The composition of IPSMF’s grantees is a testament to the rise of women entrepreneurs in the independent media space – with a significant 26 per cent of the grantee founders being women.

In contrast, digital news media is marked by a host of women founders, who apart from steering the editorial direction are also responsible for sales, marketing and sustainability.

Women entrepreneurs in legacy media organisations are a rarity.

To the fore despite challenges
Contd. from Page 1

Minute (TNM) and Padma Priya, Co-Founder of Suo India share a similar view that funders are more forthcoming to invest in ventures led by men.

Smarinita Shetty, Co-Founder, India Development Review (IDR) points to a mental barrier, among donors against big-ticket funding to women entrepreneurs because decision-makers at large foundations and corporates tend to be men and the sales narrative that many of them expect is “hype and gloss”. According to her what seems to get the attention is what is being ‘sold’ rather than the tangible outcomes that have or are being achieved.

Another issue that women media start-ups face is the assumption that ‘women’ organisations should confine themselves to women’s issues. Japleen Pasricha, Founder of Feminism in India (FII) asserts that everything is a women's issue from the economy to politics, from business to sports, from domestic violence to rising oil prices. Hence, she says, FII attempts to “analyse the current socio-political and cultural affairs through a gender lens, instead of just saying that we only work on gender-related topics.”

Says Kavita Devi, Editor of Khabar Lahariya (KL), as the world was going digital, with the mobile phone being ubiquitous, even among the women of the villages, KL decided to transition from print to digital in the way they covered and disseminated their stories – through the mobile phone.

Prema Sridevi, Founder of The Probe, points to ‘patriarchy’ as a more entrenched bias in the raising of funds. “Women’s jobs are seen as a “second job,” the first jobs being seen as taking care of the family.

While being aware of their identity as women, the single-biggest thrust of these women entrepreneurs is to explore and create journalism that mainstream media is increasingly eschewing – covering and raising issues that are socially relevant, public-spirited and from the ground – going beyond the prevalent model of mindless and raucous talking-head shows in the media.

According to Prema, the root cause of most problems of mainstream media is the ownership structure. She feels digital media is the solution – it is inexpensive, there is no need for large offices or flashy studios, its reach is more and it supports the membership or subscription model of journalism. She believes that independent journalism can thrive through digital media platforms.

Challenge of fundraising

Fundraising for most of the grantees has been a perennial challenge. Barkha Dutt, the founder of Mojo Story, is of the view that gender does become an obstacle for the most successful of women. Women are mentally conditioned to not seek investments commensurate with their worth, while men on the other hand do not restrain from hustling for funds.

For Barkha, alongside securing grants, it was important to work towards building a successful self-sustaining model, which is not

Contd. on Page 3
dependent on investors. **Mojo Story** required to be conservative and to enable expansion aided by equity infusion.

For Padma Priya, fundraising for **Suno India** becomes an even more onerous task, in explaining to non-media focused donors why media advocacy work is important as most are used to funding conventional NGOs.

Smarnita feels that funders do not understand the key role that media and knowledge play in influencing and driving long-term sustainable change. Her venture IDR was required to first bootstrap and then attract those funders who had made an effort to study and understand the social sector. However, this pool being very limited, it has been a constant battle for them to educate the larger funding universe about the benefits of funding entities like IDR.

**Attracting the right talent and building a strong team**

And no successful organisation rests on the shoulders of the founders alone. Bringing together a group of passionate individuals who work tirelessly towards a common goal translates the entrepreneur’s journey into reality.

Other than the task of generating revenues and funding, the founders also have the challenge of finding the right skill sets, especially people with “lived experiences”. The challenge is also to motivate and inspire the team to align with the core values of the organisation.

Dhanya says that **TNM** other than using the network for recommendations for candidates, also casts its net wide, including blind applications. In order to keep the hunt for talent open and also keep the biases out, their mailboxes are open for blind pitches so that people who don't have any ‘connections’ but have something important to say can reach out to them, she adds.

However, **The Probe**’s Prema thinks that while many people want to get employed, what she finds missing in candidates while hiring are the necessary skill sets. “And those with even a fraction don't have the patience to learn and work on their core function. They get easily swayed and attracted to the negative sensational glamour side of the news.”

Barkha believes that a team has to be diverse and there has to be a conscious attempt by the leadership and that does not happen on its own. At **Mojo Story**, the key leadership roles are all held by women and a conscious effort is made to be inclusive.

The challenges that Kavita faced when it came to building a team at **KL** was graduating women from the grassroots to become reporters, as they had not only to face social derision from the local community but also needed to train their ‘new born’ reporters.

Many a time, the families would not allow them to work and Kavita would have step in to counsel and persuade their daughters to become reporters. She adds that KL has striven to provide opportunities to women and young girls from diverse backgrounds and communities.

**Growing and sustaining reach and traffic**

As with any media organisation, one of the biggest struggles that digital media entrepreneurs face is of growing and sustaining their audiences on their websites and other media platforms.

According to Japleen, the sensitivity of **FII**'s content has also affected their reach numbers as a lot of their content revolves around women’s health, menstruation, gender violence, discrimination, etc. This has also had an adverse effect on the monetisation of content.

Smarnita suggests exploring non-traditional ways to grow traffic like exploring republishing of content which effectively worked for IDR whose content is republished by various mainstream media and digital websites.

