key theories in mass communication rest on the assumption that the media has effects on audience members. In general, we underestimate the effect that the media has on us, as we tend to think that media messages affect others more than us. The third-party effect is the phenomenon just described of people thinking they are more immune to media influence than others. Media messages may also affect viewers in ways not intended by the creators of the message. Two media effects that are often discussed are reciprocal and boomerang effects (McQuail, 2010). Media coverage often increases self-consciousness, which affects our actions. It's similar to the way that we change behavior when we know certain people are around and may be watching us. The boomerang effect refers to media-induced change that is counter to the desired change.

“Getting Competent”

Media outlets and the people who send messages through media outlets (i.e., politicians, spokespeople, and advertisers) are concerned about the effects and effectiveness of their messaging. To understand media effects, media criticism organizations do research on audience attitudes and also call on media commentators to give their opinions, which may be more academic and informed or more personal and partisan. Thus, given information or messages to the media make viewers competent and these competent viewers can take part in business economy.

Conceptual Framework

On the basis of the literature review and theoretical framework, it can be said that freelancer's are reshaping their career plan as independent workers.



Source: Researcher's own.

From this figure, researchers try to elucidate that with the help of virtualization via internet, educated and computer skilled people can easily learn different tasks and strategy. With their learning or even having in-depth knowledge from being educated, people can go for a specific freelance job over online. This can be their backup plan for their career. They can earn independently breaking the barriers of 9 to 5 paradigm and creating the self made business. This can be helpful to reduce unemployment, create new scopes of earning and pushes towards a positive socio-economic impact on the people.

Methodology

The present study analyzed data both qualitative and quantitative way for a better understanding and results. As primary source, data has been collected through a questionnaire via google forms and by this questionnaire 45 freelancers were interviewed across the country especially from

Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Magura, Feni, Noakhali, Rangamati, and Rangpur who are currently living in Bangladesh and directly or indirectly related to the online workplaces through various jobs. 45 freelancers answered through this process. As secondary source articles, journals, papers, magazines, online writings were used but books are not available on the studying topic. To get an in-depth knowledge on the issue, qualitative method (FGD, KII and case study) has been followed.

Findings of the study

All respondents (45) belong to the age group of (18-35) years whereas a major portion i.e. 28% belongs to the age group of (22-25) years.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by their occupation

| Occupation | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Fulltime Freelancer | 17 | 37.78 |
| College, University Student/ Dropout | 13 | 28.89 |
| Graphics Designer/ Web Developer | 7 | 15.55 |
| Corporate Job | 8 | 17.78 |
| Total | 45 | 100.0 |

Table 1 shows occupation ratio of the respondents. Here the majority of respondents (37.78%) are full-time freelancers, 28.89% students either studying in college or university or drop out, professional web developers or graphics designers (15.55%) and some of them are freelancing along with their corporate jobs (17.78%).

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by their period of time to involve as a freelancer

| Working Years | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Less than a year | 10 | 22.22 |
| 1 year -3 years | 19 | 42.22 |
| 3 years -5 years | 9 | 20 |
| More than 5 years | 6 | 13.33 |
| Total | 45 | 100.0 |

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents are young in this market and have been working for only more than 1 to 3 years (42.22%). A large number of people (22.22%) started less than 1 year ago, 20% respondents engaged in it 3-5 years ago and 13.33% respondents have more than 5 years experience in the sector. They are working in various sectors: Content/Blog Writing/Virtual Assistance, Data Entry, Social Media Marketing/Search Engine Optimization, Graphics/UX/UI Designing, Web Development/Application Development.

Most of the freelancers in the study expressed their view that they have been informed about this alternative earning source from freelancing blogs and the rest of them are inspired by friends and family members, watching videos to self-learning and training in a certain area. To avail these

jobs most of the freelancers have not got training. Figure 1 below shows that out of 45 respondents only 33.3% said they have got themselves involved in training program before coming to the marketplace. But the majority of respondents about 66.67% said they have not taken part in any kind of programs. By utilizing their own skills, knowledge, efforts and experiences, they have become freelancer.

