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IndiaAI Impact Summit 2026

From Ambition to Implementation

An Analytical Review by Future Shift Labs



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Future Shift Labs (FSL) is a strategic research and policy think tank working to build a sustainable, equitable, and digitally resilient future by advancing responsible and ethical applications of technology. Established in 2024, the organisation conducts in-depth research and analysis on emerging AI technologies and their societal impact, advocates for inclusive AI governance, and supports strategic consulting, training, and public engagement to strengthen institutional and community capacity. With a focus on fostering collaboration among researchers, policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society, Future Shift Labs seeks to position India as a global leader in digital diplomacy, ethical AI development, and international cooperation on emerging technology challenges.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The IndiaAI Impact Summit 2026 marked a significant moment in India's AI trajectory. This report moves beyond descriptive coverage to provide a structured analytical assessment of the summit's positioning followed by sector-specific insights. It examines how AI is being integrated into public services, how sovereignty and global partnerships are being balanced, and whether institutional design matches stated ambition. The report ultimately evaluates whether the summit signals durable structural transformation or primarily strategic narrative positioning.

Key Outcomes of This Report

- Identifies a shift in India's AI discourse to development-centred infrastructure
- Analyses tensions between sovereign ambition and continued reliance on global technology ecosystems
- Assesses governance gaps in accountability, enforcement and institutional capacity
- Evaluates distributional implications across labour, gender and informal sectors
- Highlights risks related to fragmented data architecture and environmental sustainability
- Concludes that long-term impact depends on institutional follow-through beyond summit signalling

Intended Audience

- Policymakers and regulatory institutions
- Researchers and scholars in AI governance and digital political economy
- Civil society organisations working on labour, gender and digital rights
- International observers tracking AI geopolitics and Global South tech policy

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INTRODUCTION

The IndiaAI Impact Summit 2026 concluded with the kind of visual momentum that signals arrival. The scale was unprecedented. Government figures reported over 5 lakh visitors across five days, surpassing the footfall of the G20 summit in 2023. A Guinness World Record was set for the highest number of pledges to an AI responsibility campaign within 24 hours. 89 countries and international organisations endorsed the New Delhi Declaration. Investment commitments were publicly pegged at \$250 billion, alongside an additional \$20 billion for frontier deep-tech research. More than 500 sessions, roundtables, and bilateral discussions were convened.

The summit marked a deliberate shift in India's AI positioning, towards a development-oriented framework organised around the sutras of *People, Planet, and Progress*, and anchored in the civilisational motto *Sarvajana Hitaya, Sarvajana Sukhaya* (for the welfare of all, for the happiness of all). This repositioning sought to situate India as a leading voice of the Global South in shaping the future of AI.

Several significant announcements followed, such as, six sector-specific AI Impact Casebooks were launched, showcasing over 170 deployed applications across domains such as health, agriculture, and education. A chapter on YASHODA AI, an initiative of Future Shift Labs with the National Commission for Women, was published as a case study in the *UN Women AI and Gender Casebook*. Indigenous model initiatives, including Sarvam AI, Gnani.ai, and BharatGen, were highlighted as steps toward sovereign AI capability. AI Mission 2.0 was announced, alongside new commitments under the New Delhi Declaration and discussions on frontier AI governance.



The summit projected India as a champion of strategic autonomy and technological non-alignment with the “third way” narrative, while simultaneously reaffirming partnerships with global technology firms that continue to underpin critical AI infrastructure. It advanced a narrative of democratization and inclusion, even as questions remain about institutional capacity, regulatory clarity, labour protections, and the governance of deployed systems. It sought to balance existential AI safety concerns with development priorities, but whether this balance meaningfully addressed ongoing material harms as opposed to hypothetical future risks, most pronounced in the Global South, remains open to debate.

In the days following the summit, commentary ranged from praise for India’s diplomatic achievement, with Sam Altman speaking of India as a potential “full-stack AI leader” to concerns about performative scale and the gap between announcements and implementation. This divergence reflects a broader feature of contemporary AI summitry: symbolic signalling often outpaces institutional follow-through.



