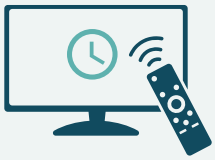
Annual Report 2026



April 2025 - March 2026

Billion Readers (BIRD)
a Planetread Initiative

2025-’26 At a Glance



1,500
hours of content

A two-year agreement with Prasar Bharati to add SLS to up to 1,500 hours of content on WAVES, its streaming platform.



60M
Potential reach via 20 channels

A first state government partnership with Maharashtra Govt to bring SLS to up to 20 Marathi TV channels, with the potential to reach 60 million weak readers.



160M
up from 117M

160 million people now get reading practice through SLS on TV, up from 117 million last year.



9
Indigenous languages

Nine indigenous languages of Arunachal Pradesh now have children's stories and folk songs with SLS.



65%
less editing effort

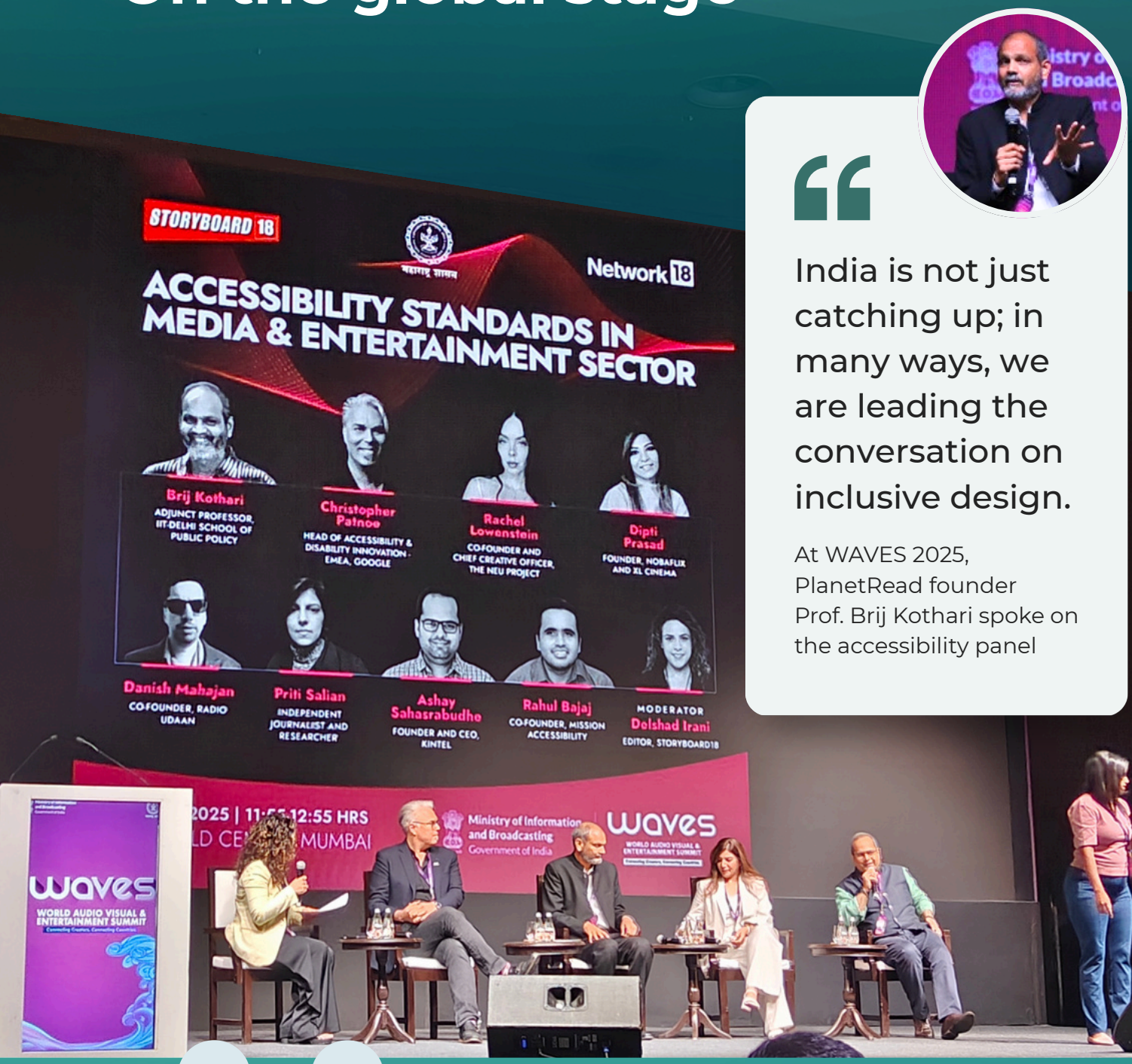
Free tools that cut subtitle editing effort by up to 65%.



26
OTT Platforms reviewed

BIRD's 2025 review of 26 OTT platforms found SLS largely missing from Indian-language content. A gap still to close.

On the global stage



> India is not just catching up; in many ways, we are leading the conversation on inclusive design.

At WAVES 2025, PlanetRead founder Prof. Brij Kothari spoke on the accessibility panel

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Partnerships, Platforms, and Access

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Our first State Government Partnership

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Our North Star

A billion people in India reading fluently, through what they already watch.

