

Billion Reader's Initiative

by PlanetRead

Annual **Report** 2023-2024

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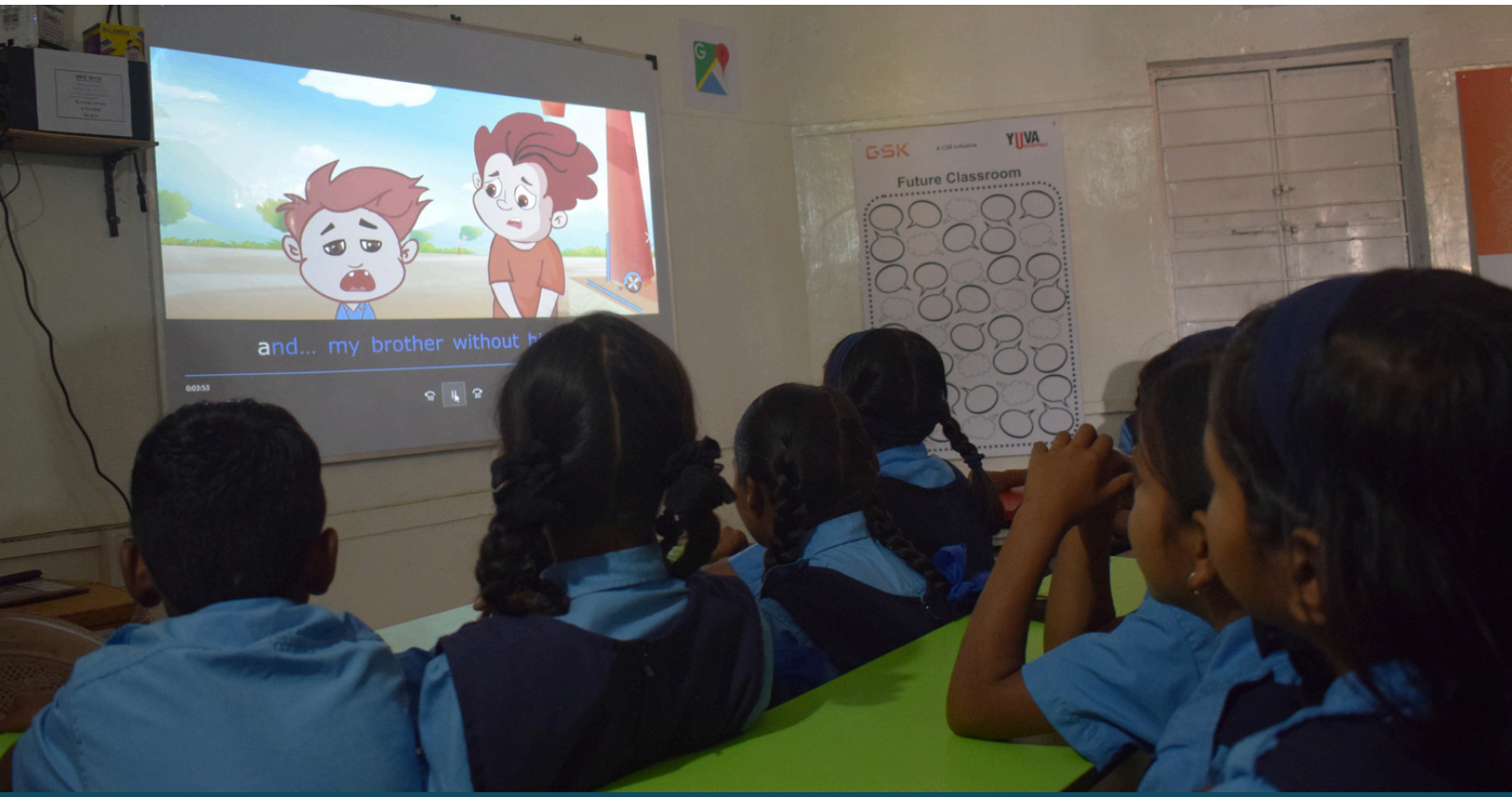
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Overview

The past year has been incredibly productive for PlanetRead, marked by significant advancements and new opportunities for growth, scale, and learning, particularly for our Billion Readers (BIRD) initiative.