Figure 1: Taking training program

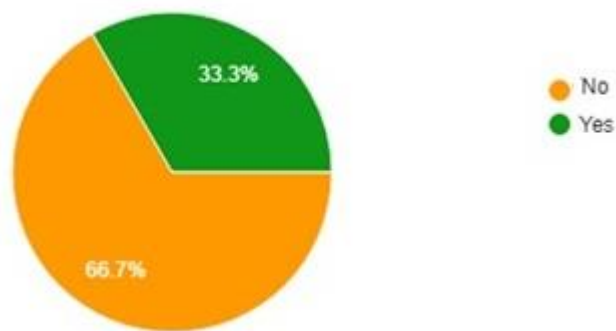
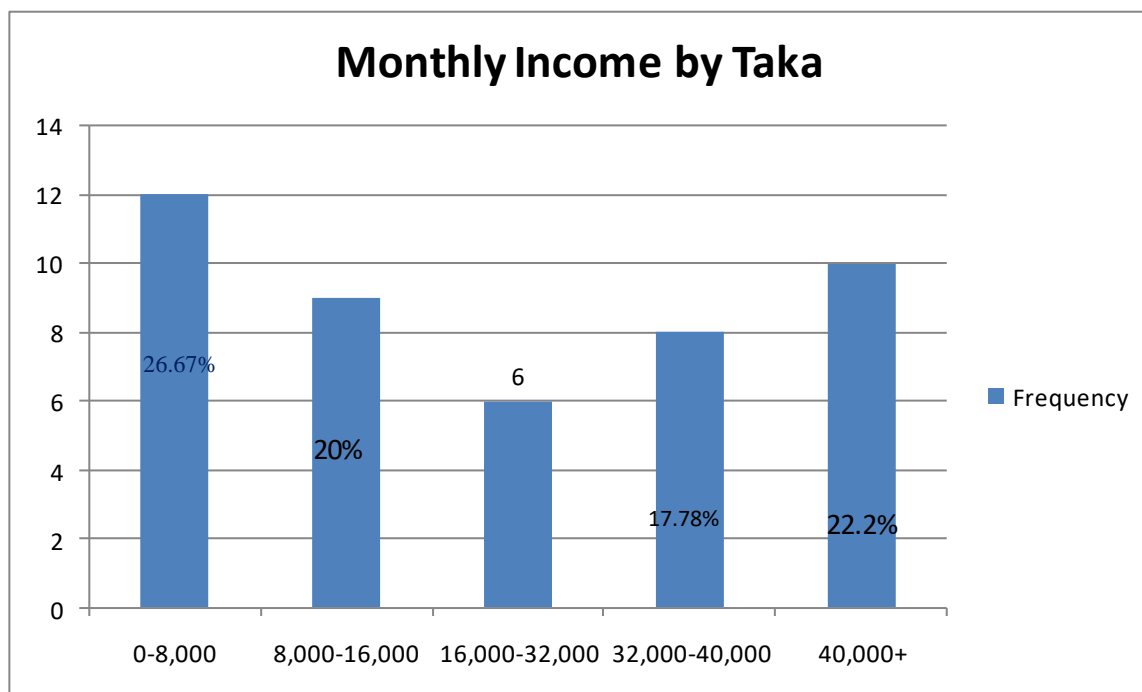


Figure 2: Monthly income by doing freelancing



Above figure 2 shows how much money freelancers income on a monthly basis. Being a student 20% freelancer earn (8,000-16,000) tk. per month, people who are also in the market for a longer period of time are also seen with distinctive ratio 17.78% and 22.22% where in both cases people are earning more than 24,000-40,000 and between 40,000+ which is a good sign of freelancers in Bangladesh that is reducing unemployment and spreading its acceptances all over the country.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents by supporting their family

| Supporting their family | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes | 39 | 86.67 |
| No | 6 | 13.33 |
| Total | 45 | 100.0 |

Table 3 above shows that the majority of the respondents (86.67%) positively support their family along with meeting their own needs but only (13.33%) respondents say that they are in primary stage of freelancing and by their earning they can only bear his expenses.

