



JanDPI: Centering People in Digital Public Infrastructure



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Background and Context

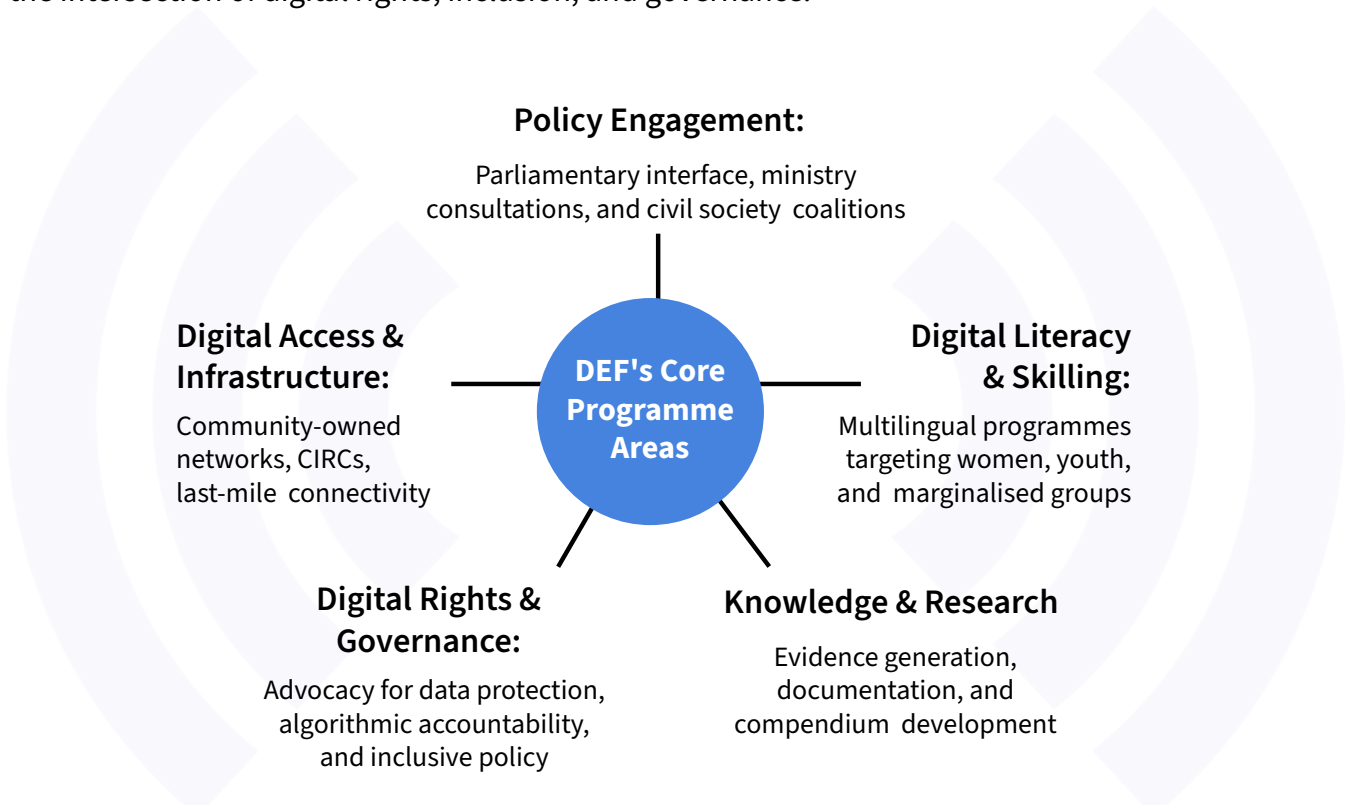
India's digital transformation over the past decade represents one of the most ambitious and consequential experiments in public technology adoption globally. The rapid build-out of Digital Public Infrastructure, from Aadhaar-based identity authentication to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DigiLocker, ONDC, the Open Network for Digital Commerce, and the emerging DPDP framework has reshaped the everyday lives of over a billion people.