We are proud to report significant progress in our efforts to influence policy and promote the implementation of the Same language Subtitling (SLS) at a systemic level.

Our dedicated engagement with key partners has strengthened our initiatives across our priority pillars: policy, government, technology, and gender.



This collaborative approach has not only enhanced our impact but has also fostered valuable relationships that will be instrumental in driving our mission forward. As we look ahead, we are excited about the potential for further growth and the continued development of innovative solutions to advance literacy and education for all.

Policy

A Policy Breakthrough
SLS for All Films in India!
(March 2024)

In March 2024, a landmark decision by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) mandated that all applications for film certification must now include a Same Language Subtitling (SLS) file, alongside other accessibility features (see here). This development has the potential to bring SLS to an estimated 2,000 new films each year across television, streaming platforms, and cinema halls.

A significant milestone for BIRD occurred with the MIB's framing and notification of India's Accessibility Standards for Films, 2024, under the "Cinematograph (Certification) Rules, 2024," which was officially released on March 15, 2024.

Win

The inclusion of SLS language in legal documentation for film certification marks a significant achievement for BIRD. We are advocating for the film industry and policymakers to recognize that embedding SLS and Same Language Caption (SLC) into production and certification is a cost-effective means of complying with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act and MIB's Accessibility Standards, 2019 for television.

Implications

With India producing 1,500 to 2,000 films annually in various languages, this new requirement compels all film producers to create and submit an SLS file as part of the certification process. This integration represents a crucial step in ensuring accessibility within the film industry.

Recommendations on National Broadcasting Policy

In April 2024, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) initiated a consultation process for the upcoming National Broadcasting Policy. BIRD actively participated in stakeholder discussions and submitted recommendations emphasizing the importance of quality SLS in enhancing media access, promoting reading literacy, and preserving Indian languages.

This groundbreaking policy shift is a testament to our ongoing commitment to fostering accessibility and inclusivity in media, setting a precedent for future initiatives in the film industry and beyond.

Technology

Development of Open-Source Tech Tools

Over the past two years, BIRD has made significant strides in technological innovation through our partnership with the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

Initially focused on developing open-source tools for Indian Language Automatic Speech Recognition, we have recently pivoted our strategy to leverage advancements in artificial intelligence (AI).

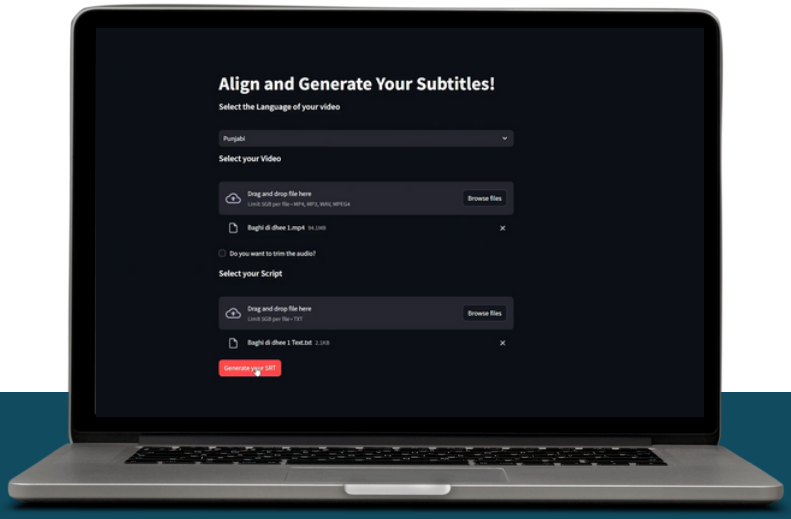
By streamlining the process of creating SLS files, the Auto Aligner not only promotes efficiency but also fosters greater inclusivity in Indian media.

This aligns with our mission to enhance accessibility for diverse audiences, ensuring that quality content is available to all.

