

# FOSS in Developing Countries

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The other day I had friends in Bolivia asking me if they could install Windows on a laptop they got through an NGO that initially came bundled with Linux.

I know people in Argentina who buy Macs and install pirated copies of Photoshop and Adobe Premiere and would not even consider using anything else.

These days I hear Twitter users complaining that Mastodon offers different features than Twitter and thus is not even worth considering.

I often hear non-geeks saying that Linux and LibreOffice are no good for them because jobs require people to know Windows and MS Office. They won't even try them.

In my experience, people would rather keep using a virus-laden pirated copy of Windows than learn how to use GNOME, GIMP<sup>1</sup>, Inkscape<sup>2</sup>, KDElive<sup>3</sup>, LibreOffice<sup>4</sup>, or whatever free software you could `apt get` in your machine.

My take on this situation is a highly unpopular one. Here it goes. You've been warned.

The FOSS movement is a "First World" thing. Its appeal is limited to the small number of elites working in the computer industry in developed countries and ironically inaccessible to the population of those countries who paradoxically would need it the most.

There, I said it.

Let me rephrase: Linux and the whole FOSS movement are just luxury items directed to a small fraction of the human population, despite their seemingly universal appeal.

It's like being vegan; you will find few in countries where food is scarce. Go to a wealthy city in a developing country, and you will find plenty of vegan shops and restaurants. To a large degree, using FOSS is like being vegan, and both groups are equally vocal about their ethical choices.

Being vegan is a privilege. Being able to use Linux is a privilege.

Let's be honest. To run Linux properly, you either need to know quite a bit (a lot, even) about computers or buy a laptop from a well-known brand like HP,

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.gimp.org/>

<sup>2</sup><https://inkscape.org/>

<sup>3</sup><https://kdenlive.org/en/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.libreoffice.org/>

Dell, or Lenovo. Try installing Linux in a PC built with components sourced in some remote end of the world: good luck. You may be lucky and find drivers for those. Maybe not.

Macs, Lenovo, and HP laptops are more expensive, but you get machines that work. You can't get that with Linux; it's a gamble at best, even if it's much better than 20 years ago. Nowadays, you can even find vendors selling laptops with pre-installed Linux<sup>5</sup> in Europe and the USA, but I need to find something similar in Latin America. Maybe there are. I hope there are.

Don't get me wrong; Linux is a godsend in many other contexts. Just not in this particular one.

Let's go beyond the "can people install Linux on their laptop" question. Can people get a job with Linux or LibreOffice in their resumé? Nope—well, unless they apply for an IT job, of course. Can they get one if they mention Windows or MS Office? You bet. It's something that people in the developed world (USA, Japan, Western Europe) will never truly understand.

Geeks are, of course, thrilled to use Linux anywhere in the world. There's a thriving community of Linux users all across Latin America. But by and large, the (admittedly more significant) non-geek part of the population would instead install pirated commercial software and run it on a virus-laden laptop with an illegal copy of Windows than take the time to move to Linux. It's a fact.

Even with Wine<sup>6</sup> or Darling<sup>7</sup>, running Windows (respectively, Mac) software on Linux boxes is almost impossible. Why use Linux when you can just run Windows or macOS directly for free? In concrete terms, for most of the planet, in those contexts, not much.

Linux and its whole world of associated software is just a first-world problem or, at most, a luxury, a privilege only affordable to IT experts.

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<sup>5</sup>[/blog/computers-bundled-with-linux/](#)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.winehq.org/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.darlinghq.org/>