There are over 600 million weak readers in India and 60% of them are girls and women. They can read a little, but not well enough to read a form, a sign or a message with confidence.

Literacy programmes are costly, slow to grow, and often stop once a child leaves school. Yet almost every household has a TV, and many now stream. According to BARC India, people watch around 4 hours of TV daily.

Same Language Subtitling (SLS) adds subtitles in the same language as the audio. Everyday viewing becomes reading practice, with no new classes, no extra time, and no change to the content.

Scaling this takes three things: partners with national reach, tools that make SLS fast and affordable, and strong evidence. This year BIRD moved on all three.



The same subtitles do three jobs

Reading

Regular, low-cost practice for weak readers, including women and girls who face barriers such as unpaid care work and restricted mobility.

Access

TV that Deaf and hard- of-hearing viewers, including many older people, can follow.

Language

A written, visible place on screen for languages with little written history.

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What we are building:
Partnerships, Platforms, and Access

Prasar Bharati and WAVES: SLS on the national broadcaster

In January 2026, PlanetRead signed a two-year agreement with Prasar Bharati to add SLS to up to 1,500 hours of content on WAVES, the national broadcaster's streaming platform. WAVES had no SLS before. It brings SLS to the public broadcaster's streaming platform at national scale.

1,500
hours of content

Our work runs through 8 locations: Delhi, Jalandhar, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh). Except Delhi, where we work out of the Doordarshan Akashwani office, the remaining 7 locations are Doordarshan Kendras (Prasar Bharati's regional centres).

We have setup a dedicated SLS facility within an office in all those 8 locations, SLS in seven major languages: Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada. Thanks to our presence in Itanagar, we are also covering 9 tribal languages, namely: Sartang, Adi, Galo, Idu, Nocte, Meyor, Kaman, Khamti and Nyishi.

8
Locations

7
Major Languages

9
Tribal Languages



50+
Team members

This is BIRD's largest programme with more than 50 team members, over half of the organisation, now work on it. A new Roman-script subtitle tool lets the same content serve readers of both native and Roman scripts.

Maharashtra

Our first State Government Partnership

In March 2026, PlanetRead, IIT Delhi and Maharashtra's Persons with Disabilities Welfare Department signed a three-way agreement to bring SLS to Marathi entertainment. Under it, BIRD will work with private TV channels to adopt accessibility features, starting with SLS. Across up to 20 Marathi channels, this could reach 60 million weak readers.

60M **Potential reach via 20 channels**

Conversations have since begun with the School Education, Marathi Language and Cultural Affairs departments.

Maharashtra also matters because of Mumbai. Much of India's TV, film and streaming industry is based there, so practices built in Maharashtra can travel to other states and languages.





One set of subtitles supports

- **Reading Practice**
- **Deaf and hard of hearing viewers**
- **Marathi Language**

Each sees a different benefit in the same subtitles: reading practice for weak readers, access for Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, and support for the Marathi language. This is universal design in action.

Arunachal Pradesh

Keeping Languages Alive

Arunachal Pradesh has dozens of languages, many spoken by only a few thousand people and with little written history. BIRD now works in 9 of them, through two strands of work.

With the state's Department of Indigenous Affairs and IIT Delhi, BIRD makes AniBooks (animated children's stories with SLS) in six languages, chosen by the state. These are Adi, Idu Mishmi, Kaman Mishmi, Singpho, Tai Khamti and Tawrã Mishmi.

Local teams in Roing work directly with native speakers.

9 **Indigenous languages**







This year, the team

Brought five children's stories into all six languages. Each was reviewed with local Community Based Organisations (CBOs), then narrated and subtitled with SLS.

Created an original Tai Khamti story from folk tradition, *The Crow and the Koot-Koung*.

Distributed printed storybooks and activity guides, refined with feedback from children and families

Through the Prasar Bharati partnership, BIRD's team at Doordarshan Arunprabha in Itanagar also added SLS to folksongs in seven languages.

These are Adi, Galo, Idu Mishmi, Kaman Mishmi, Nocte, Sartang and Tai Khamti. This part of our project brings SLS to the state broadcaster's own programming.

For many children and families, this is the first time they see their home language written and read aloud on a screen.



Building the ecosystem

Working with the media industry on quality

BIRD is a quality partner to **Qube Cinemas**, which adds SLS to about a third of Indian films and is Netflix's localization partner in India.

1/3rd

Share of SLS on Indian Films

Dangal TV, reaching 150–200 million viewers a month, has acted on BIRD's feedback to make subtitles easier to read across its shows.

200M

Viewers/Month



Convening for systems change

On 19 July 2025, BIRD, Ashoka Changemaking Networks and IIT Delhi's School of Public Policy hosted a roundtable on systems change powered by CSR and philanthropy. It brought together 60+ leaders from business, philanthropy, academia and the social sector.

60+

Leaders



Media Production

Modeling accessible practices by example

StarDost

Dost' means friend in Hindi. StarDost is a storytelling initiative produced by BIRD in collaboration with well-known 'Stars' that children would admire and consider as their 'Dost'. We have produced more than 50 episodes in 10 major Indian languages, with 30 artists taking part pro bono. StarDost is a key driver of BIRD's YouTube channel, which crossed 130,000 subscribers.

