DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION'S
PEOPLE-CENTRIC DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (DPI) FRAMEWORK

FOUNDATIONAL REFRAMING: FROM DIGITAL CONSUMER TO DIGITAL CITIZEN

Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) asserts that Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) must begin with a fundamental shift in how people are perceived within digital systems.

Conventional Digital Lens



Views people as a **User or Consumer**



Focuses on **Platform Efficiency**



Aims for **Market Inclusion**

DEF's People-Centric Lens



Sees people as a **Citizen** and **Rights-holder**



Prioritises **Social Justice & Dignity**



Strives for **Meaningful Democratic Inclusion**

WHAT IS DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (DPI)?

Digital Public Infrastructure refers to foundational digital systems that enable secure, inclusive, and seamless interaction between citizens, businesses, and governments at a societal scale.

As endorsed by UNDP, DPI consists of open, interoperable, and population-scale systems governed by transparent, accountable public institutions and designed to advance human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

DEF emphasises that:

- DPI is public infrastructure
- DPI is a state responsibility
- DPI is financed by taxpayers' money
- DPI must therefore be accountable to citizens



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For the People

Serves the Most Marginalised

Designed for women, PWD, Dalit, Adivasi, migrants, and the elderly.

Accessible to All

Works for those who are poor, illiterate, unconnected, or remote

A Public Good, Not a Market Privilege

Ensures access is based on public need, not the ability to pay.

By the People

Co-Designed with Communities

Developed in partnership with SHGs, worker collectives, and panchayats

Bottom-Up Architecture

Grounded in participatory planning, social audits, and community governance

With the People

Provides Continuous Human Assistance

Services are assisted and are not exclusively self-service.

Inclusive of Offline Pathways

Accommodates oral, non-digital, and offline methods of interaction



WHO DPI MUST WORK FOR? THE REALITY OF RURAL AND MARGINALISED INDIA

People's DPI must explicitly design for citizens who say:

- I have no smartphone
- I cannot read or write
- I do not understand English
- I cannot afford data
- My biometric failed
- My ration stopped
- My pension stopped
- I do not know where to complain
- I need human help
- I live far from the nearest CSC
- There is no 4G here

This includes:

- Artisans, farmers, agricultural labourers, cultivators
- Dalits, tribal communities, forest dwellers
- Migrants, informal workers, daily wage labourers
- SHG members, MSMEs without access to finance
- Panchayat representatives, frontline workers, rural students and teachers

IF DPI DOES NOT WORK FOR THEM FIRST, IT DOES NOT WORK AT ALL.

Six Pillars for a People-Centric Digital Public Infrastructure.

1. Universal & Meaningful Access

2. Human DPI as Core Infrastructure



3. Panchayat-First, Hyper-Local Architecture

4. Citizen Rights, Grievance & Accountability

5. Data Justice & Algorithmic Accountability

6. DPI as a Public Community Service

PILLAR 1: UNIVERSAL & MEANINGFUL ACCESS

Access is not connectivity alone. DPI must work without:

Smartphones
Data balance
English literacy
Continuous connectivity

This requires:

Feature phone, IVR, voice-based systems
Zero-data access for public services
Assisted and proximate access

PILLAR 2: HUMAN DPI AS CORE INFRASTRUCTURE

DEF introduces Human DPI as non-negotiable.

Human DPI includes:

- CSCs and community facilitators
- Panchayat-level help desks
- Frontline workers and barefoot digital workers
- Mobile and outreach support

No DPI should be deployed without a funded, local human assistance layer.

PILLAR 3: PANCHAYAT-FIRST, HYPER-LOCAL ARCHITECTURE

India’s digital governance must reflect its democratic structure.

- Panchayat as the primary DPI unit
- Block as coordination unit
- State as custodian and guarantor

DPI must be usable at the panchayat level, in local languages, with local accountability.