This report offers a structured analytical review of the summit. It moves beyond a descriptive account of proceedings to examine the political, economic, and social implications of the summit’s key themes. **Part I** situates the summit within broader questions of geopolitical positioning, sovereignty, industrial strategy, and governance. **Part II** narrows to sector-specific analysis across education, labour and the future of work, gender, climate and sustainability, and agriculture, sectors most directly implicated in the summit’s development-oriented framing.

By situating announcements within the structural realities of implementation, institutional capacity, and social impact, this report assesses where commitments signal material shifts, and where they remain aspirational.

PART I

Broad Overview

I. India in the Global AI Order: Positioning, Sovereignty, and the Global South

At the geopolitical level, the India AI Impact Summit 2026, hosted in New Delhi, marked a significant moment in India's diplomatic and technological positioning. With over 3,000 speakers, 600 startups, representation from 100+ countries, and participation from roughly 20 national leaders from French President Emmanuel Macron to Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva the summit demonstrated India's capacity to convene high-level global stakeholders at scale. The presence of technology leaders such as Sundar Pichai (Google) and Sam Altman (OpenAI) reinforced the event's visibility and signalled that India is no longer merely a large AI market but an active site of strategic dialogue.

India became the first developing country to host this annual AI summit, following editions in France, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. This shift in venue carries symbolic weight as it suggests that AI governance and innovation debates are no longer confined to traditional Western or East Asian technological powers. The summit can be seen as an extension of India's 2023 G20 presidency, during which too it positioned itself as a bridge between the Global South and the Global North. In this sense, the AI Impact Summit continued that diplomatic arc. The language of sovereignty was central throughout the summit, not as isolationist rhetoric, but as an assertion of strategic autonomy in foundational technologies. Announcements and discussions around expanded national compute infrastructure, subsidised GPU access, and domestic model development were emblematic of this effort. Companies such as Sarvam AI were showcased as proof of concept for locally trained, multilingual models embedded within national cloud and data ecosystems. The signalling was clear: India does not intend to remain a downstream consumer of frontier systems.



For middle powers navigating intensifying technological rivalry between the United States and China, this model carries appeal. It reflects a broader shift in global governance from universal rule-making toward competitive institutionalism, where states seek partial autonomy while remaining economically interdependent. The summit contributed to normalising sovereignty as a legitimate organising principle in AI governance debates.

At the same time, the Global South framing warrants closer examination. Across geopolitical conversations, a recurring dynamic is visible: Global South countries increasingly advertise their population scale as a pathway for AI expansion. By offering large consumer bases and datasets to Global North corporations, they seek to demonstrate investment-worthiness. Beneath this veneer of solidarity lie structural asymmetries.

These tensions surfaced in the summit's geopolitical positioning. On the fifth day of the summit, India formally joined the Pax Silica coalition, deepening semiconductor and technology cooperation with the United States. This move signalled alignment within trusted supply chain partnerships while advancing India's ambition to become a key node in the AI-driven global economy. This complexity was voiced through several panels, for example, *Balancing Sovereignty and Collaboration: AI Frameworks for Nations* featuring panelists from NVIDIA, Anthropic, and MeitY, Government of India.

Sovereignty framed primarily through infrastructure and capability-building, however, leaves open the question of regulatory convergence. Without parallel investment in interoperable standards, accountability mechanisms, and cross-border enforcement pathways, sovereign capacity risks entrenching fragmentation rather than enabling cooperation.



II. Industrial Policy and Economic Transition

From an economic perspective, the summit underscored India's structural dilemma. The country's growth model has historically relied on services exports and labour-intensive digital industries. Generative AI complicates this model by automating segments of precisely those sectors that fuelled earlier expansion (See Part II, Future of Work and Labour). The emphasis on public compute pools, startup acceleration, and sector-specific AI deployment must be read against this backdrop. Industrial policy is no longer confined to manufacturing or semiconductors; it now extends to model ecosystems, data infrastructure, and state-enabled diffusion of AI into public services.

