

IndiaSpend contributor Menaka Rao won the Reach Media Award for her four-part series on **Kerala's fight against tuberculosis**

and what it can teach India: (<https://bit.ly/2luBLGV>).

In November 2019, IndiaSpend's principal correspondent Bhasker Tripathi was awarded the Young Environmental Journalist of the Year Award for 2019, by Indian Himalayas Climate Adaptation Programme's Centre for Media Studies (<https://bit.ly/38FHsg1>). In January 2020, FactChecker.in launched Protest Monitor, to document and map protests in the country (<https://bit.ly/2TLoEGy>).

**The Ken**: The Ken completed **three years of operations** in October and has become a flagship for innovative deep-reported business stories which have found healthy traction in revenues. It is one of the first Indian publications to embed **its own correspondents in the East Asian region** - Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand.



**Azhimukham**: In January 2020, Azhimukham was unanimously selected by the jury for the **Maxwell Fernandez Journalism Award**, instituted by the Alumni Association of Department of Communication and Journalism, Kerala University.

**FII**: In February, FII launched 10 free **stock-images to represent rape and gender-based violence** for mainstream media. This initiative was covered by [NewsLaundry](#) and [Midday](#). [Scroll](#) and [EPW](#) have already used FII's images.

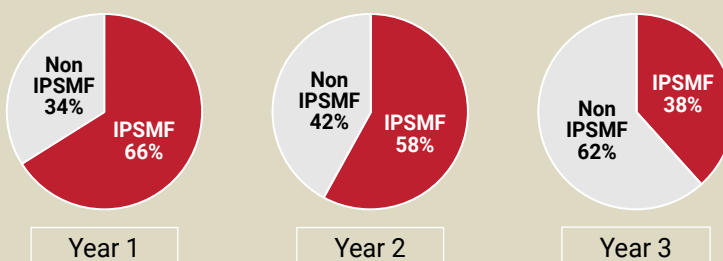
**The Wire**: The Wire was conferred the 'Best News Startup of the Year' and the 'Best Use of Video' – at the **South Asian Digital Media Awards 2019** in February 2020. The awards recognise publishers who have adopted digital media and mobile strategies to meet the "major changes in how people consume news".

**DTE**: DTE's staff reporter **Ishan Kukreti** secured the Earth Journalism Network's Asia-Pacific Investigative Environment Story Grant.

## Grants help entities stay focused on 'matching' revenue-streams

### The Path to Sustainability

Reduced y-o-y dependability on funding from IPSMF.  
Corresponding increase in other revenue streams.



Note: Based on grantees with 3-year funding: India Spend, CGNet Swara, The Wire and Live Law

IPSMF's grantees have gained a voice beyond their numbers. Their impact has been beyond the counting, and today some of the grantees lead the field in niche areas.

Be that as it may, sustainability remains the elephant in the room. These are especially trying times for media - the flailing economy coupled with the erosion of the traditional revenue streams - advertising (duopoly of Google and Facebook capturing all) and (subscriptions due to commoditisation).

It is, therefore, not surprising that the Foundation's grantees have used every method, the tried, the tested and the innovative, to facilitate revenues and growth. We examine some of them.

### Focus on building revenue streams

#### Subscriptions

Even though subscriptions as a primary revenue stream are yet to gain momentum, grantees that offer high-quality niche content have found traction.

- Live Law** which provides niche content, covering the courts on a real-time basis, has been able to convert its readership into a sustainable source of revenue through its subscription model. While current stories are offered free, Live Law

has instituted a pay-wall for archival content beyond a month. Almost **90 per cent of its revenues come from subscriptions**. Apart from individual subscriptions, Live Law has tapped into the enterprise and institutional subscriptions - law firms and law schools; and in the process become the go-to site for judicial, legal news and views.