50+

Episodes in 10 languages


Divya Prabha


Anumol


Nadiya Moidu


Kishore


Rahul Ram


Nimrat Partap Singh


Indulekha Warrier


Pooja Mohanraj


Padmapriya


Arjun Radhakrishnan


Sithara Krishnakumar


Millo Sunka


Joy Sengupta


Chorun Mugli


Zarin Shihab


Aparna Das


Aditi Balan


Kunaal Roy Kapur





Dekhte Dekhte Padhega India (DDPI):



902K

YouTube views, Hindi BIRD Song

Dekhte Dekhte Padhega India (DDPI) is BIRD's public campaign on why SLS matters. The Hindi version, released this year, has 902,000 YouTube views. Versions in Marathi, Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Bengali will be made soon.





First Songs:

ith Pratham Education Foundation and EkStep Foundation, BIRD is turning traditional lullabies into subtitled lyric videos for parents and early-childhood educators. This year, 25 lullabies in four languages completed language review. The team, with Bachpan Manao, co-ordinated a lullaby and literacy special that aired on NDTV.

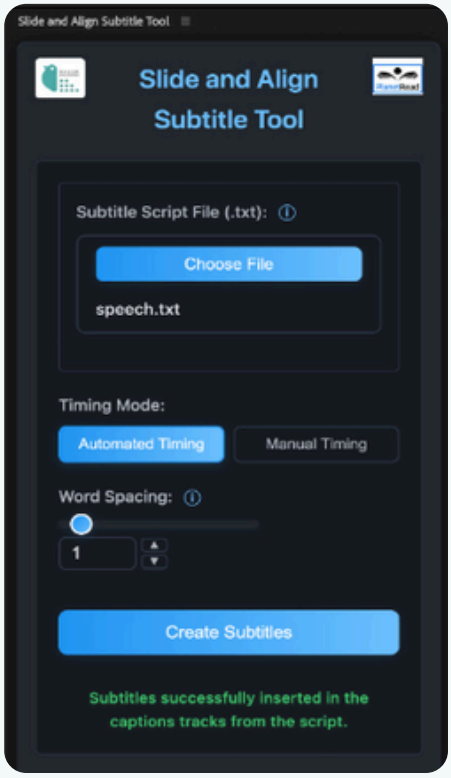
25

lullabies in 4 languages



Making SLS fast and affordable

Technology: Enabling quality, efficiency and scale



A common objection to SLS is cost. BIRD's answer is free, open tools and work with AI developers.

Our Slide and Align Subtitle plug-in for Adobe Premiere Pro cut editing effort by 65% in early tests. For more tools, visit our tech page.

65%

less editing effort

How it works

This tool automatically inserts and evenly distributes subtitle text based on video length. Editors can then slide and align the subtitles by setting precise start and end timings.

Visit our Tech page

Indian Language Support

Built by local talent

Built for industry

Shaping AI for Indian languages

BIRD tests and gives feedback on subtitle tools from CAMB.AI and Feltiv, and is working on ways to share verified data with AI developers safely and legally. Each month BIRD ranks the major AI speech-to-text tools on accuracy in Hindi, Punjabi and Marathi, checked against its own verified subtitle files. Hindi tools are nearing 85% accuracy.

Language: Punjabi

Company	Model	Release Date	Dialogue 1 Accuracy	Dialogue 2 Accuracy	Song Accuracy	Avg Accuracy
Sarvam	Saaras V4	Sep 2026	51.43%	76.29%	75.73%	67.82%
AWS	AWS Transcription	Sep 2026	42.22%	75.38%	21.36%	46.32%
Google	Chirp 3	Oct 2025	52.06%	79.94%	0.00%	44.00%
OpenAI	GPT Transcribe	Jul 2026	37.78%	0.00%	73.79%	37.19%

Disclaimer: Each language was evaluated on three sample clips (3–5 minutes each): an old movie dialogue, a new movie dialogue, and a film song. Figures shown are Word Error Rate (WER) based accuracy scores computed on this limited sample set and are updated manually. They are indicative of relative model performance on these samples only and may not reflect real-world accuracy across all use cases, accents, or content types.

Evidence: what we are learning

Good policy needs good data. This year, BIRD studied how people watch, read and use subtitles.

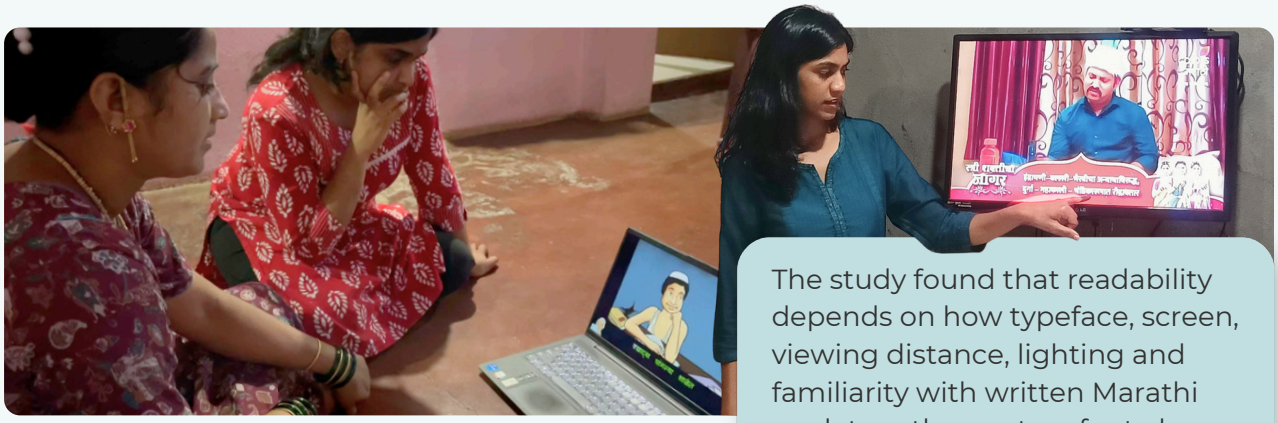
Subtitles designed with the people who read them.

