

➤ The Centre for Science & Environment (CSE), the promoters of IP-SMF-grantee **Down To Earth** was presented the prestigious **Indira Gandhi Peace Prize for 2018** by the former vice-president of India Hamid Ansari on November 19, 2019. The Prize was announced last year by an international jury headed by the former President Pranab Mukherjee. The award is a recognition of “CSE’s pioneering work” on the environment and related issues for the last four decades.

DTE became a part of the global media collaboration **Climate Change Now** initiated by The Guardian and Daily Nation. The media collaboration was an effort to encourage enhanced reporting on climate change.

➤ Think Pragati’s podcast ‘**Puliyabaazi**’ made it to the list of the most downloaded new podcasts on the Apple iTunes India store. **Puliyabaazi** also featured in the top 200 charts of Spotify India and Castbox India.

➤ Suno India podcast show ‘**Climate Emergency**’ was featured in the August newsletter of Planetary Health Alliance. Suno India has crossed over 90,000 listeners and is heading steadily towards the 100,000 listener mark.

➤ IndiaSpend’s **Factchecker.in** team won the AP award for best data journalism team portfolio (small newsroom) at the 2019 Data Journalism Awards held at Athens, Greece in June, 2019.

IndiaSpend won the second prize in the **Press Institute of India and the International Red Cross Award** for best article and photograph on a humanitarian subject. Prachi Salve from IndiaSpend won the **Road Safety Media Fellowship 2019** granted by Centre for Media Studies and supported by the WHO.

Anuradha Wal from IndiaSpend won a **fellowship** granted by the Thakur Foundation for **Investigative Reporting on Public Health for 2019**.

➤ **The Wire** has begun a sub-site for young people LiveWire (livewire.thewire.in). LiveWire focusses on covering campus issues, gender & sexuality, mental health, including socio-economic and cultural issues encountered by the youth.



Media under siege globally: Anya Schiffrin

IPSMF Inaugural Guest Lecture



Anya Schiffrin, Director of Technology, Media, and Communications specialization at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, delivered the Inaugural IPSMF Lecture on October 25, 2019.

Schiffrin related the story of independent muckraking, current trends impacting independent news media and highlighted the increasing role of philanthropic foundations in supporting independent journalism.

“Journalism globally has been under attack and the media is under siege”, Schiffrin said, adding that the need for independent media outlets is stronger than ever. This has happened precisely at the point that media entities are struggling to cope with drying revenue streams, due to- the migration of online advertising to Facebook and Google, plateauing circulation, the cost of print, ageing out of the audiences, and the challenges of competing with entities who dumb down, or manufacture outrage to garner audiences.

This has led to the decline of local news and the creation of “news deserts”, where sizeable areas do not have strong, independent news outlets. However, she said that it was also proven by

history that journalism and investigative reporting have been the strongest when the challenges to media has been the highest. “There’s a sort of flowering that takes place”, Schiffrin said.

Local and investigative news outlets are increasingly relying on philanthropy, cross-border collaboration and publishing data-driven journalism to appeal to readers. She added that to have real and tangible impact, the media could collaborate with civil society to hold the powerful to account.

She said the use of technology for newsgathering, dissemination and presentation has improved by leaps and bounds and the IPSMF grantees were at the forefront of these innovations. Schiffrin cited one of her studies, which profiled 27 small and independent muckraking news outlets from across the world, which were usually started by mainstream journalists who were laid off.

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**GRANTEE IMPACT****DTE**

● **Down to Earth's** special series on desertification garnered worldwide attention (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/desertified>). This coincided with the Conference of Parties meeting of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in New Delhi in September this year. By far this was the most expansive coverage of desertification in India with local stories from 10 states. Not only did DTE articles trigger close to 20 media articles, even the UN Deputy General Secretary shared DTE's coverage.



● As a direct result of India Development Review's (IDR) article on capacity building in the social sector, written by Amit Chandra and Pritha Venkatachalam, the leadership at many philanthropies (Omidyar Network, EdelGive Foundation, Nilekani Philanthropies, Ford Foundation, MSDF, MacArthur Foundation and Children's Investment Fund Foundation) are coming together to form a funders' collective on capacity building, which will fund organisations on institution-building activities.



