

## Just AI. Just Land

Factsheets >>

Data, Land & Livelihood  
Whose Digital Future?

# THE DATA CENTRE BOOM IN TELANGANA

Hyderabad is becoming India's "Data City," but what does this mean?

## What's Driving This?

- State incentives: land, power, subsidies
- Fast-track approvals
- Strategic location + connectivity

## Key Facts

OVER ₹1 LAKH CRORE IN ANNOUNCED DATA CENTRE AND AI INVESTMENTS

MAJOR PLAYERS: AWS, MICROSOFT, CTRLS, STT GDC, YOTTA, NTT DATA

HYDERABAD PROJECTED TO BECOME AN AI & DATA INFRASTRUCTURE HUB



IS THIS GROWTH BENEFITING PEOPLE, OR PRIMARILY ATTRACTING CAPITAL?

### LAND - FROM VILLAGES TO "FUTURE CITY"

Agricultural land is being transformed into digital infrastructure zones.

#### What's Changing?

- Rising land prices
- Shift from farming to real estate and infrastructure
- Villages redefined as "investment corridors"

#### Reality Check

THE FUTURE CITY SPANS 765 SQ. KM ACROSS 7 MANDALS & 56 VILLAGES

MEERKHANPET IS A KEY HUB FOR DATA CENTRES

41 KM RADIAL ROAD CUTTING THROUGH 19 VILLAGES

**CRITICAL ISSUE**



ASSIGNED LANDS GIVEN TO LANDLESS COMMUNITIES ARE BEING REPURPOSED AT LOW COST

# JOBS VS INVESTMENT - THE EMPLOYMENT MYTH

Big investments,  
but limited jobs.  
Investment  $\neq$  employment  
transformation

## Key Fact

Data centres are capital-intensive,  
not labour-intensive

## KEY QUESTION



WILL LOCAL YOUTH BENEFIT FROM THIS DIGITAL ECONOMY?

## Key Facts

HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

SKILL MISMATCH PERSISTS

JOBS OFTEN GO TO SPECIALISED,  
NON-LOCAL WORKFORCE

## Factsheet 4

### WATER - THE STRAIN ON STATE INFRASTRUCTURE

Data centres need water, and isn't Telangana already facing water shortages?

#### Ground Reality

- Falling groundwater levels
- Farmers struggling to sustain crops
- Irregular water supply for households

#### Key Facts

~ 26 MILLION LITRES PER MW ANNUALLY

~ 500 VILLAGES FACING  
GROUNDWATER DEPLETION

TANKER DEMAND IN HYDERABAD HAS  
TRIPLED IN RECENT YEARS

**Key Question** >>> WHO GETS PRIORITY ACCESS TO WATER?

## Factsheet 5

### POWER - ENERGY FOR WHOM?

Data centres demand uninterrupted power in a rising energy crisis.

### What This Means

- Priority allocation for private infrastructure
- Increased pressure on public energy systems

### Key Facts

DEDICATED DUAL-GRID POWER  
PROMISED TO DATA CENTRES

POWER DEMAND IN TELANGANA  
EXPECTED TO RISE SHARPLY

CONSUME UP TO 3% OF INDIA'S  
ELECTRICITY BY 2030



WHO BEARS THE COST OF POWERING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY?

## Factsheet 6

### ENVIRONMENT & LOCAL IMPACT

What looks like digital progress often leaves very real footprints on the ground.

#### What This Means

- Land-use change, affecting water bodies, soil quality, and biodiversity
- Loss of agricultural ecosystems
- Weak environmental accountability

#### Reality Check

LOSS OF ECOLOGICAL BALANCE  
IN RURAL AND PERI-URBAN AREAS

LACK ACCESS TO INFORMATION TO  
HOLD PROJECTS ACCOUNTABLE

IT RESHAPES LAND, WATER, AND  
LIFE ON THE GROUND



WHO MONITORS AND REGULATES THESE IMPACTS?

## Factsheet 7

### PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT PRIVATE GAIN?

Public resources are enabling private data infrastructure.

#### What Companies Get

- Subsidised land
- Cheap / guaranteed power
- Infrastructure support
- Fast approvals



PUBLIC INVESTMENT,  
PRIVATE ACCUMULATION.

#### *What's Missing*

HOW MANY JOBS ARE CREATED?

WHAT IS THE ESTIMATE OF  
WATER AND ENERGY USE?

HOW ARE SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL  
HARMS MONITORED AND TACKLED?

PUBLIC BENEFIT AND ECONOMIC  
RETURNS TO THE COMMUNITIES

## Factsheet 8

## COMMUNITY-IN-LOOP &amp; INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Who decides the present  
and future of digital  
infrastructure?

**Reality**

- Decisions driven by state + corporate actors
- Communities often informed, not consulted

**Reality Check**

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS ✘

LOCAL COMMUNITIES ✘

FRONTLINE WORKERS ✘



CAN DEVELOPMENT BE JUST WITHOUT MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION?

## Factsheet 9

### RETHINKING "AFFECTED COMMUNITIES"

The impacts aren't limited to just the project sites; they're also about putting a strain on the state's infrastructure

#### Direct Impacts

- Land acquisition
- Socio-environmental implications
- Disruption of livelihoods

#### Indirect Impacts

LOAD ON WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

ENERGY REDISTRIBUTION

PUBLIC RESOURCE STRAIN



IF RESOURCES ARE SHARED, WHO BEARS THE HIDDEN COSTS?

### THE BIG QUESTION

Whose Digital Future?  
And how do we create a Just,  
Community-Centric,  
Participatory AI Framework?

### What We See

- Massive investments
- Rapid infrastructure growth
- Strong state support

### What We Don't See Clearly

- Livelihood transformation
- Environmental safeguards
- Democratic participation

### What Needs to Change

- Mandatory disclosures
- Community participation
- Resource accountability



COMMUNITIES MUST HAVE A VOICE IN SHAPING THE DIGITAL FUTURE.

## Factsheet 11



### THE TELANGANA RISING 2047 VISION

*Positions the State as a Global Investment Destination*

“Telangana means business, is place for investments”: CM Revanth Reddy in Davos.

#### *What We Must Ask*

*This business-first approach shapes how land, water, and public infrastructure are mobilised, raising important questions about whose interests are prioritised in the state’s digital and industrial expansion*

#### *What We Must Ask*

*What safeguards exist for environmental and social impacts? Who monitors resource use and compliance, and is this information public? Are companies accountable for the public resources they consume?*



HOW WE BUILD THIS FUTURE WILL DECIDE WHO IT TRULY BELONGS TO.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is often understood through data and algorithms, but it is sustained by physical infrastructures such as data centres that depend on land, water, energy, and public systems. As these infrastructures expand, particularly in rural and peri-urban regions, they are reshaping local ecologies, resource use, and livelihoods. At the same time, decision-making processes around digital infrastructure and AI governance remain largely centralized, with limited engagement of affected communities.

*Just AI, Just Land* presents a community-centered analysis of these developments. Led by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) through its dedicated initiative on *Just AI - Data and Algorithms for Communities*, which examines AI in relation to community-centered frameworks and social justice, and implemented in partnership with the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), with Commons Collective and the AI + Planetary Justice Alliance as Knowledge Partners, the project explores the socio-environmental implications of data centres and advances a community-centric framework for more accountable and inclusive digital governance.

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