PILLAR 4: CITIZEN RIGHTS, GRIEVANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

DPI failures translate directly into rights denial. People-centric DPI must guarantee:

- Right to explanation
- Right to correction
- Right to human appeal
- Right to grievance redress

No automated exclusion without human review.

PILLAR 5: DATA JUSTICE & ALGORITHMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

DEF recognises data and AI as sites of power.
Principles:

- Citizen data rights
- Algorithmic transparency
- Bias audits
- Protection for those with missing or informal data

Data systems must reduce power asymmetry, not deepen it.

PILLAR 6: DPI AS PUBLIC COMMUNITY SERVICE

DPI must not become a proxy for privatisation.

Acceptable:

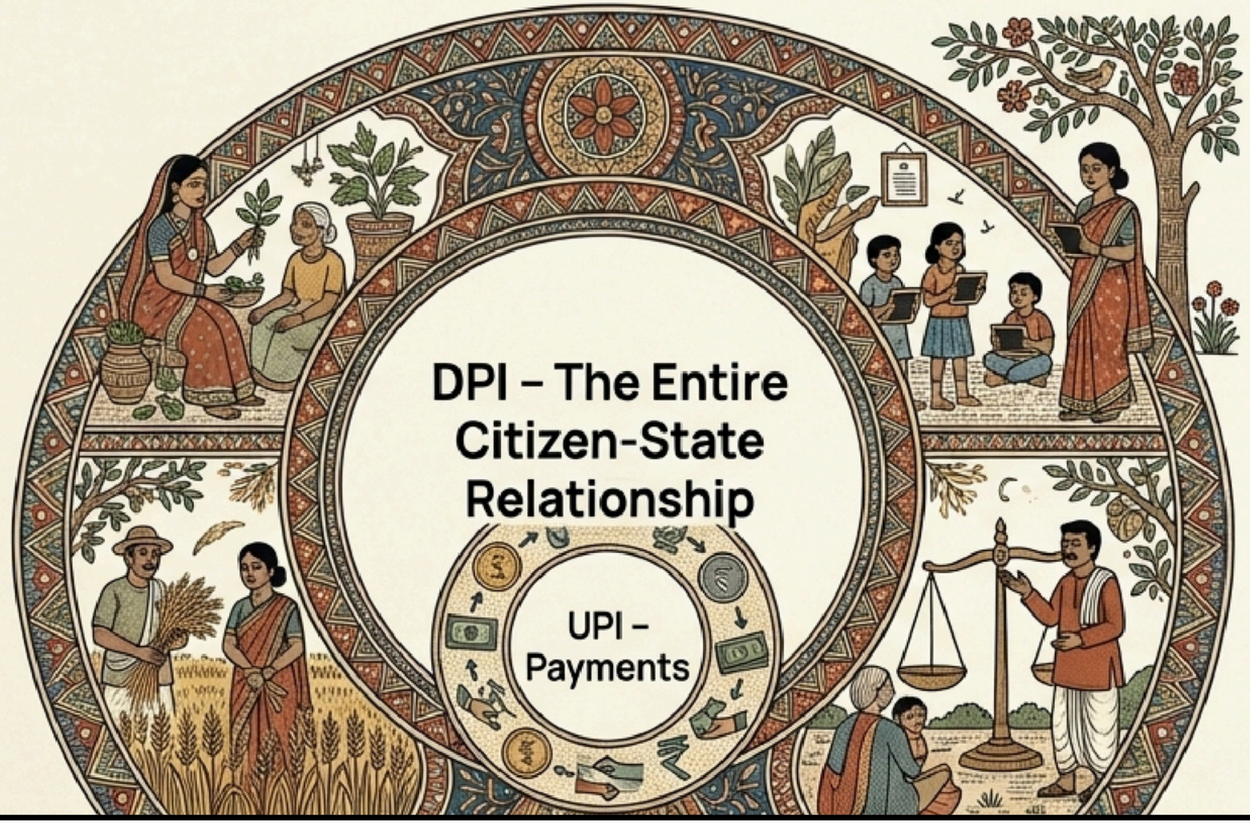
- Open public rails
- Innovation in public interest

Not acceptable:

- Platform capture
- Surveillance capitalism
- Profit-first governance of public systems

DPI is More Than Payments. DPI is About Rights.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an important and successful ***component*** of DPI, but they are not equivalents.