● **Think Pragati's** podcast series 'The Seen and the Unseen' is downloaded around 125,000 times a month. Within the policy world, the series is looked at as a valuable guide to learn about India and it is part of the syllabus of a course titled "Democracy, Development, and Conflict in South Asia" taught at the University of California. It has had a huge impact on social media, causing people to buy more books and read more. Additionally, it has become a go-to for deep insight, as evidenced by the response to the coverage after the abrogation of Article 370.



● **IndiaSpend's** article "Why Changing Afsana Bano's Life Could Boost UP and India" (<https://bit.ly/2LeGFtA>) on the failures of a programme launched by the central government that focuses on adolescent sexual health and nutrition, goaded the Uttar Pradesh government to start a special drive on "right age for marriage" to raise awareness.

NEW GRANTEES● **Asiaville**

www.asiavillenews.com

A Asiaville, launched in January 2019, is a multilingual, multimedia news website aimed at the youth, with a focus on innovations in coverage and presentation. Started by young media entrepreneur Tuhin Menon and co-founder Sashi Kumar, a stalwart of Indian journalism, it enables a critical and participatory engagement by targeting the millennial demography. Asiaville's presentation through gaming format tools, alternative endings and immersive user-interface is aimed at generating increased user participation and interactivity. Asiaville is published in Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam and English.

● **Live History India**

www.livehistoryindia.com



Live History India (LHI), launched in 2017, is a digital platform that seeks to celebrate Indian history and heritage, basing its content on facts, research and scholarship. The platform aims to rediscover and highlight the many facets of India's vast history. LHI uses its network of about 750 experts and 150 direct contributors including academia and authors. Since its launch, it has gained significant reach on its website and social media platforms, with interesting, researched and well-narrated stories. It's recently launched Hindi edition has garnered particularly high traction.

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These founders, who started out with the sole aim of publishing good journalism and

Sustainability challenges

- A trend away from advertising revenues.
- Events do not give the returns for the time and effort spent.
- Start-up journalism entities should not be over-ambitious about expansion too soon.
- Membership models and crowd-funding do work, but usually in high-income countries.
- However, building a credible and trustworthy content can be a monetisable niche business-model.

speaking truth to power, have found that award-winning journalism did not translate to financial viability. Three years later, these outlets stayed small, continued to rely on volunteer staff and raised funds from friends and family to operate. They continued to rely on grants, small individual donations and a mix of other efforts to sustain themselves.

She said, these outlets were doing everything from opening cafes, organising events and city tours and even selling comic books to fund their journalism. However, they were not always successful in making ends meet. Therefore, the role of philanthropic funding and donor support was critical for pathbreaking journalism.

Independent news media could also see temporary boosts from trends like regulation, regime and significant political changes. But, she added that such

changes could be a double-edged sword.

News outlets need to understand the needs of their audience, not be too ambitious and build a business plan with strong business-savvy staff early on.

The global crisis in the news media is driving people and institutions to take "moonshots" and provide financial support to news outlets – for instance, James Deane with the BBC Media Action Lab, Mark Nelson with US-based Center For International Media Assistance and Drew Sullivan with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Schiffrin pointed out.

"The business crisis for media means that we need philanthropic institutions and even the government to support quality journalism," Schiffrin concluded. ■



Panel Discussion on ‘The Future of News Media & The Role of Independent Media’

Rohini Nilekani, Founder Chairperson, Arghyam, moderated a panel discussion on the role, sustainability and challenges for independent media, which followed the IPSMF inaugural lecture by Anya Schiffrin

Need for Independent Media

The session began with each of the panelists defining the mission that they stood for. While Seema Singh, Founding Editor, The Ken, said it was an attempt to bring “old school magazine journalism” that had disappeared from India, for IndiaSpend’s founder Govind Ethiraj, the effort was telling stories around under-reported and **foundational topics** like health, education, environment and gender.

Editorial Director R Jagannathan said that Swarajya was an attempt to report on the **other entrenched establishments** - media, the judiciary, the bureaucracy. While Swarajya was more into commentary when it began, they now do considerable ground reporting, thanks to the support of IPSMF, he added.