In September 2025, as part of a six-week pilot, two BIRD researchers spent 26 days in New Wadade, a village of about 2,500 people in Kolhapur district, Maharashtra. Through immersion in homes, festivals and daily routines, they observed how 33 Marathi-speaking female weak readers of different ages and reading practices engage with TV and subtitles.



33

weak readers engaging with subtitled content



The study found that readability depends on how typeface, screen, viewing distance, lighting and familiarity with written Marathi work together, not on font alone.

These findings now form BIRD's subtitle design guidelines and the basis for extending this research to other Indian languages.

What India watches.

A survey of 1,642 households across Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh identified the most-watched channels and shows.

This now guides which channels BIRD partners with.



1,642

households
6 states



120

Children · Delhi centre

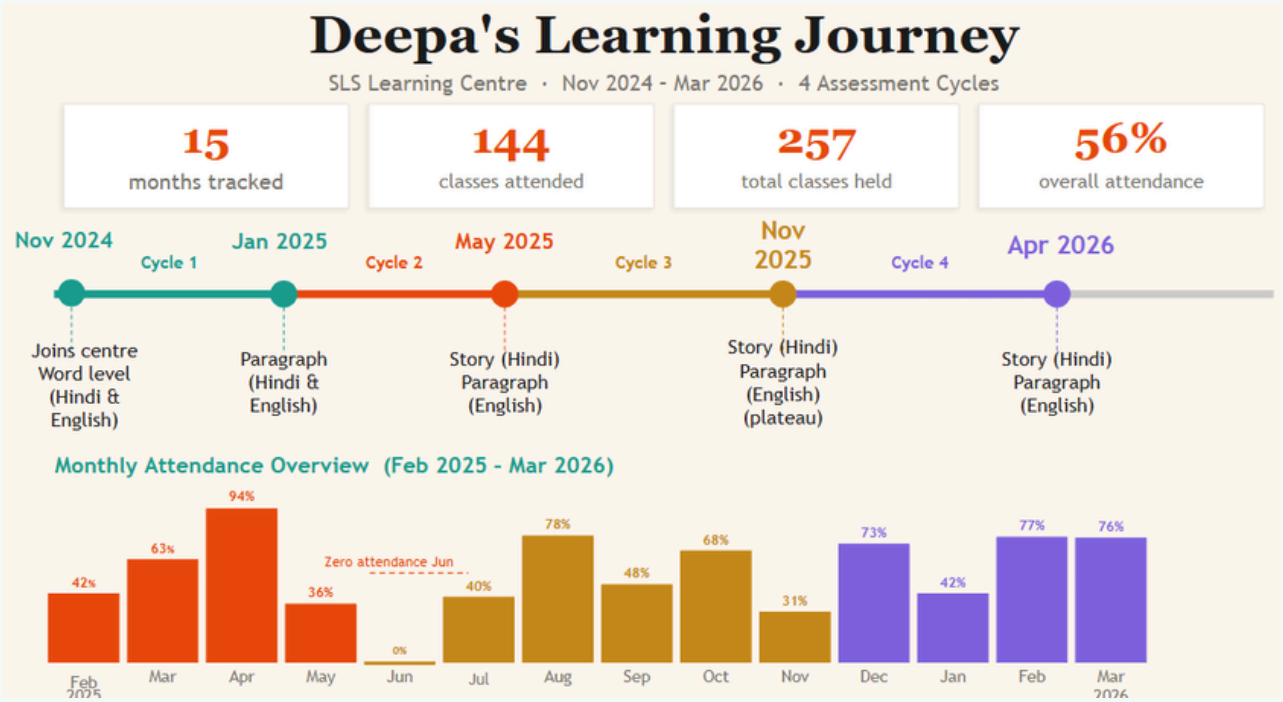
Measuring reading change.

At BIRD's learning centre in Delhi, 120 children took part in a three-monthly programme of SLS sessions, with access to physical and digital libraries with SLS content. Eye-tracking was used to assess reading. In a small group of six students, the results were encouraging and were reviewed by an external expert. The approach will be tested at larger scale in Jalgaon this year.

