



## Literacy for a Billion: Same Language Subtitling on TV in India

**Problem:** There are an estimated 650 million literate people in India. In reality, half the so-called 'literate,' more than 300 million people, can best be called 'early-literate.' They cannot read, for example, newspaper headlines.

**Goal:** The goal of the Same Language Subtitling (SLS) initiative, pioneered by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and PlanetRead Trust, is to transition over 300 million people in India, from a state of early-reading, to functional and fluent reading ability. SLS could also be implemented in many other countries saddled with the problem of weak reading skills at a mass level.



**Solution:** Same Language Subtitling (SLS) is simply the idea of subtitling the lyrics of film songs (or music videos) in the 'same' language that they are sung in. It is a deceptively simple idea for what it achieves. For over two decades, SLS has woven regular reading practice into the lives of 150 million early-readers in India.

SLS has been implemented on existing Bollywood film songs on TV, in 10 languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, and Punjabi. A Hindi song is shown with the lyrics subtitled in Hindi, Tamil songs with Tamil subtitles, and so on. What you hear is what you read. The subtitles are designed to change the color of every word in perfect timing with the song.

Several research studies have consistently found that exposure to SLS leads to a measurable improvement in reading ability. Reading skills are practiced automatically and subconsciously as a part of staple entertainment already consumed by millions. SLS is popular among viewers and known to improve TV program ratings.

**Cost:** SLS is cost-effective. On a Hindi program one US dollar gives reading practice to 5,000 people for one year.

**Partners:** IIM Ahmedabad and PlanetRead Trust have nationally implemented SLS in partnership with Doordarshan. Donors have included: All Children Reading (USAID), Google Foundation, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Development Marketplace (World Bank), DELL Giving, and the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Library of Congress, Oracle.



Reading for a billion, with Bollywood, TEDxCERN <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRP4xfN89Ss>

SLS is the recipient of several international awards: <http://www.planetread.org/awards.php>

President Bill Clinton speaks about PlanetRead: <http://tinyurl.com/39epgrm>.

Gordon Brown on SLS: <https://youtu.be/Xw8oAbpUOBk>

Narendra Modi on SLS: <https://youtu.be/ssijMWJ-Gns>

The SLS Story: a documentary on PlanetRead <http://youtu.be/lkpPRpiTI8M>

Coverage by Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster: <http://youtu.be/K7XDMzsLd5o>

Coverage by SBS Dateline, Australia <https://youtu.be/tOsWTol2PIw>

**Website:** [www.planetread.org](http://www.planetread.org)