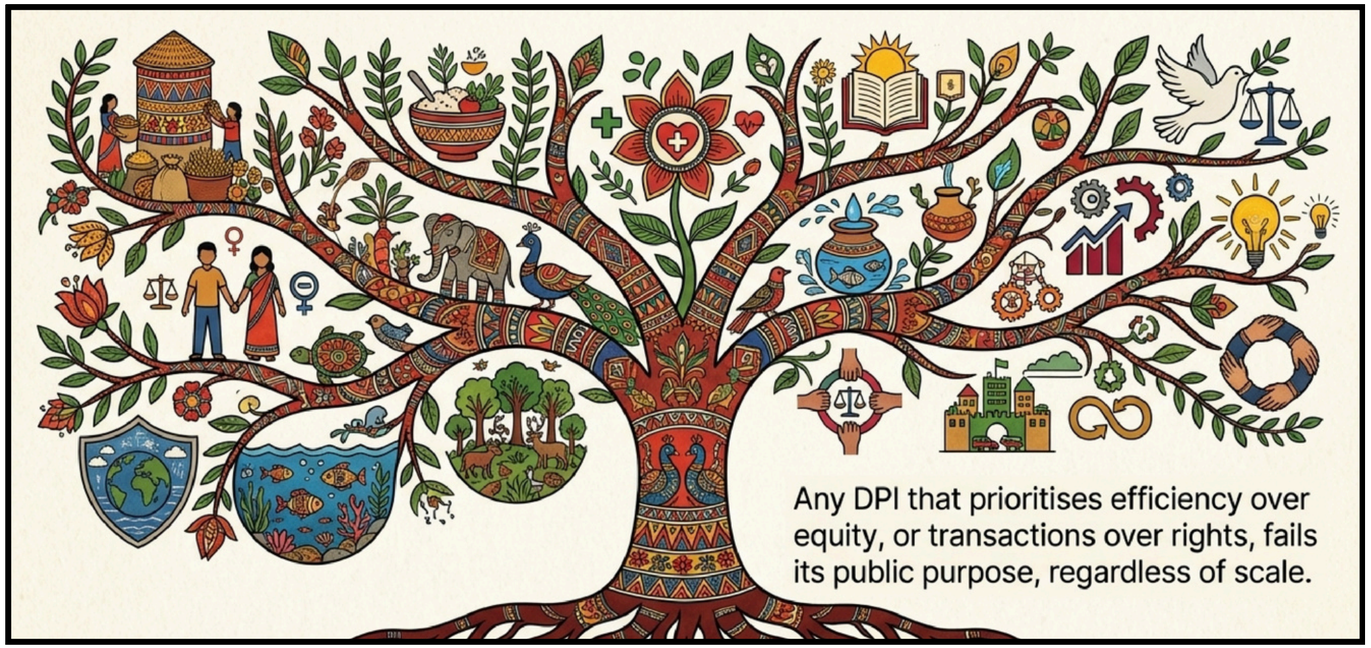
A citizen may transact digitally and still be excluded from basic rights. True DPI must support the entire citizen–state relationship, including:

- Identity and recognition
- Welfare, food, health, education
- Grievance, accountability, justice
- Human assistance and participation

A CITIZEN MAY TRANSACT DIGITALLY AND STILL BE EXCLUDED FROM BASIC RIGHTS.
UPI SHOWS WHAT DPI CAN ENABLE.

DPI DETERMINES WHETHER TECHNOLOGY DELIVERS RIGHTS.