- Down to Earth**, having leveraged its in-depth and solution-driven coverage of environment, health and livelihoods, has been successful in raising revenues through subscriptions. Though a major chunk of its subscriptions come from its combo offer of print plus online, DTE is making an effort to make its **online presence 'print plus'**, and hunker down on the increasing thirst for its content in Indian languages – Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu, other than Hindi.
- The Ken** has been the **flag-bearer of the quest for subscriptions** and sought a paying audience through its deep-reported stories with a unique voice and tone. It has found real traction in subscriptions. Retail subscriptions constitute more than **70 per cent of revenues**. Very hearteningly, 95% are annual subscriptions.

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## News & Recognition

↘ **IDR:** IDR was appointed as the [knowledge partner](#) for the [India Climate Collaborative \(ICC\)](#). The ICC is a first of its kind collaborative that is seeking to **drive investment and action around climate change** in India.

At least 10 major philanthropies – run by captains of industry, including Ratan Tata, Anand Mahindra, Rohini Nilekani, Nadir Godrej, Aditi and Rishad Premji, and Hemendra Kothari, among others – are part of this initiative.

↘ **The Bastion:** The Bastion's co-publishing partnership with [Mongabay](#) has led to its reporter, **Vaishnavi Rathore** being awarded a fellowship along with the Foundation for Ecological Security. She will be covering stories on **environmental governance in the Himalayas** over the next few months.

↘ **LHI:** LHI's first book, '[Quirky History](#)', which is **focused on young tweens/teens**, was unveiled at the Delhi World Book Fair 2020. The book has been published by HarperCollins.

↘ **The Print:** The Print has launched several new products. '[Politically Correct](#)', in which The Print's political editor analyses the most trending political topic of the week; '[Today I Learnt](#)', where young reporters explain in 60 sharp-seconds the most trending news story of the day; '[Uninterrupted](#)' – interviews of politicians, economists, diplomats and authors by Jyoti Malhotra, the national & strategic affairs editor; and '[Know Your Constitution](#)' (KYC), a one-minute video lesson on India's Constitution and its history, by Apoorva Mandhani, its legal correspondent.

↘ **Suno India:** Suno India acquired podcast [Fat. So?](#) where the hosts discuss body image, societal norms, failing at weight loss, loneliness and more. The podcast was featured in All About Eve's article '[8 Podcasts For Indian Women To Go Into 2020 Wiser, Stronger and Sharper](#)'. The podcast is poised to hit the 10K listeners milestone.

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The Ken has also **flourished in the institutional subscription** space, with about 100 corporates and 8-plus leading Management institutes - including the IIMs, ISB and the Harvard Business School, amongst its subscribers.

## Revenue streams beyond advertising and subscriptions

Apart from subscriptions, the grantees' have innovated in building a diverse set of revenue streams to build sustainable and independent newsrooms, eschewing the payroll.

### I. CONTENT CREATION

- Niche websites like **Live History India** with its deep-dive into Indian history and heritage, have been able to sell its unique skills to monetise its content through partnerships with corporates, state governments and other institutions around specific themes. This is done without diluting its core content by ensuring that partnerships overlap with editorial goals; and focus on **building annuity-type revenues** which are critical for content start-ups in the long-run.
- **Feminism in India** (FII), a niche website dedicated to amplifying the voices of women and the marginalised, has successfully raised revenues through **cause-oriented digital media campaigns** in collaboration with non-profits and corporates. Japleen Pasricha, the founder-editor, points out that brands increasingly want to be associated with causes like women empowerment and gender rights and are willing to collaborate in such campaigns to strengthen their visibility as a cause-oriented brand.
- **Dool News** covers issues of the marginalised in Kerala and has successfully exploited the potential for sponsored video content in health, travel and food. They have tried to exploit their identity as a leading local Kerala-news website to **service the needs of the local business**. Dool News leverages this **need for reach** by publishing an advertising-led print magazine of its select, most impactful, stories.
- **The Bastion** has been able to build three distinct revenue streams **i) monetising** video production, **ii) providing** services for development communication, and **iii) creating content** for Edutech companies. They have been able to monetise video content by striking partnerships with corporates, NGOs and individuals whose interests overlap with the newsroom's editorial goals. The company has also

## The sustainability mantra

1. Create **high-quality journalism** and '**smart content**' (customised to your audience needs in information, emotion and language)
2. Find your audience and niche; and **deep-connect with your readers** to convert them in to subscribers or donors.
3. **Leverage every opportunity** in revenue gathering – subscription, advertising, merchandising, content creation & services, events. Don't depend on just one source. Innovate.