To better understand how children engage with SLS, a children's media consumption survey was piloted with 126 children across 8 locations nationwide

Deepa's learning journey

Deepa joined BIRD@PlanetRead's Community Learning Centre in Sunlight Colony, Delhi, in November 2024. She was in grade 7 but could read only individual words in both Hindi and English. Like many children who have learned to get through school without being able to read, she hid the gap well, taking part in discussions and saying she understood. At the Centre, she watched story videos with Same Language Subtitling (SLS) in a no-grades, no-pressure setting. A facilitator's daily observation logs shaped a learning plan that adapted to her needs, such as oral responses before written ones and pre-taught vocabulary for English. Over fifteen months, Deepa moved from Word level to Story level in Hindi and Paragraph level in English. She also began choosing books on her own, noting down new words, and using them in conversation. Her journey shows that a low-cost, replicable model, which needs only a community room and a television, can help children who have been left behind by the system.

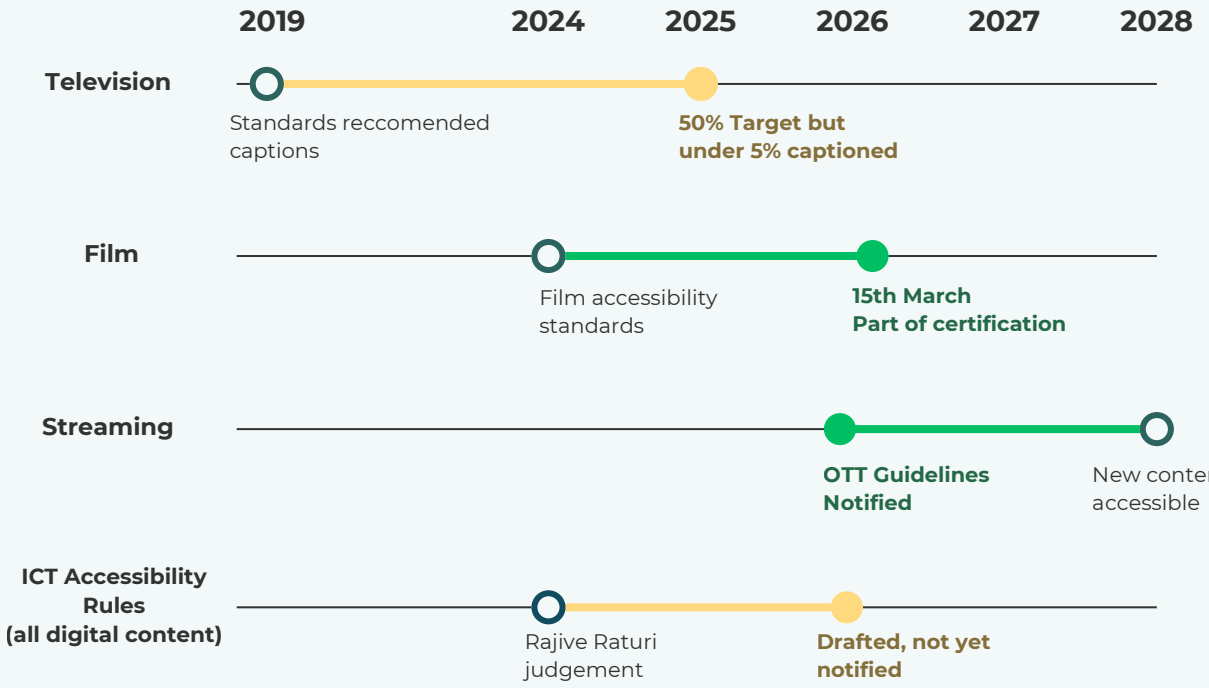


Policy: What is changing

India’s accessibility framework takes shape

From recommendation to requirement, India is moving towards enforceable accessibility standards across film, TV and streaming, with each media platform at a different stage of implementation.

Where each platform stands



2019, Television: The Accessibility Standards for Television recommend captions on half of entertainment programming by 2025. Adoption by channels is still at an early stage, with under 5% of general entertainment content captioned so far. A revised framework is under consideration by the MIB.

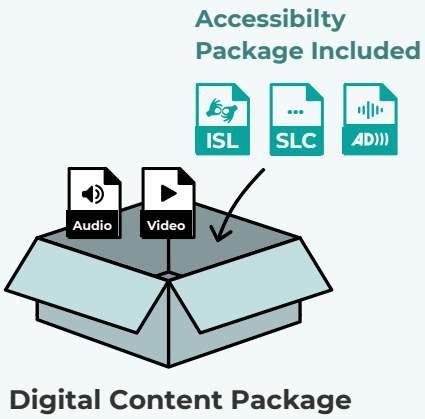
February 2026, Streaming: MIB notifies accessibility guidelines for OTT platforms. This establishes a national framework, requiring all new content on streaming platforms to be accessible February 2028 onwards.

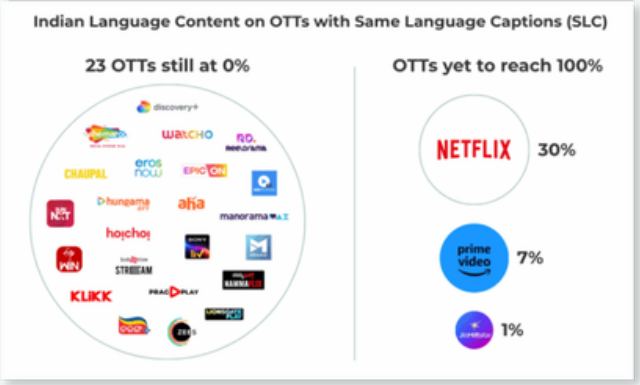
2026, ICT Accessibility Rules: Following the Supreme Court’s 2024 Rajive Raturi judgment, which directed that accessibility standards be mandatory, cross-sector ICT accessibility rules have been drafted and are close to notification. BIRD contributed to the recommendations as part of a group under the Supreme Court’s Accessibility Committee.

