

SUGGESTIVE GUIDELINES FOR PAPER WRITERS



Theme 1:

Digital Futures: Technology, Society, and Well-being in a Changing World

Advancements in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital platforms, big data, and automation are fundamentally reconfiguring the structures through which societies organise labour, deliver services, exercise power, and produce meaning. Far from being neutral forces of progress, these technologies are deeply embedded in political economies that determine who benefits from digitalisation and who is left further behind. While this has led to unprecedented opportunities for innovation and economic growth, it has also given rise to new forms of exclusion, surveillance, and precarity, raising urgent questions about justice, rights, and governance in digital spaces. Critical inquiry is needed into how technological change intersects with existing social inequalities, particularly for marginalised communities, women, persons with disabilities, and populations across the Global South. Participants are encouraged to explore both the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation, bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to interrogate its implications for marginalised communities and developing countries.

Participants are encouraged to engage with, but are not limited to, the following research questions:

- What is the impact of automation on labour markets in low and middle-income countries, particularly among workers in the informal sector?
- How does platform-mediated gig work reshape labour relations, income security, and worker identity across rapidly urbanising Indian cities?
- In what ways do algorithmic systems embedded in social welfare and public service platforms reproduce or amplify existing socioeconomic and caste-based inequalities?
- To what extent do digital financial services, such as mobile banking and fintech platforms, improve financial inclusion for marginalised and rural communities?
- How does differential access to digital infrastructure shape economic mobility and patterns of social inclusion or exclusion in developing countries?
- What role do community-based digital literacy programmes play in enabling substantive participation in the digital economy?
- How do digital surveillance technologies affect civil liberties and political participation?



- How can AI governance frameworks be designed to reflect the ethical values, developmental priorities, and epistemic diversity of non-Western contexts?
- In what ways do social media ecosystems shape public discourse and democratic participation in developing countries?
- How are governments in the Global South approaching the regulation of digital platforms, and what are the implications of these regulatory choices for development outcomes?



Theme 2

Culture and Development: Intersections, Contestations and Institutions

The relationship between culture and development has long been a site of intellectual and political contestation. Where earlier modernisation paradigms tended to treat culture as an obstacle to be overcome, contemporary development scholarship increasingly recognises cultural values, identities, practices, and indigenous knowledge systems as constitutive forces that actively shape development pathways and their outcomes; yet this recognition remains uneven. Developmental interventions continue to encounter deep tensions between externally designed frameworks and locally embedded cultural logics, raising persistent questions about legitimacy, representation, and the sustainability of change. Institutions, both formal and informal, serve as critical mediating structures in these encounters, either enabling culturally resonant development or reinforcing the marginalisation of non-Western epistemologies and indigenous perspectives. Participants are encouraged to interrogate these dynamics critically and examine the role of institutions in shaping these interactions, as well as how cultural dimensions of governance, social norms, community mobilisation, and contestations for heritage interact with development processes across diverse contexts.

Participants are encouraged to engage with, but are not limited to, the following research questions:

- How do social norms and cultural values shape women's agency and participation in economic and political life, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities?
- In what ways does language policy in education affirm or erode cultural identity, mother-tongue learning, and community well-being across linguistically diverse societies?
- What are the short-term and long-term developmental consequences of displacement?
- What tensions arise between the preservation of cultural heritage and the imperatives of economic development in rapidly urbanising or resource-extractive regions?

- How do indigenous knowledge systems contribute to sustainable natural resource management, and what institutional arrangements best facilitate their meaningful integration into development planning?
- What role do informal cultural institutions, such as community councils, religious bodies, and traditional governance structures, play in enabling or obstructing pro-poor development interventions?
- How do processes of intercultural dialogue, negotiation, and contestation in India influence the governance and equitable distribution of public goods and services?
- How can development organisations operationalise culturally sensitive programmes that acknowledge and respect indigenous epistemologies while simultaneously advancing equity and rights-based objectives?
- In what ways do dominant international development narratives and frameworks marginalise or displace local cultural identities?
- How do postcolonial legacies, including institutional path dependencies and epistemic hierarchies, continue to shape the design, conditionality, and impact of international development assistance?



Theme 3

Education, Health, Nutrition, and Social Protection in India's Development

India has one of the world's most extensive architectures of social provisioning, encompassing schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN), the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), and the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), yet the country continues to register deficits in learning outcomes, nutritional status, and universal healthcare access. The persistence of these gaps is not incidental, but reflects deep structural inequalities rooted in caste, gender, geography, and class, as well as the chronic challenges of translating policy into effective ground-level delivery. Understanding the dynamics of this implementation gap and designing appropriate interventions requires rigorous analysis of programme design, political economy, local governance, and community-level processes. Participants are invited to critically assess the effectiveness of public welfare programmes, examine patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and explore how data systems, frontline institutions, and participatory approaches can be mobilised to improve outcomes for India's most vulnerable populations.

Participants are encouraged to engage with, but are not limited to, the following research questions:

- In what ways do intersecting inequalities of caste, class, gender, and geography affect the awareness, access, and utilisation of social protection entitlements in rural and tribal communities?