DPI AS AN ENABLER OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)



- No Poverty
- Zero Hunger
- Good Health and Well-Being
- Quality Education
- Reduced Inequalities
- Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Responsible Consumption and Production
- Climate Action
- Life Below Water
- Life on Land
- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- Gender Equality
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Affordable and Clean Energy
- Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

SAMRIDDH GRAM - INTEGRATED PHYGITAL SERVICES

A Pilot in Ari-Umri Village, Guna, Madhya Pradesh in partnership with the Department of Telecom, Government of India

The project aims to translate digital connectivity into real, everyday access to rights, services, and livelihoods for rural citizens by building a village-level Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) ecosystem, not just connectivity or payments.

In simple terms, it answers the question:

HOW CAN BROADBAND, DIGITAL PLATFORMS, AND TECHNOLOGY MEANINGFULLY IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIVES IN A VILLAGE ACROSS HEALTH, EDUCATION, AGRICULTURE, GOVERNANCE, LIVELIHOODS, AND SAFETY?

COMMUNITY/VILLAGE LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

- Farmers
- Entrepreneurs
- Youth/Student
- Livestock Owners
- Elderly
- General Community

Agriculture advise and support
Weather forecast
Drone monitoring
Agri-extension services

Digital Marketing Skills
e-Commerce / Online Business

Online Education / Digital Skills
STEM Learning / Remote Education

Tracking and Monitoring

Tele-medicine / Tele-Health

E-Governance / Entitlements
Digital Services
Clean Water
Digital Education
Internet and Connectivity
Information support

LINKAGES FOR RELATED SERVICES AND SKILLING

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- Other Government Institutions
- Post Office
- PHC
- Schools

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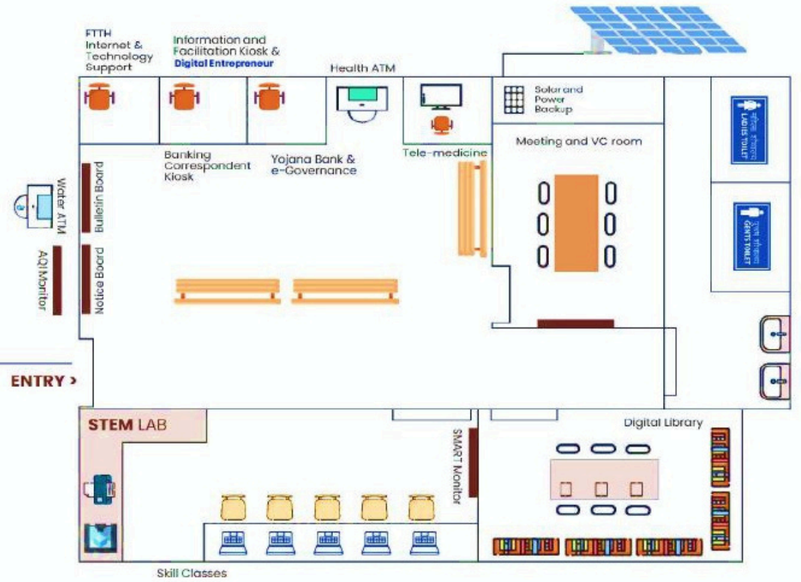
SAMRIDDH KENDRA



APPROACH

Mobilisation
Community Meetings
Camps
Meetings
Seminars
Hackathons
Workshops
Research Interventions
Training

From Platform Metrics to Citizen Outcomes

Instead of:

- Transaction Volume
- User Growth
- Platform Adoption

We Measure:



Reduction in exclusion errors





% of services accessible without smartphones



Distance to human assistance



Gender, caste, and disability-disaggregated impact



DEF’S GLOBAL VISION

DEF’s framework aligns fully with UNDP’s DPI vision, extends it through last-mile justice, human integration, and democratic local governance, and positions DPI as rights infrastructure, not merely digital infrastructure.


The Purpose of Digital Public Infrastructure
It is not about digitising services.
It is about democratising access, dignity, and rights.