



**Billion Reader's
Initiative**



by PlanetRead

Annual Report 2022-2023

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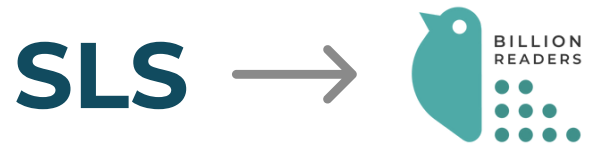
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Introduction

BIRD's vision of the system of the future

Co-Impact's design grant has nudged us to recast the SLS project as the **Billion Readers (BIRD)** initiative at IIMA, more in consonance with our system-changing vision and mission.



The vision of the Billion Readers Initiative is
“Every Indian is a fluent reader.”

In the system of the future, lifelong reading engagement, practice, and progress will be inevitable and ubiquitous for over one billion Indians.

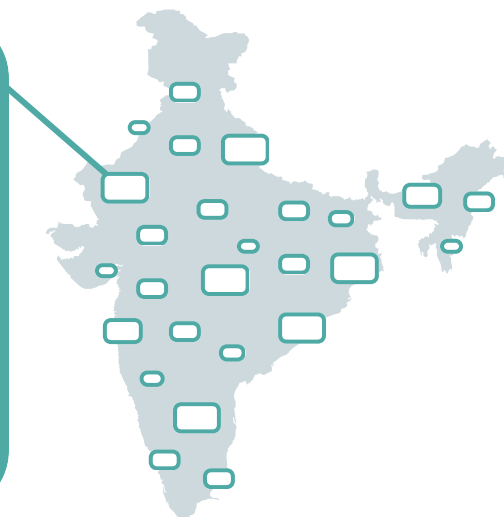
Same Language Subtitling (SLS) will be an integral part of all widely consumed entertainment and educational content in all Indian languages.

What a viewer sees is what she will read, or try to, and in the process, improve her reading skills.

Close to a billion Indians currently watch nearly four and a half hours of TV every day.



The TV screen is likely to command lifelong attention for BIRD's primary target group of 600 million weak readers and the secondary target group of 250 million non-readers who could improve but will still be weak readers in the future.



A universal application of SLS on the dialog and songs of films, serials, and such entertainment content in the system of the future is the equivalent of switching on reading practice for a billion viewers in their language.

Every Indian who has picked up beginning letter recognition ability and has access to TV, will become a functional reader within 4 years of regular SLS exposure and a majority will also become fluent readers over the same period.

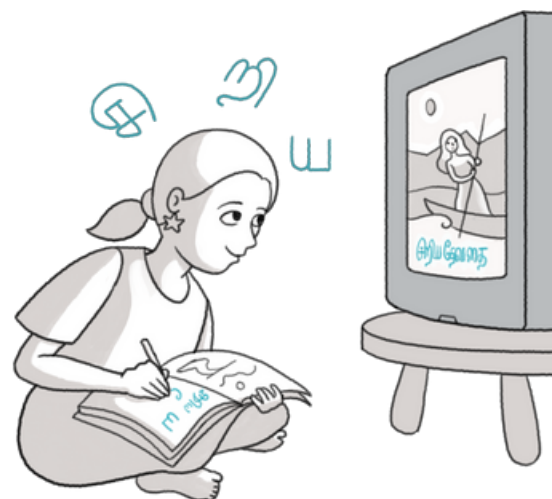
All TV viewers in India will get at least 2 hours of SLS reading exposure per day as an incidental part of the average 4 hours of screen-based video entertainment per day, for life.



Purely based on the number of words, SLS on TV will be the equivalent of reading a novel every 5 days.



Over a lifetime of 70 years, a billion Indians will have read as many words as the equivalent of 4000 books, simply because they love to watch TV.