15 March 2026, Films: The 2024 Film Accessibility Standards come fully into force, making accessibility part of certification for all theatrical releases.

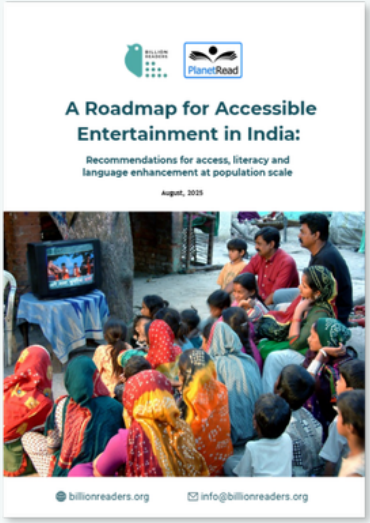
BIRD’s Role

We strongly recommend content that is "born accessible", with accessibility features like SLS, audio description, translation captions, Indian sign language, etc. created at high-quality, and embedded into the content’s DCP at the time of production, which can be toggled on each media platform based on a user’s choice. For films, that means quality SLS files deposited at certification, so accessibility travels with a film across cinema, TV and streaming.





BIRD's 2025 review of 26 OTT platforms documented the gap in Indian-language content.



Its roadmap of 12 recommendations now informs conversations with government, civil society organisations and industry.

Alongside disability rights organisations, BIRD took part in Goa's Purple Fest and in Project Ability Empowerment, a multi-stakeholder review of the RPWD Act’s implementation in Puducherry and New Delhi.

Gender and inclusion



BIRD conducted ethonographic field research in rural Bihar and Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, using home visits, group discussions and observations with women and girls (~200 participants).

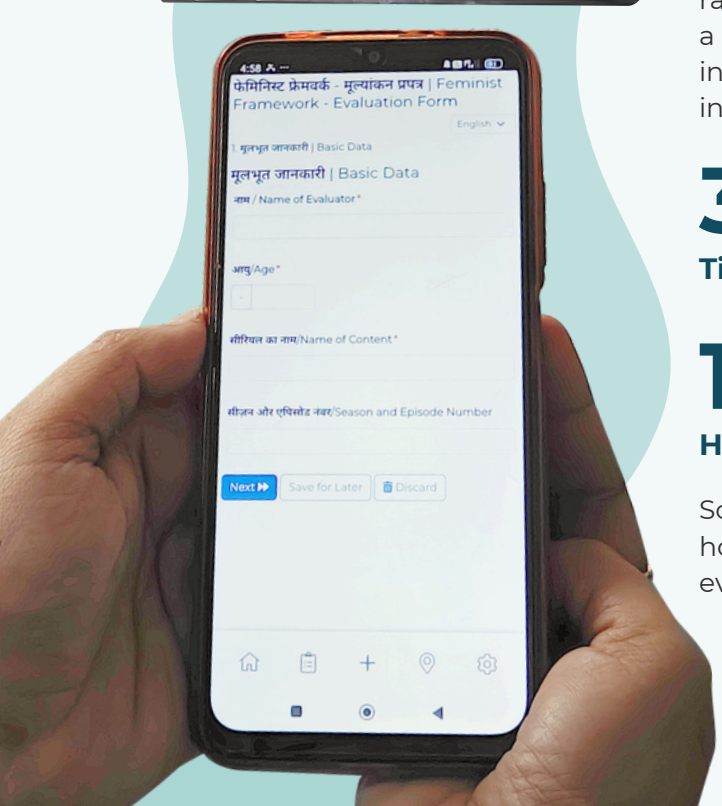
200
Participants

It found that poverty, the lower priority given to girls' education, household and care work, early marriage, limits on mobility and little leisure time all restrict continued reading practice. These barriers are sharpest in economically and socially marginalized households.

Television, though, is already in many of these homes and is one of the few forms of leisure available inside them. SLS turns that viewing time into reading practice, with no travel, extra time or classroom needed.

Feminist Framework for Media (FFM)





BIRD built a framework to assess how entertainment media portrays characters of different genders. The FFM is designed to be accessible to evaluators from diverse lived realities, such as marginalized women and scholars.

Each piece of content is evaluated across 6 categories (with a written justification required for each category rating). These category ratings are then combined into a single score out of 10, with scores closer to 10 indicating gender sensitivity and lower scores indicating a lack of gender sensitivity in the content.

