Online Freelancing as a Contributor to Job Creation (Gaza Strip)

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Agenda

Online Freelancing Definition

Development Challenge

Approaches & Partnerships

Program Challenges

Impact & Influence

Lessons Learned

Scaling-Up
Online Freelancing Definition

- Work done remotely through Internet by independent freelancers from around the world;

- Most commonly, freelancers find jobs through online platforms, including upwork.com and freelancer.com;

- And through Social Media platforms like LinkedIn & Twitter which connect them to remote work opportunities from clients around the world.
• Blockades, wars, internal divide & poor governance have strangled Gaza's economy;

• Blockade in place since 2007 has shaved around 50% off Gaza’s GDP;

• Severely impacted the ability of different sectors to maintain & create new jobs.
In 2016: Rafah cross point partially opened for 3 days only!
In 2015: closed for 344 days!

Demographic Data:
- 1.8M inhabitants.
- Area: 360 Km²
• As a result, unemployment is the highest in the world at 43% (Source: World Bank)

• For youth, unemployment is reaching more than 60%!

• Therefore, innovative ways of creating employment is crucial for youth in Gaza;

• Online freelancing was one of the logical choices.
• Mercy Corps started promoting Online freelancing in Gaza 4 years ago;
  – *Introduction of freelancing concept in technical Trainings.*
  – *Subsidized Internships for would-be Freelancers.*

• In 2014/2015, Mercy Corps further refined the process;
Approaches & Partnerships

• Services provided to hack growth of potential freelancers:
  – Professional Mentorship through expert freelancers;
  – Online freelance courses through Freelancers Online Academy ([www.foacademy.com](http://www.foacademy.com)) in partnership with a local startup;
  – Market-Driven technical skills training for potential freelancers;
  – Provision of basic co-working space services;
الدورات

- مهارات العمل الحر
- مهارات متقدمة في العمل الحر
- كيف تعمل بشكل حر عبر الانترنت

التوجيهات للمشاركة

- إلتحق بالدورة
• Services (Cont.):-

  – Provision of financial subsidies;

  – Organizing Seminars on trendy topics;

  – Vibrant online freelancing communities on Facebook.

• Trained university professors on online-freelancing.
Local Challenges:

- English Language Barriers;
- Lack of Self-Marketing Skills;
- Fitness to Freelance;
- Supply of Quality Graduates;
- Gazan Infrastructure for Freelance Outsourcing;
- Issues of money transfer, withdraw & bank accounts;
- **Global Challenges:**
  
  - Competitiveness from other countries (e.g. from India);
    - Price.
    - Image.
  
  - Recent increase on fees imposed by some freelancing websites.
    - For example upwork has recently increased its commission by %10;
Freelancers got jobs faster on freelancing market places.

Results of exit survey:

- 54 freelancers reported earning >62k USD from about 700 freelance jobs during their engagement in the program.
- On average, each freelancer influenced 3 others to start freelancing.
• Results of exit survey, Cont.:–

– **100%!** said that freelancing project positively affected their future professional life.

– Other non-income impacts: creating self-trust, developing relationships & exposure to other cultures.
Impact & Influence

- On [www.freelancers.com](http://www.freelancers.com) for example, # of Palestinian freelancers increased from **few tens** to about **600**.

- Multiple local & international organizations & some universities have started to include freelancing in their employment strategies.

- Freelancing became a hot topic in the media & among Gazan youth.
• Duaa Al-Aila, Architect & Graphic Designer trained by Mercy Corps on Online Freelancing in 2015.

- Joined Mercy Corps’ freelancing program in June 2015.

- Launched her own company in January 2016.

- Secured multiple contracts from KSA, UAE, etc.

- Services: Graphic Design, Web Design and development, & audio & video production.
Dr. Mohammed Nabhan, Medical Doctor trained by Mercy Corps on Online Freelancing in 2015.

- Joined freelancing program one year ago;
- Managed to work with [www.Jawabkom.com](http://www.Jawabkom.com) as medical consultant;
- Managed to employ a team **20** freelancers (Lawyers, Psychologists, religious advisors, etc.) @ [www.Jawabkom.com](http://www.Jawabkom.com);
- Collectively, they generate about **$10,000/month**.
- Project length could be shortened from 13 wks. to 9-10 wks.;
  - That will decrease the cost by at least 30%.
- Make “fitness to freelance” part of beneficiary selection criteria;
  - Majority of youth are looking for stable jobs.
  - Freelancing is not an attractive alternative for every person.
  - Not everyone can cope with constant need to acquire new projects.
• Unleash the Power of Social Media;
  – An avenue for self-promotion needed to earn new clients.

• Freelancing can potentially lead to entrepreneurship;
  – Freelancer acts as a micro company.
Lessons Learned

- Deeper engagement with local universities & colleges;
  - Training academics, develop freelancing curriculum, etc.
- Continue R&D in this field;
  - Explore new freelance market places (new opportunities);
  - Advice new entrants on best market access tactics;
  - Provide information about market dynamics;
  - Strategize future interventions.
- Inclusive & highly replicable with high potential of scaling-up;

- Scaling-up vertically by adding new components to project such as team building skills & self-marketing using social media;

- Scaling-up horizontally through targeting additional youth (for example in West Bank);
- Link freelancing with entrepreneurship;
  - Successful freelancers could have high potential to launch their own businesses.
  - Establishing **Service-Based start-ups**.

- Build a Freelancing platform for Gaza to attract local, regional & international clients;

- Model could be replicated in other countries suffering from high unemployment.
One Last Thing
Thank You!

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