Figure 3: Improvement of social status

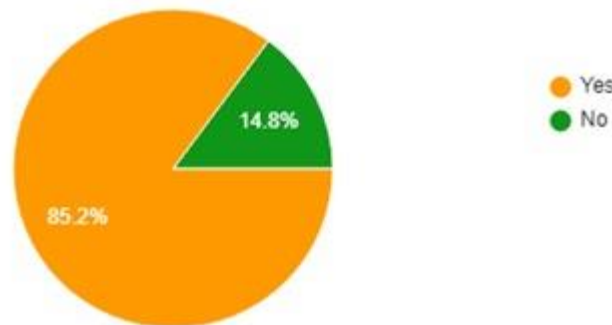


Figure 3 shows that majority of the respondents (85.2%) think and believe that by earning independently, they are contributing to their family and for their contribution others are interested to become a freelancer. They have encouraged others for seeking a freelancing job. 14.8% respondents think that traditional psychology of our society does not recognize them as bread earners.

Table 4: Freelancing can play a vital role in fighting unemployment

| Fighting unemployment | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes | 45 | 100 |
| No | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 45 | 100.0 |

Table 4 shows that the situation has been totally positive as 100% freelancers think that unemployment can be eradicated and freelancing can work as a solution to lack of jobs in the market. outsourcing has been a key factor for the social development. The majority of freelancers think that the freelancing has been the pivot for recent social developments as more and more foreign currency is coming, thus making the lifestyle easier for others and generating more taxes for the government. The respondents also opined that corruption will reduce by expanding this market. Because there is no interference or influence of black money, mugs, mediators, cadres, political lobbying to get an order, work or client in freelancing. These young groups are free of threat and fear. According to the respondents, 'freelancing can promote socio-economic development of Bangladesh by reducing unemployment, corruption, bureaucratic complexity, risk to invest capital and so on.

Table 5: Government is taking proper measures to create new freelancers

| Taking proper measures | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Yes | 35 | 77.8 |
| No | 10 | 22.2 |
| Total | 45 | 100.0 |

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents (77.8%) think government is taking proper measures to create new freelancers. Government has arranged many training centers in every district. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) on 25th January, 2014 approved 180 cores BDT on freelancing training in Bangladesh. This project created employment opportunity for the young unemployed educated people at the Upazila and Union levels. Under this first phase 15,000 freelancers have already been developed and they have started to earn. By the second phase, government tried to create 55,000 freelancers at Upazilas in 2014. The government is working to turn 4516 Union Information Service Centers (UISCs) of the country as a mini freelancing center. Government's plan is to develop entrepreneurs from the freelancers. Then promote these entrepreneurs as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) professionals who would make the contribution to earn foreign currency. Around 22.2% of people think that the government initiatives on creating more freelancers are not adequate and satisfactory.

Further Qualitative Data

The open-ended question included in the questionnaire provides some qualitative data reflecting freelancer's experience regarding the impact of the freelancing on the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Freelancers are happy with their occupation but our traditional society's attitude has not yet changed. As the social tradition of Bangladesh is that working is done outside the house, people who are sitting in the house are worthless. But the other measurement shows that the social perspective is changing and people are getting adaptive with this new chain of thoughts.

KII 1: Managing Director: APTEC Limited.

This is a women friendly institution. This institution is providing free training to the women who are not able to pay minimum course fee. The Managing Director says that they want women to be able to reach and attain equality by education and knowledge. For this reason, this training center has offered free outsourcing courses to train up 200 women through a selection process. Women are moving forward in freelancing and online jobs. He also says that in modern world 58% women freelancers are working independently and in Bangladesh about 9% women are involved in this outsourcing works. This institution also extends their hand of cooperation to the students. He also says that a few years ago school, college, university going students (middle class) used to do part time job or tuition to bear their educational expenses. But now a days, it has changed. At present students prefer to work on outsourcing like graphics, animation, data entry, web design etc. Staying in home they can easily apply their knowledge and can earn money. Not only cities but rural areas also may develop and get enlightened by spreading the knowledge of technology and freelancing. Government of Bangladesh is working for this sector. The government took initiatives to create 55,000 freelancers at root level in Upazila in 2014. Out of the total number of freelancers, 20,000 would be women of Union and Upazila levels who will get primary IT Literacy and outsourcing training. Different world renowned outsourcing marketplace, including Upwork, Freelancer, Elance has spread their hands to promote women freelancing in Bangladesh.