Domestically, the summit sought to project India as an attractive destination for AI infrastructure and research. It aimed to reassure investors, accelerate sectoral adoption in healthcare, agriculture, and education, and signal that the state intends to shape the transition rather than passively absorb it.

The scale of announced commitments reflected this ambition. Reliance Industries pledged ₹10 lakh crore toward domestic AI investments, slightly exceeding a similar commitment from the Adani Group. Google detailed its existing \$15 billion investment in Indian data centre and AI projects, including subsea cable infrastructure connecting India and the United States. Yotta Data Services announced a \$2 billion expansion of data centre capacity powered by Nvidia GPUs. OpenAI entered into agreements with the Tata Group, including leasing significant data centre capacity and expanding enterprise access to advanced models. Anthropic announced collaboration with Infosys to build AI agents. These partnerships carried financial and reputational weight, particularly in a market attentive to frontier model capabilities.

Domestic model builders also stepped forward. Sarvam AI launched India's first domestically trained multi-billion parameter large language models, positioning them as efficient, multilingual, and optimised for public service contexts. The emphasis was less on outscaling frontier laboratories and more on contextual depth, Indian languages, local datasets, and state capacity use cases. The diplomatic signal was capability rather than supremacy.

Working groups convened during the summit reflected this industrial strategy. They spanned human capital, inclusion for social empowerment, safe and trusted AI, resilience, innovation and efficiency, science collaboration, democratising AI resources, and AI for economic development and social good. Yet, the industrial policy narrative often outpaced its evidentiary base. While partnership announcements and investment pledges were numerous, less clarity emerged on governance safeguards attached to public infrastructure, competition policy implications of state-backed compute, or long-term fiscal sustainability. The central question is not whether India can build capacity, but whether that capacity will be embedded within accountable institutional frameworks.

III. Governance: From Principles to Operationalisation

The most consequential thread running through the summit was its attempt to shift AI governance from abstraction to application. Across panels and working sessions, there was a visible effort to move beyond declaratory ethics toward institutional design. Discussions centred on procurement standards for public AI systems, auditability of deployed models, risk-tiering frameworks, regulatory sandboxes, and the operational realities of embedding responsible AI into state capacity.

Over the past decade, AI policy globally has been dominated by principles-based frameworks that enjoy broad consensus but weak enforcement. The transition from normative discourse to procedural governance is both necessary and overdue. The Global AI Impact Commons was framed as a practical tool to support policy diffusion. The Trusted AI Commons aimed to consolidate benchmarks and evaluation methodologies. An International Network of AI for Science Institutions was proposed to connect research centres globally. Together, these efforts suggest movement from values articulation toward institutional design.

However, progress within formal sessions remained uneven. The density of parallel tracks fragmented continuity, limiting the iterative dialogue required for governance design. Effective policy translation demands cumulative engagement across disciplines, technologists, lawyers, economists, behavioural scientists, and public administrators. Such synthesis rarely matures within compressed conference formats. As a result, many conversations surfaced promising fragments without consolidating into shared architectures.



The summit was perhaps most revealing in its informal diplomatic spaces. Closed-door dinners, embassy receptions, and curated roundtables hosted candid exchanges about framing, agenda-setting, and positional clarity. Based on informal engagements that Future Shift Labs participated in or convened, delegates probed how India interprets its own role within AI governance, as bridge, balancing power, or agenda-setter for the Global South. They compared regulatory philosophies: European actors emphasised procedural legitimacy and precaution; American participants leaned toward innovation velocity and market dynamism; emerging economies foregrounded access and capacity asymmetries. India's positioning appeared deliberately fluid, blending developmental framing with sovereignty language while avoiding rigid alignment.