*As evidenced by their growth, **donor and philanthropic funding remain critical and essential** for online independent media, especially in the initial years.*

been able to bring-in revenue through development communication services like training and workshops for NGOs.

- **East Mojo**, was unable to raise advertising revenues due to its struggles with technology behind programmatic content and the limited size of the market in the Northeast. Therefore, it has engaged in **creating sponsored content and events**, to build unique and monetisable intellectual properties.

### II. REIMAGINING NEWS CONTENT

- **Asiaville** is a grantee which has reimagined news and current affairs space for the millennial audience. It has leveraged its skills in **tailoring content** to a specific audience in different Indian-language segments for OTT platforms like Dailyhunt, Spotify and Audible, amongst others. Keeping in mind its young audience, it has **created special products** in education, personality development, etc.

Asiaville has also focused on '**hyper-local**' content creation for specific tier-1 and tier-2 cities – Trichur, Madurai, Agra, Ghaziabad, Malappuram in Kerala, etc.

- **Live Law** is on the cusp of **creating packaged content** in the form of a **historical bank of important legal cases** like Abrogation of Article 370 or the Ayodhya dispute. The bank will contain all records dating back to the first petition till the final judgement which readers can access on a paid basis.

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## GRANTEE IMPACT: RIPPLES OF CHANGE

The impact of the IPSMF grantees' stories is now increasingly in evidence. Stories that are creating positive change by forcing the powers to act, and are even cited by civil society as credible evidence in the courts. We bring you select instances.



• The CSE, the promoters of **Down to Earth** brought out the findings of its **lab study of fast-food brands** in India 'every bite kills'. The study found extremely high levels of salt, fats and trans-fats that are much above permissible levels. (<https://bit.ly/39CIX0F>)



• In partnership with HuffPost India, **Azhimukham** published two series of investigative stories on the **electoral bond scam** authored by Nitin Sethi. The series was exclusive to Azhimukham, and this remains one of the **first instances of a regional Malayalam news portal breaking a national-level investigative story**. (<https://bit.ly/39CDJ3N>)



• **The Bastion's** Vaishnavi Rathore's three-part series 'Ecology and the City' explored how ineffective and **conflicting urban governance models negatively impact the NCR's ecosystems** and the people who depend on them (<https://bit.ly/2TAYhnZ>). This article is being used in litigation by the Centre of Youth, Culture, Law and Environment against encroachment of public land in Vikasपुरi.



• A large nonprofit advisory firm created a cadre of fellows within the organisation (vs hiring analysts) based on **India Development Review's** Amrut Bang's article on lessons in **nurturing young leadership for social change** (<https://bit.ly/2PYROkq>). An Odisha based nonprofit received funding as a result of this story.

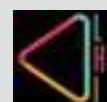


• In January, **The Lede** published an exclusive story by Rejimon Kuttappan, on how a recruitment agency accredited by Kerala's NORKA had demanded a **'freedom fee' from migrant workers** who wanted to come back home from Kuwait. The Lede's report was picked up by the Indian embassy, an investigation launched, and a number of poor domestic migrant women-workers were helped to get back home. The agency and NORKA too are under scrutiny. (<https://bit.ly/2lxxH8U>).

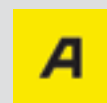
The Lede's Jeff Joseph did a seven-part series, **painstaking ground-research on the quarrying industry in Kerala**. The series highlighted the corruption and loopholes being exploited by quarry owners and political leaders to continue quarrying. (<https://bit.ly/3aH6pJ0>).