The Print’s Shekhar Gupta said that the website’s mission is to be the “Bloomberg of politics and governance in India” - **the go-to site for reporting on politics, policy and governance**. He said that IPSMF’s support had enabled The Print to expand into Hindi, Science, the Northeast and Kashmir.

The Wire was launched because of the “distaste and disenchantment” with the corporatisation of news and the role that big media was playing in India, and it was intended that The Wire will fill the need for an independent news publication that would do its journalism free of all pressures.

Press Freedom

Ethiraj said that IndiaSpend, by the nature of its work, was more into reporting the systemic failures rather than combating the government of the day. While the playbook for media freedom had changed for the worse, it was precisely because the environment for media freedom was less than conducive at present, it was **important for independent media to fill the gap**.

Jagannathan said that when different publications pick different aspects of an issue the reader gets a closer approximation of the truth. An **adversarial position** among the media entities themselves was healthy, he said.

Schiffrin pointed out that there was a global problem with distrust about the media and polarisation within it, and the solution was that if the independent media kept putting out **high-quality, fact-checked journalism**, then the audiences will learn to seek, and respect the content.

Varadarajan bemoaned the fact that the Indian media has lost the power of civilised conversations and debate. He said that one attribute of independent media has been that while the different entities may put out different points of view it is being done **without being shrill** and without indulging in a slanging match.



Moderator Rohini Nilekani (on the left) and the other panelists at the discussion held on October 25, 2019, at the Bengaluru International Centre (BIC).

Gupta asserted that **trust in media has not gone away**. He said that in the longer run, while audiences may flock to channels which may provide entertainment, the readers will not trust them nor will quality advertisers want to be associated with them. The best corrective for the media is the marketplace, he asserted.

Speaking Truth To Power

Other than the large sections of the media shying away from covering critical aspects, Varadarajan pointed out that more worrying was the fact that even when the media points out to wrongdoings, the **institutions which are supposed to take cognisance and act were not doing so**.

So also, the other challenge that the media faces is the **public apathy** on what the media uncovers. For instance, he pointed to the Kashmir situation

after the abrogation of Article 370.

Gupta pointed out that one of the ways that the incumbent puts pressure on the media is by **weaponising the denial of access**.

Jagannathan asserted that **citizen journalism** (the “Fifth Estate”) had actually democratised the media and the flow of information and expanded the freedom of the media. However, Gupta asserted that “citizen journalism was an abomination” as, like any other profession, **journalism needs skills and training** and should be left to the professional practitioners.

Trust and Brand Loyalty

Gupta pointed out that in India the only successful business model was the broadsheet newspapers and “everything else is broken”. There is a lot to learn from the dailies for the readership and the quality of advertising. The Print is building **trust and brand loyalty** with careful ideological de-hyphenation as that was one niche that was available. He said the future of news media lies in being a targeted drug for the advertiser, reaching quality audiences at the fraction of the cost of the legacy media.

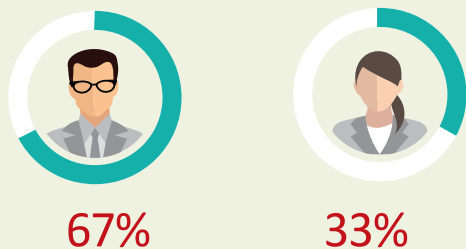
Varadarajan said individual readers would subscribe to a media product not only for the content but also if they identify with the values that the organisation stands for – **the values it enshrines or the ‘causes’ it takes up**.

