



State of freelancers in Bangladesh: Challenges, ways forward



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The new interim government under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has vowed to prioritise infrastructure development, including stable internet and electricity.

These commitments are vital for freelancers who view reliable connectivity as a basic right rather than a luxury.

The crisis also brought forth the importance of diversification. Freelancers who acquired clients outside the traditional marketplaces were better positioned to

weather the storm. Despite losing some clients during the blackout, these freelancers recovered much quickly due to their professional relationships.

THE WAY FORWARD IS BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE FREELANCE SECTOR

To ensure the sustainability of Bangladesh's freelancing economy, systemic changes are essential. Stable internet and electricity are non-negotiable. The government's plan to create an entry point with regulatory guidelines for foreign satellite

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internet providers like Starlink to obtain an operational licence in Bangladesh is a beacon of hope for many firms who outsource from Bangladesh.

Education and training must also be prioritised. While platforms like Fiverr offer global opportunities, freelancers need skills to navigate client relationships, negotiate terms, and diversify their income streams.

In a study titled 'Identifying Skill Gaps in IT Freelancing to Create Employment

and Increase Remittances' published by the National Skill Development Authority (NSDA) in October 2024, it was found that most freelancers in Bangladesh are young, urban males with less than three years of experience. While they excel in areas like graphic design, they lag behind competitors in programming, cybersecurity, and other high-value skills.

This skills gap has contributed to Bangladesh's drop to 29th place in the CEO Magazine ranking of top freelancing countries, highlighting the urgent need for advanced skills.

Instead of receiving training on just data entry, graphic designing, and digital marketing the freelancers need to develop other skills like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), cybersecurity, programming, and 3-D modeling to make a dent in the marketplaces. Public and private sector initiatives could include workshops, mentorship programmes, and access to international networks. However, these initiatives must address the skill gap between training curriculum and market demands.

Furthermore, reducing dependency on international marketplaces is critical. Building local platforms or co-operatives could empower freelancers to retain a greater share of their earnings. Government incentives for such initiatives could catalyse their development, creating a more equitable ecosystem.

A SECTOR PREPARED FOR REVIVAL

Despite the challenges, freelancing remains a beacon of hope for many Bangladeshis. It offers a pathway to financial independence and global engagement, even for those in remote areas. The road to recovery after the July 2024 blackout will be long, but the resilience of Bangladesh's freelancers is undeniable.

The new era of 'Bangladesh 2.0' brings with it the promise of progress. As the country rebuilds, the freelancing sector must be at the forefront of these efforts. By addressing infrastructural deficiencies and fostering a supportive environment, Bangladesh can ensure that its freelancers not only survive but thrive in the global digital economy.

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