We are now utilizing existing AI models to create open-source tools that enhance accessibility in media. One of our key developments is the **'Auto Aligner' tool**, which automatically generates SLS files.

This innovative tool is designed to significantly reduce both the time and costs associated with incorporating SLS into new films and TV content, making it easier for industry stakeholders and content producers to comply with accessibility standards.

Auto Aligner Tool Demo



We are excited about the potential impact of these technologies on the industry and are committed to continuing our efforts in developing tools that support language accessibility and literacy.

Impact & Outreach

Impact of SLS: Transforming Literacy for Weak Readers

Our ongoing efforts to implement the Same Language Subtitling (SLS) have yielded significant results in enhancing literacy among weak readers.

As of March 2024, our tracking indicates that approximately 411 million weak readers are now benefiting from quality SLS exposure. Notably, among this group, 73 million weak readers engage with more than 2 hours of SLS content on television each day.

Research conducted on the effects of consistent SLS exposure reveals compelling outcomes: regular viewing of SLS content for over 2-3 years can effectively double the number of functional readers. This transformative impact highlights the critical role that accessible media plays in literacy development.



We are committed to expanding SLS outreach, ensuring more individuals gain access to resources that enhance reading skills. By prioritizing quality content and accessibility, we aim to foster a more literate, inclusive society.

Organization Update

BIRD's Transition to IIT Delhi

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

BIRD is undergoing significant transformation as we transition from the Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi's School of Public Policy.

This move to the national capital enhances our ability to influence national policy and collaborate effectively with policymakers, government officials, and television networks. Our official entry into IIT Delhi was marked by a seminar led by Brij on January 31, 2024.

With this transition, BIRD is better positioned to leverage IIT's strategic reputation as a premier public university in India, renowned for its leadership in research, innovation, and technology.

Organizational Strengthening

Our team has expanded, allowing us to enhance our expertise in key areas, including gender, state implementation, operations, research, and communications, across Delhi, Punjab, and Arunachal Pradesh. Additionally, we have strengthened our advisory board by welcoming experts in communications, media, engagements, and government strategy.

Advisors


Amita


Avinav


Raj


Tathagata


Vikesh


Sonali

Governing Board (India)



Chitra



Pekham



Brij

Governing Board (USA)



Shweta



Robert



Megan



Brij

Executive Team



Brij
Founder & Director



Revati
Director- Partnerships & Development



Tanvi
Legal Counsel



Nirav
COO



Parthibhan
CAO



Prasid
Director - Strategic Partnerships

Operations Team



Aditi
Communications Manger



Anusha
Creative Designer



Anushree
Researcher - Gender & Media



Dhanalakshmi
HR Co-ordinator



Hema
Field Researcher



Leenata
Video Editor



Malavika
Research Associate - Gender & Media



Priyanka
Video & Subtitle Editor



Regis
Video Editor



Reshma
Hindi Language Expert



Rubina
Operations Manager
(Chandigarh)



Sandhya
Manager - Film & Partnerships
(South India)



Santosh
Video Editor



Saurabh
Eye Tracking Co-ordinator



Sivasailam
Accounts Officer



Sonia
Project Manager



Vijay
Operations Manager
(Mumbai)