SLS on TV will serve four major purposes to solve the weak reading challenge at transformative scale

Prevention

Motivation for literacy

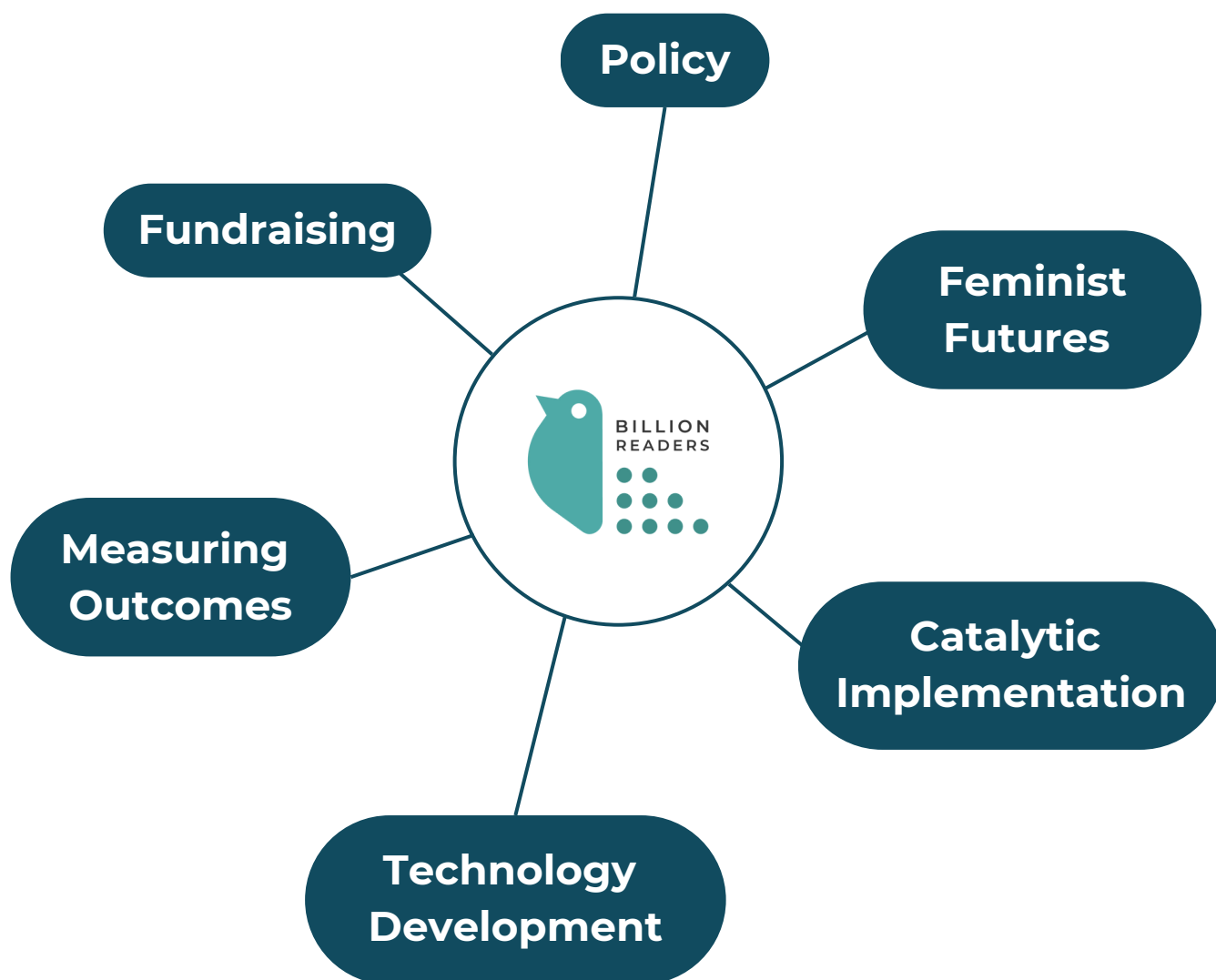
Parental assessment of reading abilities

Remediation

The SLS project was born in 1996 and recast as BIRD in 2021 in consonance with our system-change vision and mission.



BIRD's strategy to transition from today's system to a system of the future has six strands



Policy framework

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting's (MIB's) existing Accessibility Standards will be revised to serve an expanded set of purposes.

They currently address media accessibility centrally and need to include reading literacy and language learning to make a stronger case for SLS for all viewers and not just DHH persons.

The conversations with MIB will occur directly and jointly with disability rights groups.

With rights groups, we are in the process of arriving at a common language to serve DHH and hearing stakeholders, close small but extant gaps in our definitions (e.g., of SLS vs. captions), align our asks of the government, and put up a united front in our advocacy with the ministries and the private sector.

Our coalition has recognized the need to exercise a variety of pressure channels, together and separately, such as targeted evidence, expanded advocacy, and even legal recourse.