• Trader body Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh approached India's competition regulator, Competition Commission of India, against e-commerce companies Flipkart and Amazon alleging predatory practices. They cited **The Ken's stories** with exclusive reporting on Flipkart and Amazon in their case as **evidence**. The two stories cited are: [Discount or death: how Amazon, Flipkart drive their festive sales, and Of, by, for Amazon: Private labels, public consequences](https://bit.ly/2v6cQGF).



• In February, **Live History India** signed an agreement with Peepal Tree Pvt Ltd to help create a platform and be the **knowledge partners for Indian artisans and crafts**, so that their work can find an international marketplace and thus help in the revival of India's famed crafts.



• **Asiaville's** story on environmentalist Simon Oraon Minj, popularly known as the 'Waterman of Jharkhand', prompted the **ST commission to direct the Jharkhand government** to help him financially. The Padma Shri-awardee had been living in poverty, without even an old-age pension. (<https://bit.ly/3cBpYnY>)



• **The Caravan** carried a story on how detainees, who were part of the protests against CAA, were denied legal counsel and medical help at the Daryaganj police station in December 2019. **The story was cited as evidence in a petition** filed (by Amicus Curiae Aparna Bhat on 07 February 2020) in the Supreme Court seeking protection for the detained (<https://bit.ly/2v6cQGF>).



• **Sikkim Chronicle** was the first media house to take up the story of the **social boycott of a newly married inter-caste couple** at Dalapchand village. The reportage spurred the district administration to intervene and take remedial measures (<https://bit.ly/2lvJxjJ>).

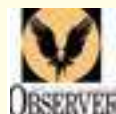
## NEW GRANTEE

**The India Forum** [www.theindiaforum.in](http://www.theindiaforum.in)



The India Forum (TIF), run by the Vichar Trust, is a digital 'journal- magazine' that aims to deepen the conversations on contemporary issues. Helmed by Rammanohar Reddy, eminent editor, it offers serious analysis, commentary and reflections on contemporary issues in a manner that is accessible to a wider audience. The portal offers a range of in-depth and well researched articles on topics spanning education, climate change, caste, defence, politics and gender, among a host of other issues.

**Kashmir Observer** [www.kashmirobserver.net](http://www.kashmirobserver.net)



Kashmir Observer (KO), in its 23rd year of publishing, is also one of Kashmir Valley's first online ventures. It has remained steadfastly independent and balanced in its editorial and journalism in spite of enormous odds in a conflict zone. KO is now poised to make renewed efforts in the online medium with ground-reported stories on critical and, hitherto, uncovered issues by going beyond the conflict. It is also set to relaunch its online television channel 'Observer TV'.



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**III. MERCHANDISING, PUBLISHING**

Some of IPSMF grantees have also explored the avenue of **merchandising** as a source of revenue, built around a **cause or an identity**.

- **Feminism In India - FII** is **designing products around feminism**, gender equity and women's wellness to be sold through their online store. This also helps in branding and visibility.
- **Khabar Lahariya** has also **explored merchandising** through its sale of products like T-shirts that are branded around Bundelkhand (the area they cover) and other KL branded products.
- **DTE** also plans to explore merchandising by **selling products revolving around content**. It also publishes the Annual State of the Environment Report. Interestingly it has explored publishing food books, which leverage DTE's deep insight into hinterland India and its bio-diversity to bring recipes from the far corners.

DTE has successfully **repurposed its content into topical books** that are available on the DTE website. Examples include: Body Burden – Antibiotic Resistance, a theme-based, biannual report. This has also been an important source of revenue for DTE.

**IV. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

The deprioritizing of news by social media platforms means that while the traction may be high in terms of numbers, monetization is still an issue – especially for news sites. However, some entities have broken the code.

- **The Print**, for instance, has been able to leverage social media, especially YouTube. It now earns a major chunk of its **commercial revenues from social media**. Longform programming like 'Cut the Clutter' anchored by Shekhar Gupta and 'Word On the Street' by Shahbaz Ansar have done extremely well in terms of **both traction and revenue**. Live events - which are streamed on social media, other than adding to branding and visibility also bring in revenues.
- **Dool News** is also able to raise revenues by monetising its social media presence that includes revenues coming from Facebook's Instant Articles, ad-breaks and YouTube advertisements.

