

Updated May 08, 2020



Same Language Subtitling (SLS) on TV: Lifelong reading literacy for a billion (PlanetRead & IIM-A)

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Inescapable and lifelong reading literacy on TV for 1 billion viewers, including 600 million weak-readers, by marrying Same Language Subtitling (SLS) with mainstream entertainment. SLS is now broadcast policy in India. It just has to be implemented.

SLS is a deceptively simple and positively disruptive solution to India's seemingly intractable weak-reading challenge. India has one billion TV viewers, including 600 million weak-readers. The average Indian watches 3 hours and 46 minutes (EY-FICCI, 2019) of TV a day, in a mix of 20+ languages. Since SLS is proven to cause inescapable reading engagement, even among weak readers, implementing... SEE ALL

EDUCATION

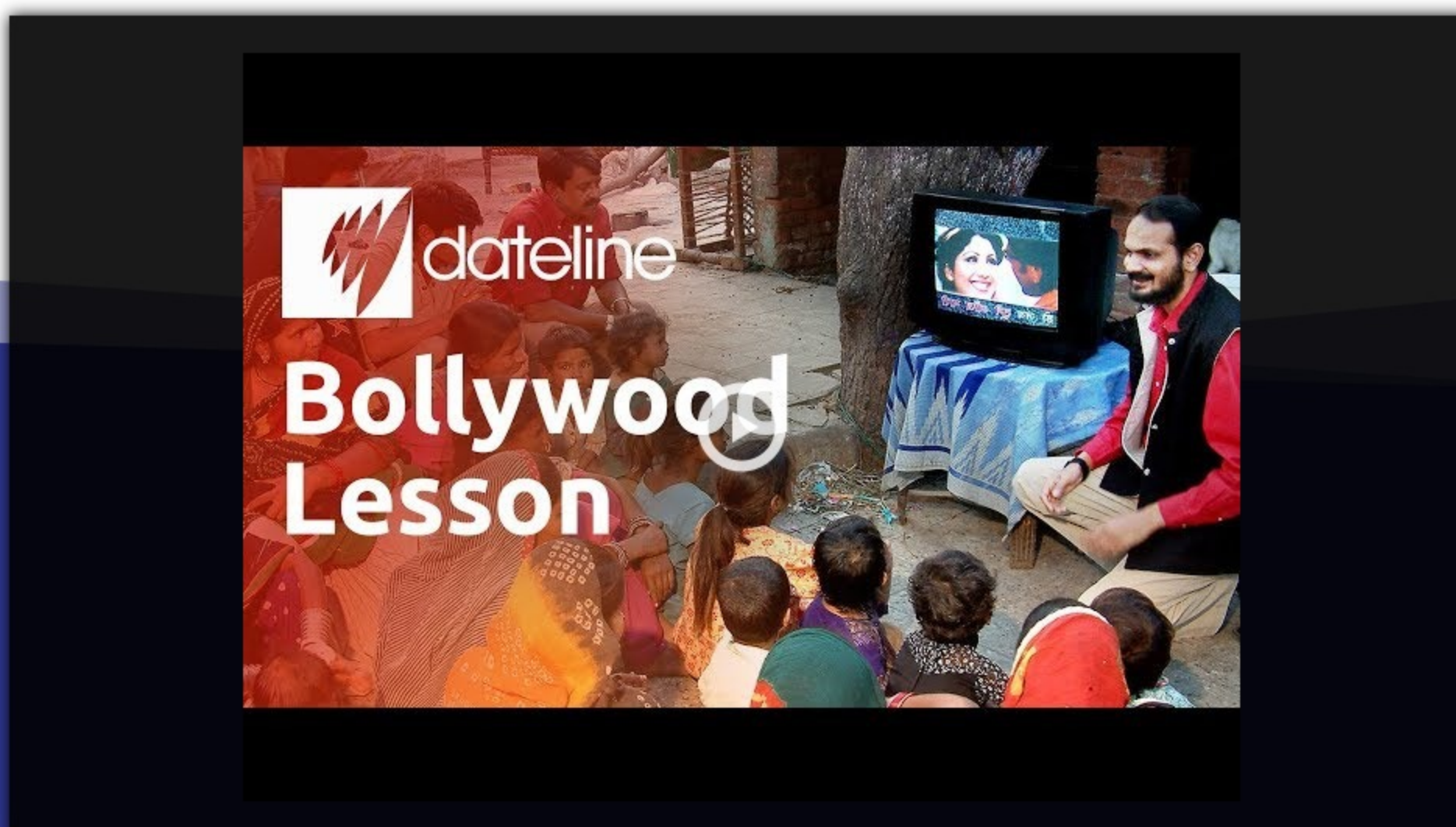
Stage 5: Scaling

In September 2019, India's Ministry of Information & Broadcasting mandated all TV channels (800+) to telecast entertainment content like films and serials, with Same Language Subtitling (SLS). By 2025, 50% of all TV programming must have SLS.