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN TELEVISION PROGRAMMES



Government of India
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi

September, 2019



Catalytic implementation

BIRD's catalytic implementations have five main purposes

1. Train the Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) engine for multiple languages and content genres
2. Implement on the national/state network to strengthen the government's enforcement of AS on private networks,
3. Win support for SLS scale up in states/languages and leading TV networks and streaming platforms
4. Set quality benchmarks and codify SLS implementation standards
5. Build a business case for SLS.

For all these purposes, we will work with

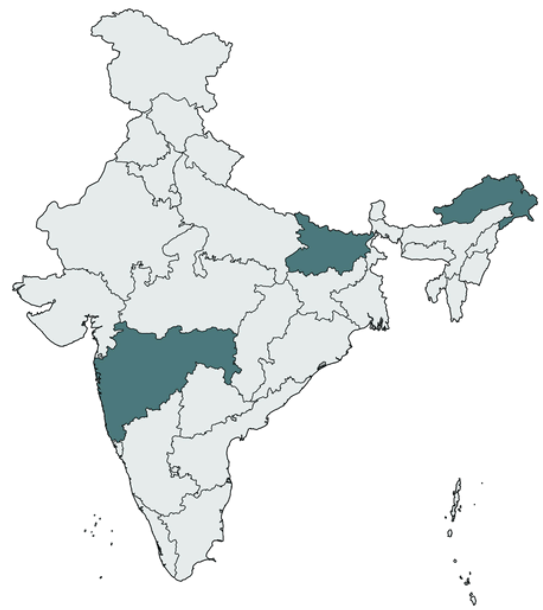
1



Closely with **Doordarshan (DD)**, the **national TV network**, to implement the Government's Accessibility Standards

2

Selected **private networks**. BIRD will implement SLS on **1000 hours** of entertainment content **per language** in **12 languages**.



At present BIRD has a well-crafted strategy to scale SLS in India, resulting from Co-Impact's design grant. We have made some headway in policy conversations with the governments of **Maharashtra, Bihar, and Arunachal Pradesh**.

In February 2023, BIRD collaborated with the Government of Bihar to co-create and conduct a preliminary data collection and qualitative survey in public schools across Bihar. The team visited and surveyed Mahadalit villages and public schools in the state as part of the initiative. The overarching strategic objective of the survey was to identify and prioritize the most watched channels and programs in Bihar.

Learning, Measurement, Evaluation

BIRD will conduct focused surveys, including with Pratham's ASER Centre, to monitor exposure, reactions, and learning gains among key populations, especially Girls and Women