Several structural tensions became clearer through both formal and informal dialogue, which are as follows:

- **Regulatory coherence and innovation incentives** remain a central fault line. Policymakers emphasised enabling innovation while managing systemic risk, yet methodologies for balancing these imperatives remain underdeveloped.
- **Accountability and scalability** form a second tension. Deployment narratives highlighted scale in healthcare, agriculture, and financial inclusion, but institutional pathways for liability allocation, audit transparency, and citizen redress received comparatively limited elaboration.
- **Inclusion and representation** constitute a third axis of complexity. While participation was broad, participation does not equate to influence. Questions persist regarding who drafts standards, who shapes frameworks, and whose lived realities inform governance design.

These tensions are not unique to India. They are systemic features of contemporary AI governance. What the summit illustrated is how such tensions manifest differently across geopolitical contexts, particularly where development ambitions intersect with technological dependence. If the next phase of AI governance is defined by operationalisation, then the summit's legacy may lie less in its formal outputs and more in the groundwork laid for iterative institutional alignment.

PART II

Sector-Specific Analysis

I. Education

The education track at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 positioned *human capital* development as a foundational pillar of India's AI transition. India educates over 250 million school students and employs more than 9 million teachers, making AI integration a matter of scale. Rather than treating education as a downstream beneficiary of technological progress, discussions framed it as central to shaping economic mobility, institutional resilience and social inclusion.

Leadership discussions, including *Harnessing AI for the Future of Learning and Work* organised by Coursera India Pvt Ltd, emphasised the shift from linear education pathways to continuous, skills-based learning models. Static curricula and degree-centric systems were seen as ill-suited to rapidly evolving technological demands. Sessions highlighted AI readiness initiatives and collaborative approaches to closing skills gaps. The message was clear: lifelong learning, mid-career reskilling and modular skill acquisition must become structural features of India's education ecosystem.

AI literacy and systemic capacity building formed another core pillar. The session *AI Literacy: Building Skills, Inclusion, and Global Leadership* examined widening literacy gaps across regions and sectors. In India, disparities in digital access and educational infrastructure shape unequal exposure to emerging technologies. Discussions focused on embedding AI education within formal curricula, expanding workforce upskilling (see Part II, Future of Work and Labour), and strengthening lifelong learning frameworks. The proposed "Universal AI Literacy Stack" aimed to layer AI capabilities across stages of learning.

Initiatives such as PadhAI 2.0, convened by the Centre for Policy Research and Governance, demonstrated practical steps toward scaling teacher training and context-sensitive pedagogical models. Leverage Edu, launched a proprietary suite of agentic AI systems designed to transform international education and talent mobility. International stakeholders, including UNESCO, underscored the importance of ethical and human-centred AI, particularly relevant in a system where digital access, language diversity, and socio-economic disparities remain uneven. Speakers underscored the importance of training multipliers, teachers, administrators and government officials, in scaling AI literacy. Without systematic curriculum integration, AI exposure risks remaining concentrated in urban or elite institutions. Broad-based literacy is therefore central to preventing new digital divides.

Responsible deployment featured prominently. Sessions such as *Safe AI Solutions in Education – Global South Perspective*, *Building High-Quality AI Systems for Education*, and *From Promising Pilots to System Shifts* shifted attention from adoption to governance. Discussions addressed data protection, bias mitigation, accountability mechanisms and lifecycle quality assurance. Moving from pilots to system-wide integration requires regulatory clarity, administrative capacity and institutional safeguards.

Inclusion and equity were recurring themes, particularly in *One Billion Futures: AI and the Future of Education Equity in the Global South* and *Teacher-Led, Localised and Frugal AI for Equitable Education in the Commonwealth*. These discussions emphasised bridging digital divides, enabling localized and open-source AI deployments, and developing sovereign AI architectures suited to lower-resource environments. For India and similarly placed Global South countries, equitable access to AI capabilities was framed as essential to long-term economic participation.

Institutional transformation was addressed in the Ministry of Education session *Pushing the Frontier of AI in Education* and related discussions on Centres of Excellence. The focus was on embedding AI through curriculum redesign, pedagogical reform, industry collaboration and structured policy intervention. Participants stressed the need to move beyond experimental pilots toward coordinated, scalable change. This aligns with broader reform trajectories under the National Education Policy framework, which emphasises digital literacy, multidisciplinary learning, and technology-enabled pedagogy.