Yet, as DPI systems scale, a fundamental tension has emerged: infrastructure designed for the public is not always designed with the public. Marginalised communities, especially rural women, urban migrants, persons with disabilities, linguistic minorities, and informal sector workers, often encounter DPI as an obstacle rather than an enabler. Algorithmic exclusions, low digital literacy, insufficient local-language interfaces, and intermediary dependency continue to widen existing inequalities rather than close them.

The 8th Digital Citizen Summit 2026 is convened at this inflection point. It brings together the evidence, voices, and aspirations necessary to reorient India's DPI trajectory toward a genuinely people-centric paradigm, one in which communities are not merely end-users of digital systems but active participants in their design, governance, and improvement.

About Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)

DEF's work is anchored in the belief that meaningful connectivity requires more than broadband pipes: it demands locally relevant content, culturally appropriate interfaces, community-owned access infrastructure, and robust digital rights protections. The Digital Citizen Summit (DCS), co-hosted annually by DEF, has grown into one of India's foremost platforms for deliberating on the intersection of digital rights, inclusion, and governance.



The 8th Digital Citizen Summit 2026: Overview

Theme

JanDPI: Centering People in Digital Public Infrastructure

The theme reflects a deliberate call to interrogate how India's DPI stack serves its most underserved citizens. It foregrounds the human dimension of public digital systems: accessibility, agency, accountability, and dignity.

The core vision of JanDPI lies in building people-centric Digital Public Infrastructure that focuses the "people" in DPI, and places people at the centre of design, governance, and delivery of digital services and technology. JanDPI goes beyond building platforms and software and ensures that the 'people' can use these systems locally, affordably, and without exclusion, through shared access points, assisted services, offline and low-tech options, regional languages, and socially inclusive design.

Mission Statement

To build a community-led evidence base on people-centric DPI practices, amplify voices from the margins of the digital economy, foster multi-stakeholder dialogue between citizens, civil society, government, and technologists, and advance policy recommendations that place human rights and social equity at the centre of India's DPI agenda.

Edition History & Legacy

The Digital Citizen Summit has, over seven preceding editions, established a distinctive identity as a platform that centres lived experience over technical abstraction. Past editions have addressed themes including digital rights, data sovereignty, social media governance, platform accountability, and algorithmic bias. The 8th edition builds upon this legacy by turning its lens on the foundational infrastructure layer itself.



Why People-Centric DPI? The Case for This Theme

The DPI Momentum

India has emerged as a global reference model for DPI development. The India Stack comprising Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and allied systems has enabled unprecedented scale in service delivery. The G20 presidency in 2023 positioned India as an advocate for DPI adoption in the Global South. International bodies including the World Bank, the UNDP, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have cited India's DPI model as a template for development.

The Inclusion Gap

However, the benefits of DPI have not been distributed equitably. Multiple studies, including DEF's own community surveys and independent research, point to persistent gaps:

- Authentication failures due to biometric mismatch continue to exclude elderly, manual labour workers, and persons with disabilities from Aadhaar-linked entitlements.
- UPI adoption remains concentrated in urban, educated, and formally employed populations; informal workers, rural women, and linguistic minorities face significant barriers.
- Digital document requirements for government benefits create exclusion for those without consistent internet access, device ownership, or digital literacy.
- Low local-language support in DPI interfaces limits accessibility for the 500 million+ Indians who are not proficient in English or Hindi.
- Grievance redressal mechanisms within DPI systems are opaque, inaccessible, and structurally biased against low-income users.

The Policy Moment

The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act 2023, the National Data Governance Framework Policy, the emerging AI governance discussions, and ongoing reforms to welfare delivery systems collectively create a critical policy window. How DPI is designed and governed in this period will shape the digital rights of Indian citizens for generations. A people-centric intervention in this moment is not just timely but essential.