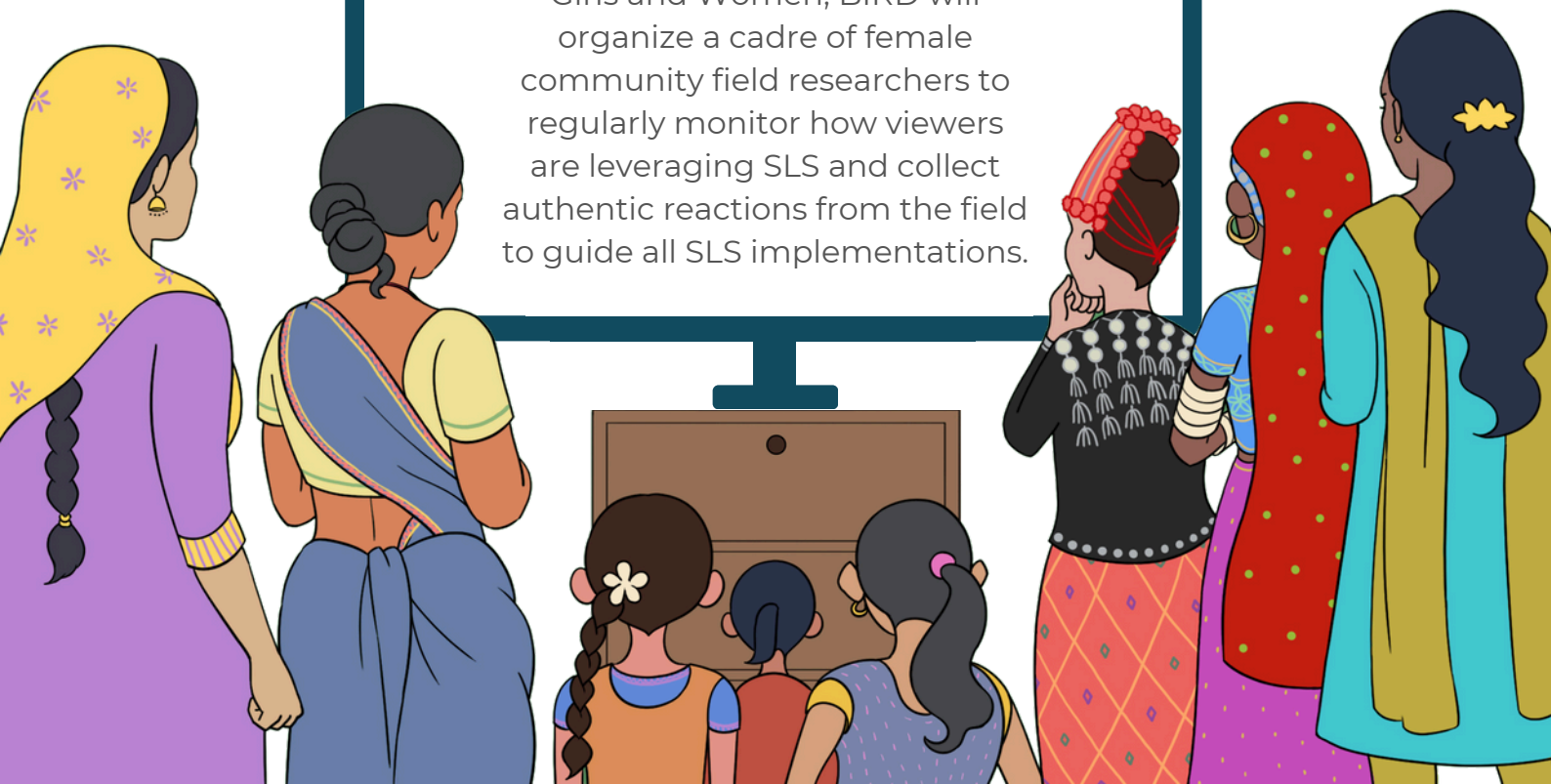


With our partnership with Breakthrough and Gender Center at IIMA, we will develop and publicize a framework for assessing content using a gender lens.



Feminist futures

To ensure last mile delivery to Girls and Women, BIRD will organize a cadre of female community field researchers to regularly monitor how viewers are leveraging SLS and collect authentic reactions from the field to guide all SLS implementations.





We have successfully completed the project
**"The impact of Same Language Subtitling (SLS)
on reading engagement and reading skills in
girls & women: An eye-tracking study."**
supported by Echidna Giving.

**Our aim was to find out how SLS can be
leveraged to improve reading literacy among
girls and women from low-income families.**

Specifically, we examined

1) Is the extent and nature of reading engagement enhanced by watching entertainment content with SLS?



2) Does regular exposure to SLS over a period of time have an impact on reading skills?

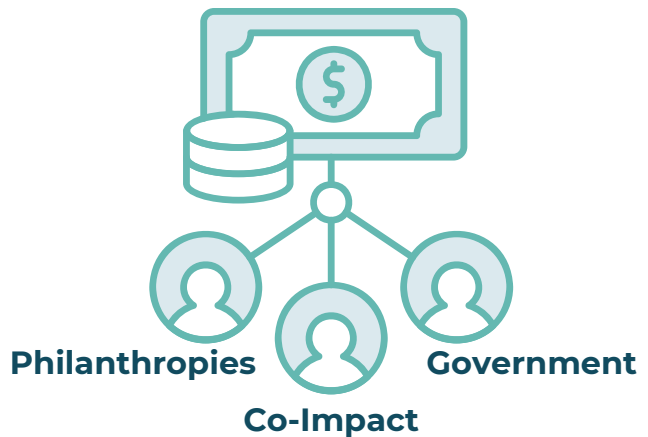


Fundraising

\$19M

BIRD's total
fundraising goal for
system acceptance &
change of SLS

Our fundraising strategy has
been to raise **1/3rd each** from



**Co—
Impact**

RICHARD AND SUSAN
**Smith
Family
Foundation**

We have secured \$6.5 million from Co-Impact over 5 years and \$300K over three years from the 'Smith Foundation' based in the UK.

In 2022, BIRD received a transformative system-change grant from **Co-Impact** for system acceptance and implementation of SLS on TV and streaming.

We aim to diversify BIRD's fundraising pool from government bodies to corporates, foundations, and HNIs.