Overall, the education track reflected a clear understanding: AI readiness depends on human readiness. Any technological deployment must therefore align with foundational learning priorities, teacher capacity, and curriculum coherence.

Key Takeaways

- 1. AI Literacy as Foundational Infrastructure:** The proposed Universal AI Literacy Stack reframes AI capability as a layered public good, embedded across schooling, higher education, and mid-career reskilling.
- 2. Teacher Capacity as the Multiplier:** Initiatives such as PadhAI 2.0 demonstrate that AI integration depends less on student exposure and more on systematic teacher training and administrative readiness.
- 3. From Pilots to System Shifts:** Sessions like Safe AI Solutions in Education - Global South Perspective and Ministry-led discussions on Centres of Excellence emphasised moving beyond experimentation toward regulatory clarity and lifecycle quality assurance.
- 4. Equity Requires Localisation:** Discussions in One Billion Futures and Commonwealth forums underscored frugal, localised and open architectures as essential for Global South contexts.
- 5. Human Readiness Precedes AI Readiness:** The education track positioned institutional reform, curriculum redesign, modular credentials, digital interoperability, as preconditions of AI adoption.

II. Future of Work and Labour

The Future of Work and Labour track examined how AI is reshaping employment structures, skills demand and labour markets. Across industry and policy sessions on skilling and employability by KMPG, DeepTech4Bharat Foundation, and [Apna.co](#) among others, participants assessed both short-term disruption and longer-term structural shifts across manufacturing, healthcare, automobile, HR, sales and supply chain functions.

The emphasis was on how workforce systems must anticipate change rather than react to displacement after it occurs. The launch of the New Delhi Declaration: AI Workforce Development Playbook & Reskilling Principles, signalled an attempt to formalise this anticipatory approach, by identifying labour exposure patterns, defining tiered skilling pathways and embedding reskilling principles into national planning.

Across panels, AI was described as a general-purpose technological shift comparable in scale to earlier industrial revolutions. In *Global Dialogue on AI and Labour Market Resilience*, Shamika Ravi, Member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, noted that India ranks among the countries with the highest levels of firm-level AI adoption, underscoring the urgency of anticipatory policy design. Yoshua Bengio stressed the need for international coordination to mitigate adverse labour market effects, particularly in contexts of uneven regulatory capacity. The discussion converged on the importance of aligned skills strategies, social protection systems, multilingual inclusion, data-sharing frameworks, and cross-border cooperation as central pillars of labour market resilience.

Overall, the idea of AI as a capability multiplier that enhances productivity dominated discussions. Sanjeev Bikhchandani of InfoEdge said in a panel that whenever there is new technology, “there is always great fear of job loss, but productivity goes up.” The overarching fears of AI-induced job loss were rejected. For instance, G20 Sherpa and former NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant argued that technological revolutions have historically created new avenues of employment rather than eliminating work altogether. AI was positioned as augmenting human capability, accelerating decision-making and improving service delivery. The prevailing message was that workers who adapt will benefit.

The AVPN’s session on *The Future of Work for the Global South: Skilling for Opportunity and Social Mobility*, underscored a widening AI divide between the Global North and South, with AI adoption in advanced economies roughly double that of developing regions, while skilling systems lag even where adoption is rising. A core insight was how skills shortages are already constraining AI uptake. On the other hand, the Prosus and Naspers Group panel, *AI for All: Catalysing Jobs, Growth, and Opportunity*, launched a white paper delivering a blueprint to power the next phase of jobs, productivity and inclusive growth, positioning India as a model for the Global South, demonstrating how ~16% of the world’s AI talent is of Indian origin.