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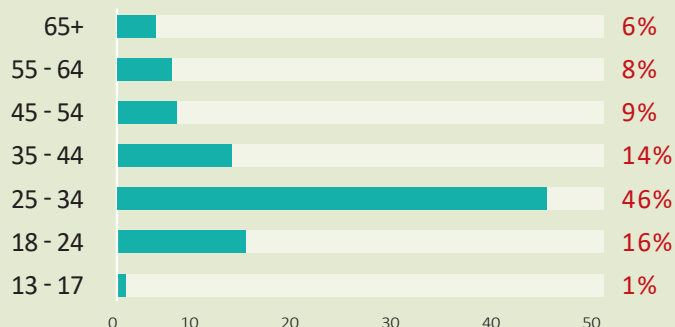


READER DEMOGRAPHICS OF IPSMF SUPPORTED MEDIA

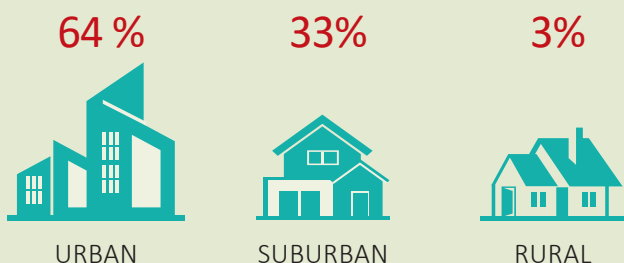
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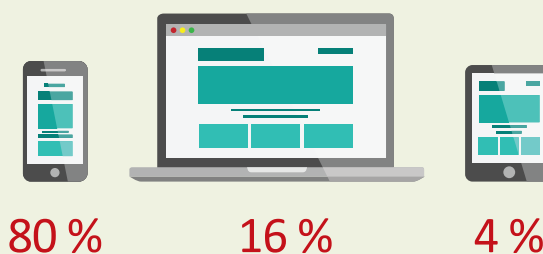
AGE



LOCATION



DEVICES



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Sustainability: The ‘reader-pay’ model

Moderator Rohini Nilekani asked the panelists if the ‘reader-pay’ model was working or if independent media will continue to depend on philanthropic funding to remain viable.

Singh said that The Ken’s focus on reader subscriptions from day-one has kicked off a virtuous cycle, giving their journalists time, money and wide editorial independence to pursue stories. She added that the entity has been “borderline profitable”

for some time. For sustainability, she said, it was important not to **understand your audience and engage with them.**

Jagannathan explained that for Swarajya the ‘reader pay’ model had worked well as they **focused on certain areas where there was good reader support.** They were able to meet 60 to 70 per cent of its costs from reader-related revenues, but the advertising support was less than par as Google and Facebook took away a significant portion of it. Therefore, they depended on donations from individuals and grants from organisations like IPSMF to break even.

Ethiraj explained that while the critical part of IndiaSpend’s funding has been IPSMF, they vigorously explore **B2B opportunities** in research, content syndication and build the brand through primary research as evidenced by around “30 to 35 citations per quarter”.

The Challenge

Other than the systemic challenges for independent media, the participants pointed to the proposed new regulations on FDI in digital media. Both Gupta and Varadarajan said these regulations were an attempt to **control the digital media under the guise of reforms.** ■

Timeline of grants

Total Commitment – ₹ 59 Cr

MEETINGS	NEW GRANTS	GRANT RENEWALS
FY 2019-20: 3 Meetings	India Development Review, Asiaville, Live History India, SC Observer and Feminism In India.	CGNetSwara, EPW, Live Law, ThePrint, The Caravan, DTE, Khabar Lahariya, AltNews, The Ken and Azhimukham.
FY 2018-19: 4 Meetings	Azhimukham, East Mojo, Imphal Free Press, Janjwar, Max Maharashtra, Media Vigil, Saptahik Sadhana, Sikkim Chronicle, SunoIndia, The Bastion, The Lede and ThePrint (Hindi and Science).	Dool News, IndiaSpend, Swarajya, The Better India, The News Minute and Think Pragati.
FY 2017-18: 8 Meetings	Alt News, Dool News, Down To Earth(DTE), KhabarLahariya, Samachara, Satyagrah, Swarajya, The Caravan, The Wire (Urdu & Marathi), Think Pragati and ThePrint.	The Better India, The Ken, The News Minute and The Wire (English).
FY 2016-17: 7 Meetings	Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), Gaon Connection, Ippodhu, Live Law, The Better India, The Ken, The News Minute, The Wire (Hindi) and WTD News.	
FY 2015-16: 5 Meetings	CGNetSwara, IndiaSpend and The Wire (English).	

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