Organizational Readiness

Over the last two decades, the SLS project and now BIRD has been driven by a set of values that have guided all our work, team culture, and strategic pilots with a clear beginning, end, and strategic intent to move national broadcast policy on SLS.

Throughout, different teams with a core group of members have driven our initiative, run 10+ pilots in partnership with Doordarshan, put SLS on the broadcast policy map, and contributed to policy breakthroughs like the Accessibility Standards. We reached this stage by leveraging the IIMA brand with the government and it has now been strengthened tremendously by our partner brands, such as, IIT and MIT.

Within IIMA, BIRD is situated at the Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIIE), a technology business incubator. CIIE.co is a continuum of initiatives, legal entities, and partners aligned towards the shared mission of “supporting fearless entrepreneurs creating game-changing solutions” across stages and sectors.

**A small addition
for a big impact**



Coalition of Stakeholders Driving SLS Success



सूचना एवं
प्रसारण मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
INFORMATION AND
BROADCASTING

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)

Revision of the Accessibility Standards (AS, 2019) for television. Changing a policy narrative is possible if we can sustain MIB's trust and confidence in BIRD for anyone helming the ministry. In the next phase we will further strengthen this by forming a strong coalition with disability rights-based groups and let the coalition drive written policy submissions and engagement. Our written inputs to MIB aim to change the policy narrative by expanding the range of AS benefits to include media access, reading literacy, and language learning, at population level.



शिक्षा मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION

Ministry of Education (MoE)

Following the passing of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 and as a response to the pandemic, the Ministry of Education (MoE) announced a slew of national level programs and initiatives: Nipun Bharat (foundational reading and numeracy skills by the end of Class 3, by 2027), Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat (a 100 day reading campaign), One Class One Channel (200 edTV channels) and Diksha platform. MoE's current leadership sees a potential association of BIRD with the latter two initiatives for which, NCERT and CIET are the MoE's nodal agencies. BIRD is actively exploring a partnership with them to integrate SLS on their existing video content and supporting their need for more content.



The Gujarat Council of Educational Research and Training (GCERT)

GCERT has agreed to use 50 AniBooks (animated stories with SLS) in Gujarati, English, and Hindi on edTV in Gujarat. These and more AniBooks are available to BIRD in 10 major Indian languages through PlanetRead.



सत्यम् शिवम् सुन्दरम्

Doordarshan

The strategic importance of implementing SLS widely on Doordarshan (DD), India's national/state TV network, is that it strengthens the government's hand and signals a strong intent to the private networks.



AI4Bharat at IIT-Madras

BIRD is entering into a partnership with AI4Bharat, a non-profit center at IIT-Madras led by two faculty members that works in the field of Indian language Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR). AI4Bharat was part of Google India's first 'AI For Social Good' cohort that worked on a project with Pratham Books. They are currently supported by the Nandan Nilekani-backed EkStep Foundation' and are collaborating with the National Language Translation Mission (NLTM) on AI tools for Indian language translation. AI4Bharat and BIRD are finalizing a proposal to develop ASR technology for scaling SLS on different content genres in 12 major Indian languages.



National Film Development Corporation (NFDC)

BIRD proposes a pilot implementation of SLS on the National Film Development Corporation's (NFDC) online platform <https://www.cinemasofindia.com/>. This is a government-owned streaming platform that hosts many critically acclaimed films in Indian languages. SLS on the platform will push privately owned streaming platforms to consider adding SLS on their content and even the government to consider scaling up our pilot implementation on all of its content.



National Association of the Deaf (NAD)

BIRD and the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), India's leading organization for the rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) persons, submitted a list of policy changes for MIB's consideration. One of the points asks for a review as stipulated in the AS.



National Centre for Promotion and Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)

We are building a partnership with the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), India's leading disability rights group, to be able to sustain policy engagement with MIB over the long term and keep the AS relevant for both quality implementation, periodic revision, and expansion.



Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

With the MoE's 200 edTV channels about to be launched in July 2022, BIRD drafted this policy advocacy letter to make a timely intervention on seeding SLS at this formative stage on educational content. The letter was drafted with inputs from Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and approved by NCPEDP to initiate a 3-way collaboration that will lead to larger advocacy, the development of common language and cause, and strategic concerted activism.