Hence, if one theme unified the track, it was skilling. Corporate leaders from Coursera and representatives from NASSCOM’s FutureSkills ecosystem emphasised tiered capability building: advanced AI developers, domain-integrated professionals and broad AI literacy for the wider workforce. Curriculum redesign, faculty retraining, stackable credentials and apprenticeship-linked degrees were recurring proposals. India’s digital public infrastructure, Aadhaar-linked credentials, interoperable learning records and scalable platforms, was presented as a backbone for rapid workforce transformation. Semiconductor workforce sessions reinforced the role of simulation-based training and virtual labs in expanding technical access. Skilling was framed not merely as workforce preparation but as a national competitiveness strategy.

However, labour transition was largely treated as a supply-side challenge. The assumption underlying many discussions was that displacement risks can be mitigated if individuals upskill quickly enough. Less attention was given to demand-side constraints, enterprise absorption capacity or wage dynamics.

The EkStep panel featuring Blue Dots platform reframed the issue as a discovery problem rather than a pure skills deficit. Large segments of MSMEs and self-employed workers remain digitally invisible. District-level pilots demonstrated that AI-powered enterprise and worker mapping significantly improved job matching once fragmentation was reduced. In contexts where informal or semi-formal employment dominates, traditional skilling models aligned to formal sector absorption may misalign with economic reality. AI embedded in fintech, agri-tech and supply-chain platforms may influence incomes through productivity gains in microenterprise rather than formal wage employment.

Participatory data initiatives such as Karya highlighted a critical but comparatively underexamined dimension in the Summit: marginalized workers are already embedded within AI value chains as annotators and local-language contributors, particularly across the Global South. Questions remained regarding wage standards, bargaining power and upward mobility within data-driven labour segments. Karya's panel on *Women, Work, and the Future of AI* further underscored gendered stratification within these value chains, with women underrepresented in technical and leadership roles while overrepresented in precarious gig-based work. Training initiatives aimed at increasing female participation in STEM and AI literacy received broad support, though structural questions around remuneration and labour protections persist.



The summit ultimately framed labour transition as a coordination challenge: aligning academia, industry and government to prepare for AI integration. India's digital backbone (Aadhaar, UPI and interoperable platforms), the KPMG panel emphasized, offers potential not only for credentialing and job matching but also for portable benefits and real-time labour analytics. Yet redistributive design and political economy questions received less sustained attention than productivity gains.

The dominant message was pragmatic: disruption is inevitable, preparation is possible, and institutional alignment can mitigate shocks. How productivity gains will be shared, how labour protections will adapt, and whether augmentation will prevail over automation in practice, remains to be seen.