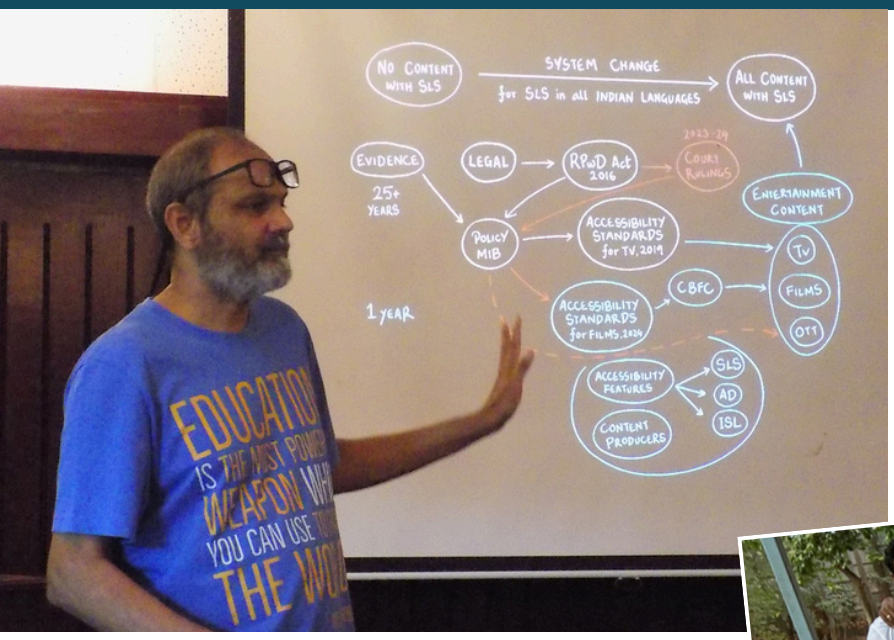
Swapnil
Video Editor



Tamanna
Field Co-ordinator

Offsite get-together in Pondicherry

To foster team cohesion and align our big-picture objectives, we organized an offsite gathering in Pondicherry from March 2-5, 2024.



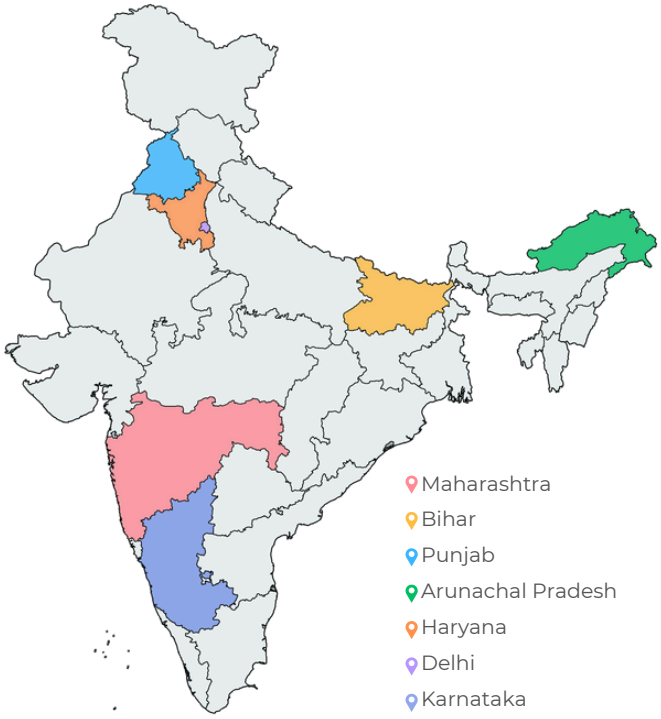
This two-day event featured informal meet-ups, presentations, and discussions, bringing together team members from Mumbai, Delhi, and Pondicherry, along with India Board members Pekham and Chitra, and representatives from Mission Accessibility (MA).



The offsite was not only productive but also a fun opportunity to strengthen connections across our growing team!



State Level Partnerships



BIRD is actively working with state governments across India to scale Same Language Subtitling (SLS) initiatives, improving literacy and media accessibility for diverse communities.