- How do infrastructure deficits, teacher accountability mechanisms, and household poverty interact to shape educational achievement?
- How effective have conditional cash transfer and direct transfer schemes been in addressing nutritional deficiencies among children?
- What has been the role of frontline health workers, including ASHAs and Anganwadi functionaries, in improving maternal, neonatal, and child health outcomes in underserved and remote areas?
- What have been the inclusion and exclusion effects of Aadhaar-linked digital identification systems in the delivery of food, healthcare, and welfare entitlements?
- What are the principal barriers to achieving universal health coverage in India, and how do these barriers vary across states, districts, and/or socioeconomic groups?
- How has the implementation of the National Food Security Act affected food security and nutritional outcomes across different population groups and agro-ecological zones?
- How do the capacities and accountability structures of local governance bodies such as Gram Panchayats influence the quality and coverage of social service delivery?
- What lessons can be drawn from state-level policy innovations in education and health for designing nationally scalable reforms?
- How does the interaction between public and private healthcare providers shape equity, quality, and affordability of health services across urban and rural India?



Theme 4

Regions, Resources, and Development: Comparative Perspectives from Indian States

Regional disparities remain a defining feature of India's development trajectory, reflecting deep-seated differences in resource endowments, ecological conditions, institutional capacity, and historical trajectories. The relationship between natural resources and development outcomes is neither linear nor uniform; in several cases, regions endowed with minerals, forests, or water resources continue to experience uneven growth, ecological stress, and distributive conflicts. This raises critical questions about how political economy dynamics, governance structures, and policy choices mediate the translation of resources into inclusive development. At the same time, spatial inequalities are reinforced by variations in infrastructure, market access, and state capacity, producing divergent pathways of structural transformation across states. Understanding these differences requires moving beyond aggregate indicators to examine the interplay between geography, institutions, and history in shaping development outcomes.

Participants are encouraged to engage with, but are not limited to, the following research questions:

- What are the key factors that explain variations in development outcomes across Indian states, particularly in terms of growth, human development, and structural transformation?
- How do differences in regional contexts shape the trajectories of economic and social development across states?
- How do natural resource endowments influence development pathways, and under what conditions do they contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth?
- In what ways do geographical factors such as location, connectivity, and ecological conditions affect access to opportunities and development outcomes?
- How do institutional capacity and quality of governance shape the utilisation and management of resources across regions?
- What has been the role of public policy, including regional development programmes and fiscal transfers, in addressing inter-state disparities?
- How do intergovernmental arrangements and fiscal federalism influence regional equity and development outcomes?
- In what ways do historical trajectories continue to influence present-day regional inequalities?
- What explains the differences in sectoral transformation and industrialisation patterns across states?
- What lessons can be drawn from comparative state-level experiences to inform more inclusive and context-sensitive development strategies?



Theme 5

Education, Knowledge Systems, and Well-being

Education, when understood beyond the confines of formal schooling, encompasses a plurality of knowledge systems—including indigenous, traditional, and experiential forms—that shape how individuals and communities interpret, navigate, and sustain their social and economic worlds. However, dominant education systems have historically privileged formal, standardised knowledge, often marginalising community-based epistemologies and limiting their role in shaping development outcomes and well-being. This raises important questions about inclusion, relevance, and the relationship between knowledge and lived realities. At the same time, contemporary transformations, particularly digitalisation and changing labour markets, are reshaping knowledge hierarchies, access, and the value attached to different forms of learning.



Participants are encouraged to engage with, but are not limited to, the following research questions:

- How can education be understood in relation to broader dimensions of individual and collective well-being, including social, cultural, and economic aspects?
- What are the key limitations of formal education systems in addressing diverse learning needs and lived realities?
- How do different knowledge systems, including indigenous and local traditions, contribute to livelihoods, resilience, and community well-being?
- What challenges arise in recognising and integrating diverse knowledge systems within formal education frameworks?
- How can education systems incorporate multiple forms of knowledge while maintaining their distinctiveness and relevance?
- How is digitalisation transforming access to knowledge, learning processes, and educational equity?
- What are the implications of changing labour market dynamics for the role and design of education systems?
- What role do communities and local institutions play in sustaining and transmitting knowledge systems?
- How can education systems be made more inclusive and responsive to diverse socio-economic contexts?
- What policy approaches are needed to better align education systems with well-being, livelihoods, and long-term development goals?



Theme 6

Global Goals beyond 2030

As the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches, it is imperative to move beyond a narrow assessment of targets achieved and consider the broader structural limitations of the current global development framework. While the SDGs have provided a shared normative agenda, progress has been uneven, with persistent inequalities, climate vulnerabilities, and institutional constraints undermining their transformative potential. These challenges point to the need for a deeper reflection on the assumptions, priorities, and governance structures that underpin global development efforts. At the same time, emerging dynamics—including climate change, technological disruption, and shifting geopolitical alignments—are reshaping the context within which development goals are pursued.

Participants are encouraged to engage with, but are not limited to, the following research questions:

- What have been the major achievements and continuing challenges in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals across different regions?
- How and why has progress varied across countries, sectors, and population groups?
- What key principles should guide the design of a development framework beyond 2030?
- How can future global agendas better address issues of inequality, inclusion, and sustainability?
- How is climate change expected to influence development priorities and international cooperation in the coming decades?
- What role are technological advancements likely to play in shaping future development pathways?
- How do changing geopolitical dynamics affect global collaboration on development issues?
- How can global governance mechanisms be strengthened to support more effective and inclusive development outcomes?
- What role can countries of the Global South play in shaping the post-2030 development agenda?
- What lessons from the implementation of the SDGs can inform future strategies and institutional arrangements?
- Why has progress on inequality-related goals remained uneven across regions, and what structural factors explain these disparities?
- How do intersectional inequalities (gender, class, geography) shape the effectiveness of SDG interventions?
- To what extent does the SDG framework adequately incorporate principles of environmental justice and social equity?