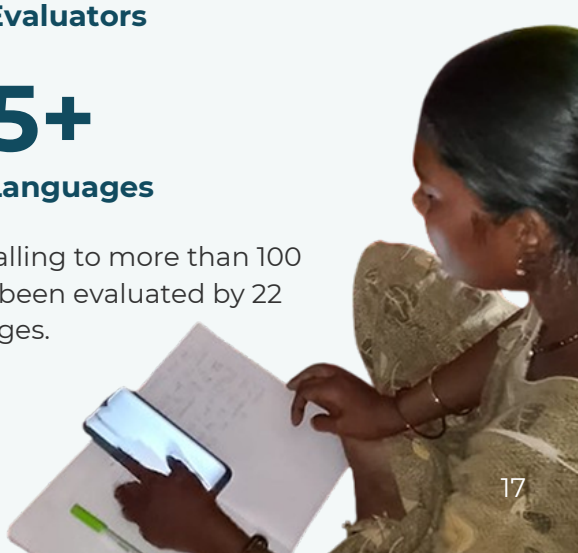
31+
Titles

22
Evaluators

100+
Hours

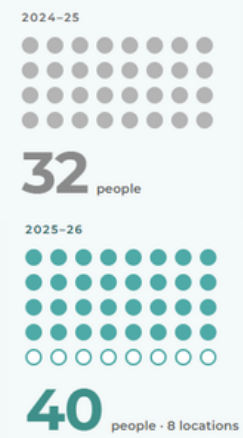
5+
Languages

So far, over 31 titles (totalling to more than 100 hours of content) have been evaluated by 22 evaluators in 5+ languages.



Where this takes us next

Strengthening the organisation



The team has grown substantially over the last year, from a small, distributed group of 32 to 40 people across 8 locations. The growth has been driven primarily by the Prasar Bharati and Maharashtra MoU partnerships, which required rapid recruitment and onboarding of new teams in Delhi and Maharashtra.

To manage HR processes across its now geographically dispersed team, BIRD adopted a new HRMS platform and its existing onboarding processes are being strengthened to keep pace with the scale of hiring.

BIRD is also developing a set of operational systems, including onboarding processes, accountability frameworks, and institutional engagement guidelines covering recruitment, induction, communication protocols, reporting, quality assurance, and partner engagement. These are being designed as living documents that will evolve through experience and feedback from regional teams.

On POSH compliance, BIRD completed two mandatory training cycles across the organization this year and engaged an external committee member to strengthen the independence and credibility of its Internal Committee. A comprehensive overhaul of the employee handbook is underway in light of the new labour codes.



In February 2026, BIRD held its first organizational offsite in Hyderabad, bringing together over 40 team members in person. The offsite included a Strategy Huddle with Ramesh Padmanabhan (former CEO, ARMMAN Foundation), who helped sharpen BIRD's thinking on scaling partnerships, along with team-building activities at Ramoji Film City. In the lead-up, the team also met with BIRD's US-based advisor, Vikesh Mahendroo, for guidance ahead of the offsite.

Challenges and lessons

Scaling national change is rarely linear. Under 5% of general entertainment content on TV meets existing caption benchmarks, so turning standards into practice will take sustained work with government and broadcasters. Maharashtra is the first real test of state-wide SLS in one language, and 2026–27 will show how well that model travels. We have also learned that policy and partnership work best together. Broadcasters change their production systems where expectations are clear and support is consistent, so BIRD pairs policy engagement with hands-on technical help.

Priorities for 2026–27

Deliver at national scale with Prasar Bharati and Maharashtra, and deepen quality work with Dangal TV, Qube Cinemas and Deluxe Media.

Bring the Maharashtra model to more states. Early conversations are under way with two states.

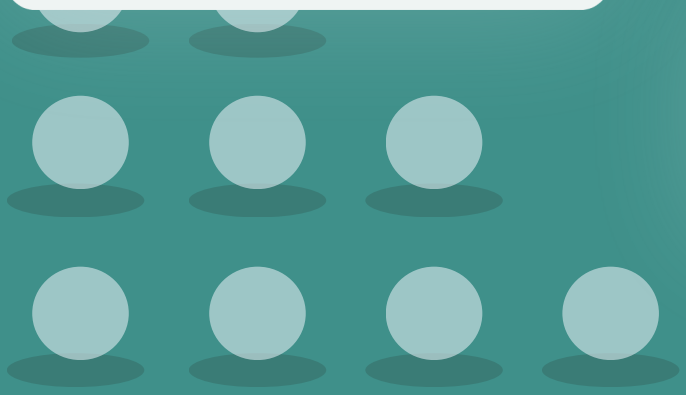
Push for mandatory, portable captions, so best-effort rules become firm and captions stay with content across platforms and dubbed versions.

Launch the national household study for district-level evidence on SLS and reading.

Run the Jalgaon study, assessing SLS and reading in grades 2 to 6, in English and Marathi.

Keep releasing free tools, including production-ready AI captioning, more Roman-script languages, and captions for non-speech sounds.

Make the Feminist Framework for Media public, with a yearly ranking of how popular shows portray women, and take it to rural women.