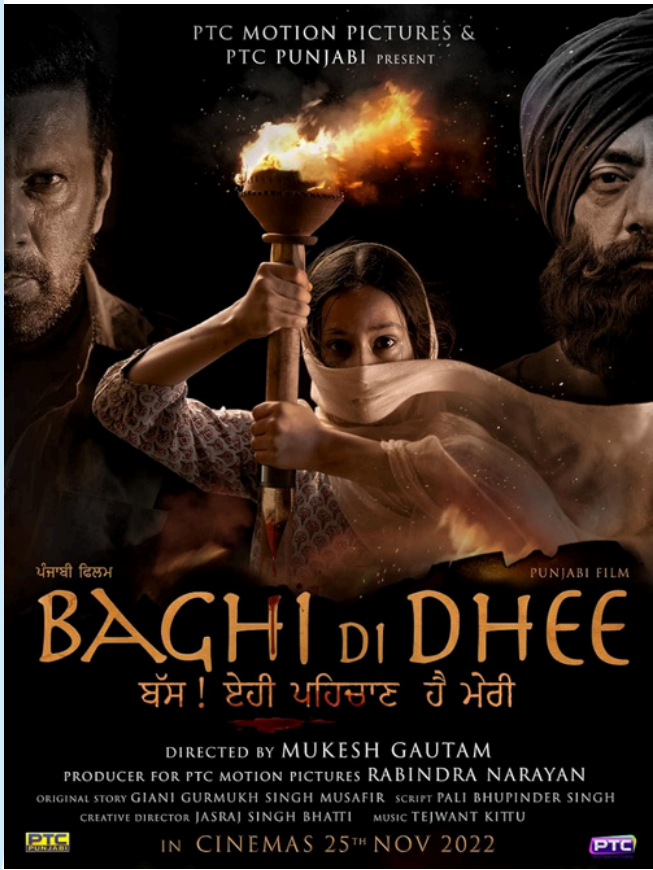
Punjab

Pioneering SLS Implementation at Scale

In 2024, Punjab is poised to become the first state to implement SLS at a large scale. BIRD is collaborating closely with the Punjab government, which has already issued a directive to Punjabi TV channels to adopt SLS in their programming. To further this effort, the government is organizing a meeting with top channels to advocate for widespread SLS adoption.

BIRD is partnering with three major Punjabi TV channels, and in July 2024, we celebrated the broadcast of *Baghi Di Dhee*, the first Punjabi film featuring SLS. See sample of our SLS work on dialogue & songs. Additionally, a qualitative baseline survey is being conducted to assess local media consumption patterns and reading skills, helping tailor our interventions. BIRD has also set up an office in Mohali to drive this initiative, aiming to add SLS to 5,000 hours of existing Punjabi content over the next five years. Our goal is to integrate SLS into the production processes of popular channels and expand its reach, particularly among girls and women in rural areas.





Karnataka

Building Coalitions for SLS Adoption

Since June 2024, BIRD has been working closely with the Karnataka government to scale SLS initiatives. We are in the process of formalizing a partnership with the Department of Education and have been engaging with Kannada TV channels to facilitate the widespread adoption of SLS in educational content. This collaboration aims to ensure that Kannada-speaking communities gain enhanced access to educational and media content through SLS.





Arunachal Pradesh

Promoting Indigenous Languages through SLS

In July 2024, BIRD signed an MoU with the Arunachal Pradesh government to create *AniBooks*—animated stories with SLS—aimed at promoting indigenous languages and local cultures. This initiative will also extend to the state's TV channel, where we will integrate SLS into programs featuring local folk songs and stories, ensuring these cultural assets are accessible to all.

Delhi

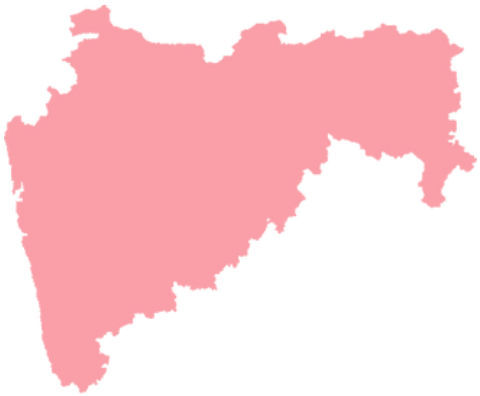
Community Learning and Research Initiatives

In Delhi, BIRD is collaborating with the local government to establish a community learning center focused on language learning through SLS. This after-school program will also serve as a research hub, using eye-tracking studies to demonstrate how SLS fosters automatic reading engagement among children. The goal is to integrate SLS into the broader educational ecosystem in Delhi, benefiting children from grades 1 to 8.



Maharashtra
Enhancing Literacy through Marathi TV

BIRD has a longstanding proposal (since 2021) with Maharashtra's Department of School Education to scale SLS on existing Marathi entertainment content. This initiative seeks to improve reading literacy while making Marathi TV programs more accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals.