Case Study 1: Pronoy Mendes

He is a student of Dhaka College and has completed BBA. He has come from a lower middle class family. When he felt that living in Dhaka is costly and his father could not bear his expenses, he had to do some tuition. Fortunately he was informed and guided by a senior brother about Upwork and started to give time and effort. After 6 months, he got his first job in Upwork and since then he has been working part time as a Virtual Assistant. His monthly income is 24,000 and he is supporting his family and became independent worker in freelancing. Now he has a saving fund. Initially it was tough for him to maintain his social life. He has a desire to employ himself in this job sector fully. He says “I will not run after job increasing tension in my life and will not pay subscription and will not waste time”. He highlights the good side of freelancing by saying that freelancing can be helpful for health. As 9 to 5 desk jobs can be often frustrating and time-consuming, Freelancers are often more relaxed, get enough sleep for starting a new work day and less likely to commute from one place to another as a 10-mile commute can lead to a higher blood pressure and increased cholesterol. Freelancers more likely to have time for exercise resulting in a better health.

Case Study 2: Mahfuz Raihan

Mahfuz Raihan has been working as Virtual Assistant for the last 7 years. He says, “It is easy to hear but difficult to do and earn handsome money”. He also says, ‘I have started freelancing in 2009 as a Telemarketer, after that I realized I am not to be hold in a small box so I decided to expand my learning to be a Freelance Marketing Strategist but it took me few years to be where I am now’. He took freelance seriously because the working hours are flexible and can be chosen according to the demand of the contractor. That means, without compromising on 9 to 5 office hours, any service can be provided within the 24 hours and it can happen on demand. When he

started freelancing, his earning was 4,000 tk. but now his income increased by 1, 00,000 tk. This also results into lesser wasted working hour and system loss. At Present he is working with few US, AU clients. He says that to become a freelancer one is needed is just a computer or laptop with an internet connection and proper skill. Bangladesh has young, educated and enthusiastic workforce that is willing for more economic opportunity. He opined that government's support is not adequate in Bangladesh while other countries are providing support to their freelancers. The increased internet bill, costly tax and pricing of personal computers, support for the startups and various freelance agencies, lack of getting a place etc. are the obstacles for the freelancers in Bangladesh for not flourishing enough.

Focus Group Discussion

The discussion took place on 6th August 2018 in Dhaka. 8 participants spontaneously presented their view and experience:

All participants agreed that freelancing has become a major part of our economy. It is a great alternative for anyone who are not getting any jobs. Another important aspect came out of this discussion is that the clients do not need to have face to face conversation with the freelancers-it is saving the valuable work hour that many people have to spoil their office hour due to severe and regular jam in Dhaka city. Another issue they talked about is the uncertainty of jobs in the market. The newbie freelancers are working in an agency and contributing individual services because they are not able to get their first job in the market. They regretfully said that lack of support from the surroundings is main barrier for the freelancers to work and expand their sphere. All participants think that if government decreases the price of electronics and internet bill, they will contribute more to economic development, thus thereby they will play as a role model in the society. In this way they are trying to break the traditional and conservative social structure of Bangladesh.

From FGD discussion some possibilities in freelancing/outsourcing have came out:

- The freelancers in Bangladesh can offer quality services at a cheaper rate than other countries.
- Handsome earning by doing freelancing is impressive and satisfactory compared to the living standard and average salaries of Bangladesh.

But regretfully they highlighted some barriers to freelancing in Bangladesh:

- Costly and slow speed internet connection
- Payment system is not suitable for the international money transaction. PayPal has not been yet introduced in Bangladesh.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Freelancers of Bangladesh are working successfully in the various internal and external marketplaces. Recently, the European Commission has selected Bangladesh as an ideal destination for outsourcing in the world. Many freelance consultants are working with so many renowned institutions and making Bangladesh Proud. Freelancers of Bangladesh are not only contributing to the economic development, but also reducing frustration from the mind of young

graduates instead of running after a job. They need not to pay bribe or assume any political shelter to establish in their life. They are free from every type of social malpractice. They only gather knowledge and skill and search their work in this line. Thus they are independent and can motivate others to become an independent freelancer. Freelancing can turn into a revolution in the future days if proper attention and patronization is paid. For this reason following recommendations are proposed:

1. The internet bill should be reduced.
2. The tax on personal computer accessories and laptops should be reduced.
3. The government should emphasize on more well prepared training centers rather than just any training centers for beginners.
4. There should be a more flexible money transfer system so that freelancers can easily take courses or buy virtual tools from the marketplaces.
5. Raise Social Awareness on how freelancing can be effective.

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