It is essential to have the required skill set and knowledge of digital

Contd. on Page 5
contractors were engaged in few months. The money would be released in a come on record and assured that Corporation Limited (KPDCL) the Kashmir Power Distribution paid by the government, power contractors who were not problems faced by the Kashmir Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change and Climate Suno India was invited by the plugging and mitigation and adaptation efforts Trends to attend a workshop titled "Waves: What can you" After the release of the story "Heat and the government do to beat the heat?" A report that highlighted the plight of women vegetable sellers of Mao, and the need for a proper market shed for them to sell their farm produce daily led to the opening of the long-awaited Mao-Imphal market at Kabo Leikai Nongchup in Imphal West. Scheduled Tribes Department who Kerala Scheduled Castes and intervention of officials of the Kozhinjampara Panchayat of Palakkad District, led to the intervention of officials of the Kerala Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Department who have promised necessary action for the rehabilitation of these families. Churachandpur district without the construction of a road in the far-flung areas in the valley. electrifying remote villages and far-flung areas in the valley.

**Article 14** An ambitious writing project that took nearly a year to research seeks to explain why India is where it is today on civil liberties and what may lie ahead. This article chronicles the systematic targeting of critics and the erosion of the rule of law through surveillance, application of stringent sedition laws and the use of "national interest" as a convenient prop.

**Live History India** A story on the pathetic state of Jogeshwari Caves of Mumbai, which dates back to the 6th Century CE, evoked a response from Maharasthra's then tourism minister, who said that the government is preparing a plan to restore the site.

**The News Minute** Following the story on the anguish of families awaiting justice, seven years after the killing of 20 men from Tamil Nadu in an 'encounter' by the AP Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Special Task Force (RSASTF), CM MK Stalin responded and promised them legal assistance. A report on the Chennai Police's bid to cover up a custodial death at the G5 Secretariat Colony police station led to the transfer of the case to the CB-CID and the suspension of three policemen.

**Max Maharashtra** A series of reports on how no action had been taken in increasing the height of a bridge on the Yerela river in Sangli district of the state despite lives being lost during floods led to the sanction of Rs 7 crores for building a new bridge, by the then Minister of State Vishwajit Kadam.

**Democratic Charkha** A report on the plight of over 250 tribal children from Katihar in Bihar who had to drop out due to the closure of the primary school forced the State government to reopen the school.

**Investigation** on the callousness and negligence of a doctor conducting free eye operations as part of a free eye treatment camp, which led to 20 out of 60 operated patients losing their sight in Muzaffarpur in UP, resulted in administration acting swiftly to compensate the victims and also initiate action against the doctor.

**HW News** A report on the six-month-long struggle and discrimination faced by a trans woman in securing a room at the hostel at Panjab University due to her sexual orientation, ensured the allotment of hostel room to her and also led the University to make a permanent block in the hostel for transgenders.

**EastMojo** The coverage of the harassment faced by a Naga senior citizen at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati led to the administration apologising for their shocking behaviour.

**Alt News** Alt News reported how its rigorous pursuit of accounts on Facebook and YouTube, which foment hate speech and instigate violence against communities, has led to the "de-platforming" of these dubious instigators.
45 Grantees • 15 States • 10 Languages
Hindi, Assamese, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu & English

Languages

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marketing and promotion for a media entrepreneur to successfully work on increasing reach.

Strong support system
For most of the women entrepreneurs, support from family and close networks has been a key factor in making their entrepreneurial journey successful. Dhanya explains that it is not easy for a person in their mid-career to suddenly decide to begin an entrepreneurial venture. “It requires ideating, suggestions and a good dose of skepticism, which can be given by those in one’s close circles.”

For Kavita, the support from the Foundation has enabled KL to spread their coverage into the hinterlands, helping the organisation and its team to expand.

Barkha says, one of the biggest support systems has been the support of organisations like the IPSMF. The loyal viewer base that she has built over the years has alsopitched in with their contributions to show their trust and support.

Networking with peers
A key asset in entrepreneurship is networking. It enables one to thrive in the ecosystem and provides access to a pool of support, resources, talent and guidance. The right network enables one to succeed and also has your back in times of need.

For Japleen, the strong network of fellow women media entrepreneurs, women groups, etc., provided vital support in terms of resources and guidance. While for Prema, being a part of the YouTube Creators programme provided her access to a pool of like-minded individuals who shared their learnings and challenges which helped her in her journey as a media entrepreneur.

Trolling and cyberbullying affecting the work
Trolling and cyberbullying are seemingly intensified if one is a woman entrepreneur – they are not only targeted for their work but also for their gender.

For Japleen, who faces constant trolling and hate on social media platforms, she has had to curtail her presence. Mini Menon has a clear protocol for dealing with trolls where they do not react or respond to provocative commentary and ensuring that they do their jobs in the most balanced and thorough way. The goodwill LHI has been able to build ensures that their readers have in many instances backed them when they have been under pressure.

Kavita points out that she and KL’s reporters have faced trolling and bullying but they have stood firm.

For Barkha, death threats, abuse and slander online are a frequent affair and the online space is a “daily war zone”. She addresses the issue by not engaging with what she thinks is below the belt or a comment borne out of malice.

Despite the many challenges – raising resources, fighting subtle and sometimes open patriarchy, building a skilled and committed team, facing trolling and intersectional discrimination – women entrepreneurs in the independent digital media space – as the grantees of the Foundation show – are increasingly making their presence felt.

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News Dissemination on Online Platforms - IPSMF Grantees

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