Bihar
Tailored SLS Interventions

In Bihar, BIRD conducted a media consumption survey in 2022, led by community leaders, to understand the local preferences and identify the most-watched channels among children. This survey will guide our SLS strategy across the state, ensuring that our initiatives align with local media habits and educational needs.
See our survey findings here.

Haryana
Advancing Educational Content in Hindi

BIRD is in discussions with Haryana's Department of School Education to encourage content producers to create SLS-based educational videos in Hindi. These efforts aim to enhance learning opportunities for students across the state by leveraging the power of SLS to improve literacy and language skills.



These initiatives are part of BIRD's broader commitment to advancing literacy and media accessibility through Same Language Subtitling across India. Our partnerships with state governments and local media channels are essential in making SLS a transformative tool for educational and cultural engagement, especially in underserved communities.

Key Program Partners

Mission Accessibility (MA)
BIRD has established a fruitful collaboration with Mission Accessibility, a prominent disability rights and advocacy organization. This partnership has been instrumental in our joint efforts, particularly in the Delhi High Court, where we provided backend support that contributed to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting's notification of the Accessibility Standards for Films (AS - Films, 2024). Together, BIRD and MA are now focused on advocating for the adoption of similar accessibility standards for OTT platforms and reinforcing the implementation of the Accessibility Standards for TV, 2019.

Sanjhi Sikhiya
In Punjab, BIRD is partnering with Sanjhi Sikhiya, an organization dedicated to improving the quality and accessibility of education in government primary schools. This collaboration aims to enhance educational outcomes for children, ensuring that SLS is integrated into learning environments to support literacy development.

Gram Vaani
To effectively assess and understand the media consumption patterns of girls and women across states where BIRD is scaling SLS, we plan to conduct qualitative on-ground surveys in their homes. Following this, a statewide Interactive Voice Response (IVR) 'snapshot survey' will be carried out to gather data on what sampled households are watching. Gram Vaani is proposed as our partner organization for executing these IVR media snapshots, enabling us to capture valuable insights.

Pratham ASER

To evaluate the impact of our initiatives, BIRD will commission an independent baseline and endline assessment of reading skills in partnership with Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). This survey will focus on the reading skills and media consumption patterns of all household members aged five and older, providing critical data to measure the effectiveness of SLS in promoting literacy.

Rocket Learning

BIRD is collaborating closely with Rocket Learning to incorporate SLS into the content they distribute to parents and preschool teachers. This partnership aims to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of early childhood education resources, ensuring that SLS supports language learning from an early age.

Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies (RNP)

We are actively engaging with Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies to strengthen our relationships with other NGOs in the sector. This initiative is designed to promote the adoption of SLS within the NGO space. To date, we have successfully integrated SLS into the programs of three NGOs, expanding our reach and impact in community-based literacy efforts.



OTT & Film Producers

Over the past 1.5 years, BIRD has been working to add SLS to numerous movies as part of our catalytic seeding strategy with producers and OTT platforms. To date, we have successfully integrated SLS/SLC into 22 films, making significant strides in enhancing accessibility for diverse audiences.

Fundraising Partners

Co-Impact System Change Grant
BIRD has been awarded a 5-year (2022-2028) system-change grant of $6.5M from Co-Impact for system acceptance & implementation of SLS.

Smith Foundation
We received a renewal of US$125,000 from the Smith foundation for year 2.

Philanthropy Asia Alliance
In Sept 2023, Selected amongst 29 high impact orgs across Asia by Philanthropy Asia Alliance (PAA), a funding collaborative initiated by Temasek Trust.

HundrED
In June 2023, Selected for the 2024 HundrED Global Collection and will be featured amongst the top 100 most impactful & scalable education innovations in the world.

Indian Philanthropy Alliance (IPA)
Since Feb 2024, We are partnering with The Indian Philanthropy Alliance (IPA), a coalition of nonprofit, philanthropic, and charitable organizations dedicated to mobilizing people and funding in the United States (and elsewhere).

Network Partners

Sattva Consulting

We partnered with Sattva in Oct 2023 for a scoping study for a six-week engagement that include the scale-up strategy through a state selection process & implementation plan, strategy for engagement of CSRs & HNI donors with expert insight, and strategic direction for government engagement.