The DPI Special Series : Building Community Evidence

A signature output of DCS 2026 will be the DPI Special Series, a curated documentation of community-level practices, experiences, and case studies that demonstrate what people-centric DPI looks like in practice. The Special Series will serve both as a knowledge resource and a policy advocacy instrument. Digital Empowerment Foundation, in collaboration with Centre for Development Policy and Practice and APNIC Foundation, invites experts, scholars, and practitioners working on Digital Public Infrastructure in the Asia Pacific Region to submit abstracts of research papers, essays, commentaries or case studies on the topic of 'Centring People in Digital Public Infrastructure'. These contributions will form a publication which will be released during the Digital Citizen Summit 2026.

DPI Special Series

Published report documenting community-level DPI case studies with policy implications

DCS 2026 Declaration

Formal policy recommendations from multi-stakeholder deliberation

Summit Proceedings Report

Full documentation of the December 9 summit including session summaries

Media Coverage

Press coverage targeting national and regional media outlets

Digital Resource Hub

Online repository of compendium, proceedings, videos, and community stories

Social Media Campaign

Pre-summit digital campaign to amplify community voices and raise DPI awareness

Target Participants and Stakeholders

DCS 2026 is designed to be genuinely multi-stakeholder in composition. The regional consultations will prioritise grassroots and community representation, while the national summit will integrate community voices with policy, technical, and civil society perspectives.



Stakeholder Groups

Community Representatives

Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of DPI from rural and urban settings; women SHG members; informal workers; persons with disabilities; linguistic minorities

Civil Society Organisations

Digital rights groups, welfare rights organisations, grassroots NGOs, community networks across states

Government

Officials from DoT, MeitY, UIDAI, NPCI, DBT Mission, state IT departments, and district administration

Technology Sector

DPI developers, fintech companies, open-source communities, accessibility specialists

International Community

Development organisations, foreign diplomatic missions, Global South DPI networks

Academia & Research

Digital governance researchers, economists, sociologists, legal scholars

Media:

Journalists covering technology policy, rural development, and digital rights



Key Thematic Areas for Deliberation

The following thematic areas will structure discussions across both regional consultations and the national summit. Each theme is grounded in observed gaps in India's current DPI deployment and informed by DEF's community research.

Theme 1

DPI & Digital Identity: Ensuring authentication systems are error-tolerant, accessible, and rights-protecting for all citizens

Theme 2

Financial DPI & Last-Mile Inclusion: Making payment and financial infrastructure work for the unbanked, informal, and rural populations

Theme 3

DPI in Welfare Delivery: Reforming the digitisation of social protection to prevent exclusion and enable dignified access

Theme 4

Data Rights & Community Data Governance: Implementing DPDP in ways that protect and empower communities rather than corporate interests

Theme 5

Language, Accessibility & Cultural Inclusion: Designing DPI that serves India's linguistic diversity and disability rights commitments

Theme 6

Connectivity Infrastructure as DPI: Treating last-mile internet access as a foundational public good

Theme 7

DPI Governance & Accountability: Building transparent, participatory, and grievance-responsive governance for DPI systems



Strategic Significance

DCS 2026 arrives at a moment when the global conversation on DPI is intensifying. India's DPI model is being cited and adapted from Africa to Latin America. Yet the domestic evidence base on who DPI is actually working for, remains thin and often inaccessible to policymakers. The DPI Compendium will help fill this gap.

The summit's three-phase architecture ensures that the national policy conversation is preceded and informed by substantive community consultation. This is not merely procedural: it is an epistemological commitment to treating community knowledge as valid evidence for policy.

Why DCS 2026 Matters

- First structured, community-evidenced assessment of India's DPI stack from a rights and inclusion perspective
- Bridges the gap between grassroots DPI experience and national policy formation • Produces a durable knowledge resource (DPI Compendium) accessible to researchers, civil society, and policymakers
- Positions Indian civil society as a credible voice in the global DPI debate
- Contributes to a more informed, inclusive, and accountable DPI governance framework

Contact & Engagement

For partnership inquiries, speaker nominations, community participation, or media accreditation, please reach out to the Digital Empowerment Foundation:

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