Registered in India

Focus Areas:
Literacy, Basic Education and Communications and Media

1 Key Partner	1,000,000,000 Customers	20 Employees
\$2,500,000 Funds Raised to Date		



Problem

India's official literacy rate is expected to cross 80% in Census (2021). But over 60% nominally "literate" people cannot read a newspaper or a simple text. In a population of 1.25 billion (age 7+), India has: 1) 400 million (32%) good readers, 2) 600 million (48%) weak-readers, & 3) 250 million (20%) non-readers. A root cause is low quality of schooling: 50% children cannot read a Grade 2 level text, even in Grade 5. Indians live a life of "Learning Poverty" while in school and later in life.

Solution

Same Language Subtitling (SLS) is the idea of subtitling mainstream entertainment on TV in the "same" language as the audio. What you hear is what you read. For example, Hindi films and serials with the dialog and songs, subtitled in Hindi; Tamil content subtitled in Tamil, and likewise on all existing Indian language content on TV. There is compelling evidence that: a) SLS on A-V content causes automatic and inescapable reading engagement and b) measurable skill improvement among weak-readers.

Target Beneficiaries

Our main target group is the currently 600 million weak-readers. Additionally, we expect the 250 million non-literates to also become weak-readers through the state's efforts and benefit from SLS. The majority of weak-reading and non-reading groups are female and rural. The primary education system has not served them well. The mean years of schooling in India is 4.8 for girls and 8.2 for boys. Furthermore, girls and women have fewer opportunities outside of home to improve their reading.

Mission and Vision

PlanetRead's tag line is "Literacy for a billion". But that is in India alone. Once India implements SLS well, and its impact is visible, it is bound to spread to other low-literacy countries, especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. SLS recently became national broadcast policy in India. Our next mission is to build the required partnerships to ensure its national scale up, at quality. The global vision for SLS is to give 2 billion viewers daily reading practice, for life.

Competitive Advantage

1) Globally, we are the first to leverage SLS (or subtitles) on mainstream TV, expressly for reading literacy. Other countries have used SLS for media access and language learning but not for reading literacy at scale. 2) There are few, if any, reading literacy interventions that guarantee everyday and lifelong reading practice. Not even schooling achieves that. SLS is one such lifelong reading intervention that has been proven in several TV pilots to improve reading skills through everyday practice. 3) The cost of SLS is disruptively small. In India, given that a billion people watch TV, SLS costs \$1 for lifelong reading (average lifespan is 70 years). 4) SLS is backed by strong evidence, built over two decades of work. This evidence has moved national broadcast policy.

Planned Goals and Milestones

Policies don't always get implemented but the onus to implement SLS is now squarely on the powerful entertainment industry (TV and film). We will put in place a model quality implementation of SLS on a good quantity of existing content (say 20,000 films), under a multi-stakeholder partnership of the government, industry, academia, and civil society. This will serve as a catalyst for industry-wide implementation on new content. Conduct independent impact evaluation.

Funding Goal	10,000,000
Projected Cumulative Lives Impacted	1,000,000,000
New Implemented Countries	India
Recruit	The partnership leads will decide when the size of available funding is clear. There is interest at Harvard and MIT (J-PAL and J-WEL) to associate.
New Feature	A national open database of clean scripts and song lyrics (this does not exist at present). Technology to automate or streamline the SLS implementation process.

The Team Behind the Innovation

We conceived SLS (1996), proven it works and moved national policy (2019). Key team members & advisors: 1) Brij Kothari, IIM-A, Faculty 2) Tathagat Bandyopadhyay, IIM-A, Dean 3) Nirav Shah, PlanetRead, COO 4) Megha Pradhan, J-PAL South Asia: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/mpadhan> 5) Sanjay Sarma, MIT: <https://openlearning.mit.edu/about/our-team/sanjay-sarma> 6) David Bloom, Harvard: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/david-bloom/> 7) Vijay Kumar, MIT: <http://web.mit.edu/vkumar/www/>



EXECUTIVE TEAM INCLUDES WOMEN AND YOUTH

Milestone

Jun 2020	Recognition Received PENDING Same Language Subtitling (SLS) story: From idea to national policy as part of Stanford Social Innovation Review , feature article on SLS (forthcoming)
Feb 2020	Recognition Received PENDING Speaker: Role of technology in providing quality education as part of Harvard India Conference
Sep 2019	In The News The larger picture about inclusive programming ORGANIZATION The Hindu
EXPAND	
Jan 2003	Recognition Received PENDING Tech Laureate in Education ORGANIZATION Tech Museum of Innovations, San Jose, CA
Jan 2002	Recognition Received PENDING Winner (\$250,000): Global Innovation Competition as part of Development Marketplace (World Bank)
Aug 1996	Created