Rediffusion

Since March 2024, we are partnering with Rediffusion to strengthen the association between SLS and reading literacy.

Ashoka Huddle

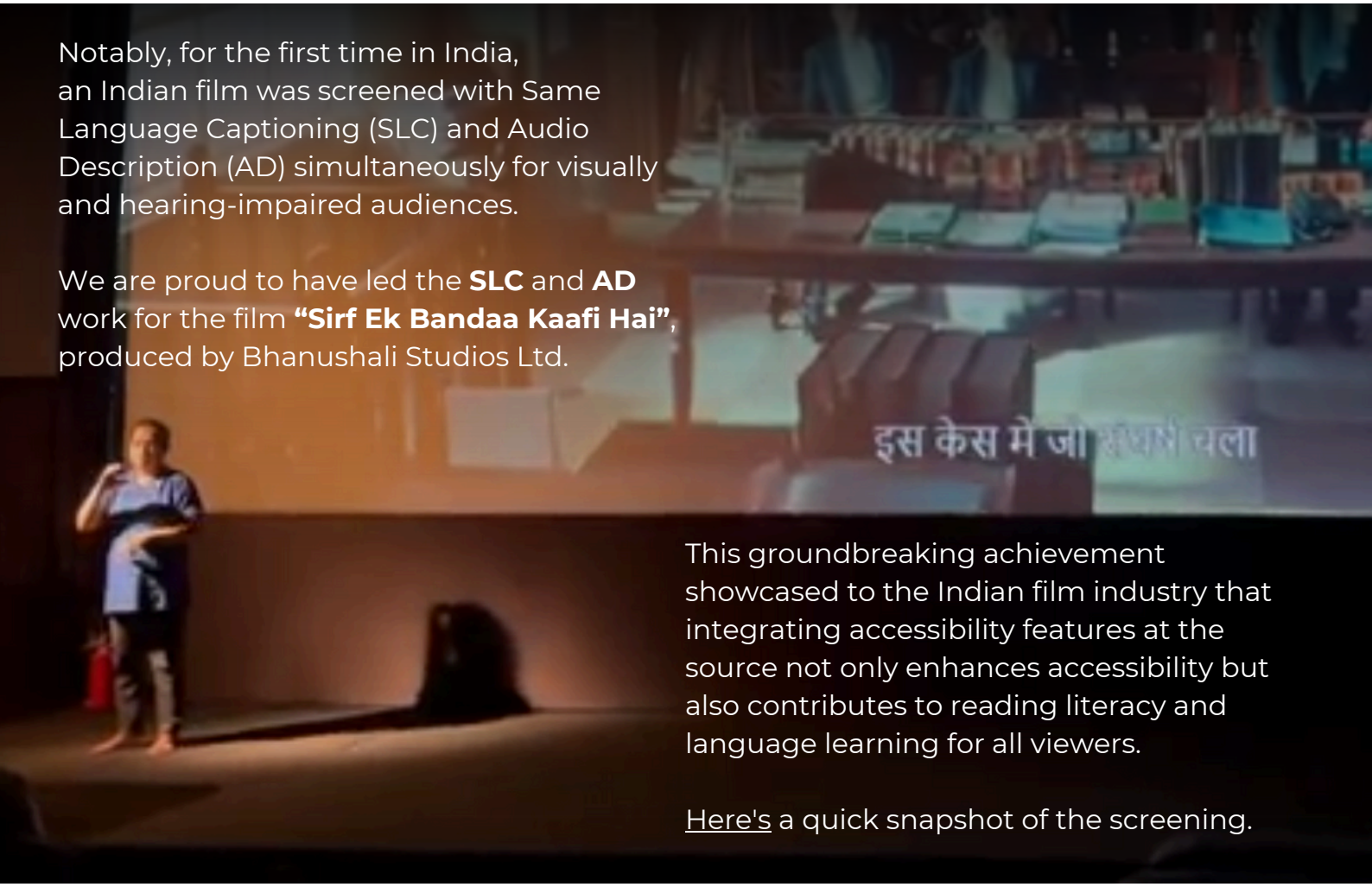
As an Ashoka fellow, Brij has been invited to participate in a May 2024 Huddle with Indian Diaspora Entrepreneurs/Executives. The event aims to pair us with industry leaders to co-create solutions and showcase the work of top Ashoka Fellows. This opportunity will help us expand our network in the US and beyond.