**V. INNOVATION**

While grantees aim at conventional sources of revenues, innovation is also high on the agenda.

- **The News Minute (TNM)** is launching a unique experiment which combines the strengths of hyper-local content, leveraging

the digital platform to build a community, and exploiting offline synergies.

TNM whose primary source of revenues is advertisements (about 55 per cent) is launching a **paid membership facility** for the NRIs, who constitute about 20 per cent of their audience and are deeply engaged. TNM is **building a community** by providing discussion boards, access to editors, customized events, etc. The effort is targeted at the South Indian diaspora, in the US and the Middle East, who are keen and curious to know about news and events from the places of their origin. TNM seeks to provide an 'emotional connect' to the audience by reporting on local issues – going hyper-local to the extent of even providing customized news of an event, a locality or a development on demand.

- **Live Law**, in a similar vein, has begun a **unique feature 'Firm View'** that enables legal firms and lawyers to showcase their work, post job-vacancies, and contribute articles, at a cost. The Live Law editor points out that this facility **fills a gap**, where lawyers and legal firms are not allowed to advertise, and therefore 'Firm view' enables the law firms to promote and brand themselves.

**VI. PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING**

**Individual donations and philanthropic funding** remain a critical part of independent media's survival and growth. All of the Foundation's grantees have benefited by the funding support offered to them at critical stages of their life. Some of the entities flourishing today were brought back from the brink because of the Foundation's intervention.

For entities like **The Wire** and **Alt News** individual donors and philanthropic funding has been a more than significant part of their revenues, from donors who identify with the 'cause' in their journalism.

**Alt News** founder Pratik Sinha emphasizes the **importance of creating an emotional connect** with individual donors through constant interaction and devoting considerable time and attention. **Connected and engaged donors** also act as force-multipliers, through 'word of mouth' publicity adding to credibility and reinforcing the cause.

**The Wire's** call to action for support has found **clear traction with its readers**. However, as **The Wire's** editor, Siddharth Varadarajan points out, donations and philanthropic funding can be a double-edged sword as **non-profits cannot raise more than 20 per cent from commercial revenues** per the tax laws.

**TIMELINE OF GRANTS**

Grant commitment Rs. 62.11 Cr

MEETINGS	NEW GRANTS	GRANT RENEWALS
<b>FY 2019-20:</b> <b>6 Meetings</b>	India Development Review, Asiaville, Live History India, SC Observer, Feminism In India, The India Forum, Kashmir Observer.	CGNet Swara, EPW, Live Law, ThePrint, The Caravan, Down To Earth, Khabar Lahariya, Alt News, Azhimukham, The Ken, Dool News, EastMojo, Max Maharashtra and Satyagrah.
<b>FY 2018-19:</b> <b>4 Meetings</b>	Azhimukham, East Mojo, Imphal Free Press, Janjwar, Max Maharashtra, Media Vigil, Saptahik Sadhana, Sikkim Chronicle, Suno India, The Bastion, The Lede and ThePrint (Hindi and Science).	Dool News, IndiaSpend, Swarajya, The Better India, The News Minute and Think Pragati.
<b>FY 2017-18:</b> <b>8 Meetings</b>	Alt News, Dool News, Down To Earth, Khabar Lahariya, Samachara, Satyagrah, Swarajya, The Caravan, The Wire (Urdu & Marathi), Think Pragati and The Print	The Better India, The Ken, The News Minute and The Wire (English).
<b>FY 2016-17:</b> <b>7 Meetings</b>	Economic and Political Weekly, Gaon Connection, Live Law, The Better India, The Ken, The News Minute, The Wire (Hindi) and WTD News.	
<b>FY 2015-16:</b> <b>5 Meetings</b>	CGNet Swara, IndiaSpend and The Wire (English).	