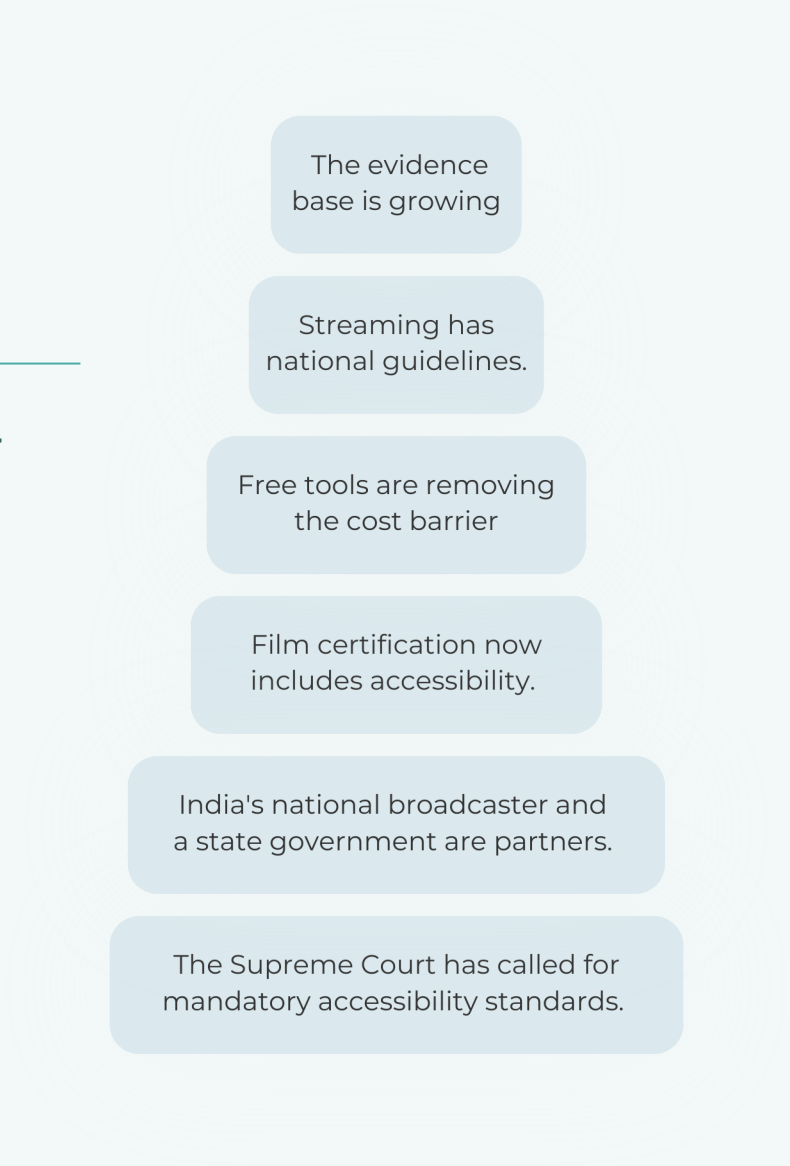


Join us

The building blocks for SLS at national scale are now in place.

SLS does not require building new literacy infrastructure. It works through a media and film industry that already reaches hundreds of millions of people every day.

The question now is how quickly SLS scales, and who scales it with us.



We invite funders, partners and governments to join us.

Reach out to us at
info@planetread.org
https://billionreaders.org/
https://www.planetread.org

Instagram | Facebook | Linkedin | YouTube

Financials

Balance Sheet as on 31st March	2026	2025
Assets		
I. FIXED ASSETS	**20,53,983**	**14,04,000**
II. CURRENT ASSETS		
Loans, advances & prepaid expenses	6,15,069	55,78,675
Deposits	4,39,00,292	3,33,78,567
Cash in hand at bank	61,61,577	11,44,516
Total Assets	**5,27,30,921**	**4,15,05,758**
LIABILITIES		
I. Capital fund	5,22,17,499	4,13,24,154
II. Loan	4,08,482	-
III. Current liabilities	1,04,940	1,81,604
Total Liabilities	**5,27,30,921**	**4,15,05,758**

Income and Expenditure Account		
INCOME		
I. Grants & Donations	7,69,82,051	94,07,660
II.Earned Income	6,508	-
III. Bank interest	15,28,524	35,47,234
IV. Excess of expenses over income	-	3,58,76,151
Total Income	**7,85,17,083**	**4,88,31,045**
EXPENSES		
I. Operational costs ***	6,18,52,518	4,68,25,290
II. Administrative costs	57,71,221	20,05,755
III. Bank costs	8,482	-
IV. Excess of income over expenses	1,08,93,344	-
Total Expenses	**7,85,17,083**	**4,88,31,045**
Turnover in lakhs	**785**	**488**

A. Op-Eds

mid-day

27 Apr 2025

Accessible entertainment for India's development

DH DECCAN HERALD

9 May 2025

Access and the law: Entertainment without barriers is a right, not a favour

THE WIRE

6 Dec 2025

Subtitles Could Do for India What Schools Haven't

B. Glossary

Term	Meaning
SLS	Same Language Subtitling: subtitles in the same language as the audio, for reading practice
SLC	Same Language Captioning: SLS plus descriptions of non-speech sounds, preferred by Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers
AniBooks	Animated, captioned children's stories, used in Arunachal Pradesh
DDK	Doordarshan Kendra, a regional centre of the national broadcaster
DDPI	Dekhte Dekhte Padhega India, BIRD's public campaign
FFM	Feminist Framework for Media
OTT	Streaming platforms
MIB	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
DCP	Digital Content Package, the file bundle a film is released with

C. Events


HOW TO WASH
RINSE
INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY DAY


INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY DAY




INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY DAY
Vroooomm... here I go...


INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY DAY


INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY DAY


HIGH SCHOOL, BADALI MAI KI (FG
AUDITORIUM


GOVT. HIGH SCHOOL, BADALI MAI KI (FGS)
AUDITORIUM