



Inclusive Programming

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The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has mandated the captioning for TV programs, in order to make it accessible to the **deaf or hard of hearing** population (also known as aurally challenged people).

India's phase-wise implementation plan requires all channels to start captioning, on at least one programme per week, starting from August 15, 2019.

- The target is to achieve 10% of all programming channels must have captions by 2020, which will grow by 10% every year.
- It is expected to finally cover up to 50% of all the programming by 2025.

Underlying Idea

- India has a **billion** TV viewers. According to the latest **FICCI-EY Media & Entertainment report** (of 2019), the average Indian watches TV for around 3 hours and 46 minutes every day.
 - Films (24%) and general entertainment (53%) are the dominant genres.
 - All of this content is now required to have Same Language Subtitling (SLS) in all the languages for improving quality education levels.
- India's push into TV captioning is significant for two reasons:
 - India is one of the first major countries (except Brazil) in the **Global South** to embrace captioning for **media access**.
 - It is the first country where the importance of captioning or Same Language Subtitling has been established for **mass reading literacy**.
- The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** made subtitles on TV a **right of an individual**.
- Same Language Subtitling, if implemented in India, can make a massive contribution to Sustainable Development Goal (**SDG-4**) on **quality education**, as quality education foundationally depends on **good reading skills**.
- Scientific evidence suggests that SLS on TV would serve **three goals**:
 - It will inculcate the **daily literacy reading practice** in almost one billion viewers,

including 500 million weak-readers who would benefit the most.

- It will facilitate Indian **language improvement**, and
- It will grant **Media access** to approximately 65 million aurally challenged people.

Similar Initiatives

- The **United States** was the first country that implemented captioning for the aurally challenged people.
- All English channels in **India** have been implementing SLS for film and general entertainment content for over a decade.

It is noteworthy that the English SLS experience establishes the fact that it is not difficult for the entertainment industry to implement SLS system-wide.
- Inspired by the Indian experience, there is an active campaign in the **United Kingdom** to **Turn-On-The-Subtitles** (TOTS), by default in children's programming.

Way Forward

- India is in a unique position to scale up SLS on TV for both goals: media access and reading literacy. The major challenge for the Ministry is to **ensure compliance** by all channels both state and private-owned, as set in the time table.
- SLS causes inescapable reading engagement even among very weak readers who can barely decode a few letters.
 - Hence, regular exposure to SLS can lead to **measurable improvement in reading skills** which in turn, can result in much higher rates of newspaper and other forms of reading.
 - Also with frequent exposure to SLS for over three to five years (on content that people watch), most weak readers can become functional and even good readers.
- The cost of SLS is negligible for new content when incorporated in the production process itself. Therefore, to institutionalize SLS on TV, broadcast policy could simply mandate the same for all new content produced and telecasted after a particular date.
- The **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting** together with the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** needs to mandate a policy of SLS in Indian languages on all digital **Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms**.
- Cost-effective and better implementation of the policy is required on the part of the entertainment industry.

Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016

- **Article 41 of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)** states that State shall make effective provision for securing right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, and disablement, within the

limits of its economic capacity and development.

- This act defines disability based on an **evolving and dynamic concept**.
- Under the act, the types of disabilities have been **increased from 7 to 21**. In addition, the **Government has been authorized to notify** any other category of specified disability.
- The act is implemented by the **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment**.

Over-The-Top (OTT) Platform

- Over the top refers to the film and television content provided via a high-speed Internet connection rather than over a cable or satellite provider.
- OTT does not mean free, as the term encompasses services such as Netflix, and Amazon Prime.

Source: TH