Producer's Guild of India

BIRD will partner with the Producers Guild of India (GUILD) with the goal of embedding SCRIPT generation and its integration in the production process of future films. The GUILD is India's premier film industry body that represents the Hindi film industry, or colloquially, "Bollywood." The GUILD represents all major Bollywood film producers. It interacts closely with the government and other stakeholders on critical industry related regulatory challenges, policy matters, copyright protection, taxation, and ease of filming.



Central Board of Film Certification

BIRD will persuade the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), directly and through MIB, to require the submission and revision of a SCRIPT to match the final film version that is passed.



Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC India)

BIRD has signed a one-year subscription with BARC for access to its data and analytics, at the lowest possible rate, within the permissible pricing constraints of a joint industry body.



Pratham and ASER

BIRD is exploring a partnership with Pratham to leverage content with SLS in or as a home based complement to two of their programs. Pratham's Second Chance program focuses on providing women school drop-outs, older than 16 years, another chance at completing Class 10 education.



MIT Open Learning

BIRD plans to continue its design phase relationship with MIT Open Learning for the 5-year system change phase.



Sesame Workshop India (SWI)

SWI is a leader in creating edutainment content for the 3-8 age group, with a thriving YouTube presence in English and a few other Indian languages. BIRD has entered into a partnership with SWI to add SLS on some of its new and existing YouTube titles.



Rocket Learning

Rocket Learning is a non-profit that creates content for pre-school children. BIRD will add SLS to their content and expand their library of content for pre-school children.

Leadership and Team

Advisors



Amita



Tathagata



Sonali

Governing Board (India)



Chitra



Pekham



Brij

Governing Board (USA)



Shweta



Robert



Megan



Brij

Executive Team



Brij
Founder & Director



Revati
Director- Partnerships & Development



Surabhi
Co-Lead



Nirav
COO



Parthibhan
CAO

Operations Team



Regis
Sr. Animator



Sonia
Project Manager



Vasanthakumar
Accounts Officer



Dhanalakshmi
HR Co-ordinator



Hemlata
Field Researcher



Indu
Field Researcher



Jayanthi
Cook



Vijay
SLS Operation
Co-ordinator



Santosh
Video Editor



Swapnil
Video Editor

Financials

SLS has stood the test of time since its inception in 1996 but like most system change initiatives, BIRD needs base funding that can thrust its sustained engagement with the government, private sector, and CSO stakeholders into a new 'can do' orbit in a complex and large country like India.

Our execution strategy is planned around three budget scenarios

- Base Budget \$8M
- Midsize Budget \$13M
- Full Budget \$19M

Balance Sheet as on 31st March	2023	2022
Assets		
I. FIXED ASSETS	8,12,873	6,04,138
II. CURRENT ASSETS		
Loans, advances & prepaid expenses	4,68,156	3,47,769
Deposits	2,00,00,000	
Cash in hand at bank	6,98,23,310	51,88,523
Total Assets	9,11,04,339	61,40,430
LIABILITIES		
I. Capital fund	9,04,46,449	58,62,808
II. Loan	17,477	56,041
III. Current liabilities	6,40,413	2,21,582
Total Liabilities	9,11,04,339	61,40,431
Income and Expenditure Account		
INCOME		
I. Grants & Donations	9,19,34,222	15,00,000
II. Earned Income	-	5,000
III. Bank interest	3,42,154	1,83,925
IV. Excess of expenses over income	-	15,56,326
Total Income	9,22,76,376	32,45,251
EXPENSES		
I. Operational costs ***	73,07,241	25,37,263
II. Administrative costs	3,81,165	7,07,988
III. Bank costs	4,329	-
IV. Excess of income over expenses	8,45,83,641	-
Total Expenses	9,22,76,376	32,45,251
Turnover in lakhs	923	32

This year we contributed to public discourse through various op-eds

Media



The Better India
Feb 16th, 2023

An IIM-A Professor is using Movie Subtitles to Improve Reading Skills of 1 Billion Indians

Business Standard

Business Standard
April 1st, 2022

Same language subtitling as a driver of literacy



The Free Press Journal
June 8th, 2023

Reading Between the Frames: Literating Rural India Using Movie Subtitles

The Arunachal Times

Arunachal Times
Sept 16th, 2022

IIM Ahmedabad's initiative to strengthen Arunachali languages laudable: Lokhande

THE HINDU

The Hindu
Oct 2022

Improving access to entertainment content

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Times of India
March 21st, 2023

The Pathaan precedent

The Hindu

May 30th, 2023

Amid India's OTT boom, platforms still keep the disabled in the dark