Billion Readers (BIRD) has made significant strides in raising awareness and advocating for accessibility in media through various external representations.

Key External Representations

International Film Festival of India (IFFI) Film Bazaar (Nov 2023)

BIRD debuted at the International Film Festival of India's Film Bazaar in Goa, an initiative by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). This prestigious event provided an excellent platform to share our story with industry players, filmmakers, and producers, fostering potential creative collaborations. Here is a quick glimpse of the event



Notably, for the first time in India, an Indian film was screened with Same Language Captioning (SLC) and Audio Description (AD) simultaneously for visually and hearing-impaired audiences.

We are proud to have led the **SLC** and **AD** work for the film **"Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai"**, produced by Bhanushali Studios Ltd.

This groundbreaking achievement showcased to the Indian film industry that integrating accessibility features at the source not only enhances accessibility but also contributes to reading literacy and language learning for all viewers.

Here's a quick snapshot of the screening.

Bridgespan's System Change Collective (On going)

With the recent launch of Bridgespan's System Change Collective in India, BIRD is excited to deepen our relationship with Bridgespan. This collaboration aims to leverage collective resources and expertise to drive systemic change in literacy and accessibility across the country.

The Bridgespan Group



Content India Show (Oct 2023)

BIRD participated in the Content India show, engaging in discussions about the future of TV subtitling and the immense value of media access for all viewers, including those with hearing impairments. This conversation highlighted the critical importance of accessible media in promoting inclusivity.



Agami Summit (Dec 2023)

At the Agami Summit in Panchgani (southeast of Mumbai) in Dec 2023, BIRD presented our journey in making accessibility a national priority through our collaboration with Mission Accessibility. This platform allowed us to share insights and strategies that emphasize the importance of accessibility in media and education.

Financials

Balance Sheet as on 31st March	2024	2023
Assets		
I. FIXED ASSETS	**11,17,244**	**8,12,873**
II. CURRENT ASSETS		
Loans, advances & prepaid expenses	14,94,319	4,68,156
Deposits	6,87,95,595	2,00,00,000
Cash in hand at bank	65,21,328	6,98,23,310
Total Assets	**7,79,28,486**	**9,11,04,339**
LIABILITIES		
I. Capital fund	7,72,00,305	9,04,46,449
II. Loan	-	17,477
III. Current liabilities	7,28,181	6,40,413
Total Liabilities	**7,79,28,486**	**9,11,04,339**

Income and Expenditure Account		
INCOME		
I. Grants & Donations	1,01,08,951	9,19,34,222
II.Earned Income	7,500	-
III. Bank interest	47,89,268	3,42,154
IV. Excess of expenses over income	1,32,46,144	-
Total Income	**2,81,51,863**	**9,22,76,376**
EXPENSES		
I. Operational costs ***	2,75,46,988	73,07,241
II. Administrative costs	5,96,393	3,81,165
III. Bank costs	8,482	4,329
IV. Excess of income over expenses	-	8,45,83,641
Total Expenses	**2,81,51,863**	**9,22,76,376**
Turnover in lakhs	**282**	**923**

Media

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

Seattle's Child

Seattle's Child
Mar 22nd, 2024
Turn on the Subtitles to boost kids' literacy

mint lounge

Mint Lounge
Jan 18th, 2024
How reading subtitles is improving literacy in rural India

The Indian EXPRESS

The Indian Express
October 21, 2023
Making films accessible to the disabled can serve everyone

Feb 27th, 2024
Everyone should be able to watch TV — including those with disabilities

THE HINDU

The Hindu
August 25, 2023
The superpower of OTT platforms

THE TIMES OF INDIA

The Times of India
March 21, 2023
The Pathaan Precedent