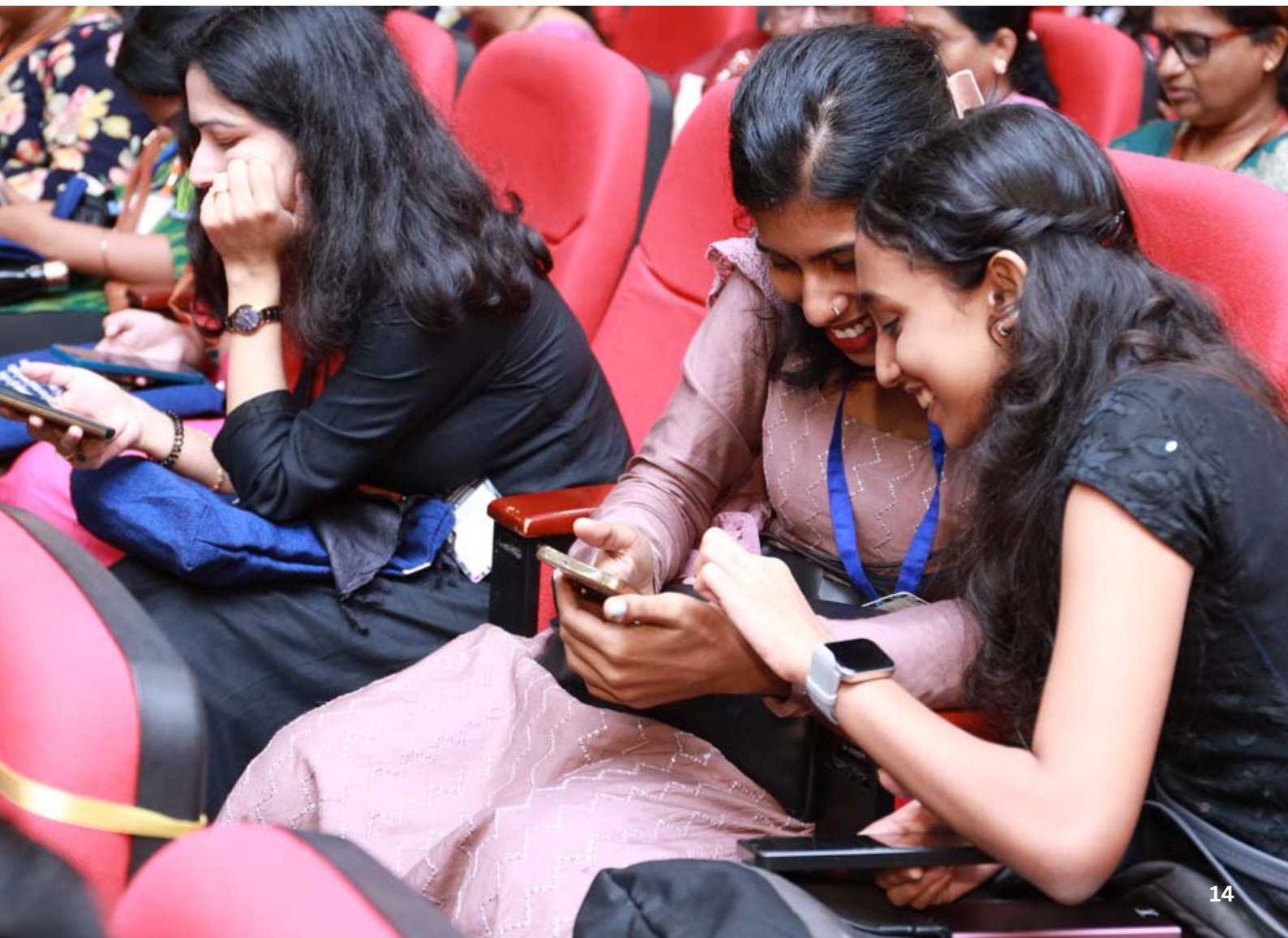
Key Takeaways

1. **Anticipatory Labour Policy Has Begun:** The New Delhi Declaration: AI Workforce Development Playbook & Reskilling Principles formalises exposure mapping and tiered skilling pathways.
2. **India's Adoption Is Already High:** As noted in Global Dialogue on AI and Labour Market Resilience panel, firm-level AI uptake is among the highest globally, compressing the policy response window.
3. **Skilling Is Necessary but Not Sufficient:** Corporate and NASSCOM-led models emphasised tiered AI capability building, yet demand-side absorption and wage dynamics remain underdeveloped.
4. **Informality Changes the Equation:** The Blue Dots platform (EkStep) reframed labour transition as a discovery problem, demonstrating improved job matching once informal workers and MSMEs were digitally mapped.
5. **AI Labour Is Extractive:** Karya's model surfaced a structural reality: marginalised workers are embedded in AI value chains, yet questions of wage standards and mobility persist.
6. Productivity optimism dominated; redistributive design and labour protection architecture received comparatively less attention.

III. Gender

Gender featured as a cross-cutting structural concern running through discussions on safety, entrepreneurship, labour transitions, climate resilience, and AI governance. Women constitute barely one fifth of India's digital workforce, while algorithmic systems continue to reproduce biases affecting caste, rural, and informal communities that remain underrepresented within formal data ecosystems. Sessions such as UNFPA's Reimagining Gender in Technology and UNESCO's Women in AI: A South Asia Outlook highlighted a shared concern that inclusion cannot be treated as a corrective step after technologies are deployed. Participants repeatedly stressed that ethical and inclusive AI must be built into system design from the beginning, particularly in data collection, model development and governance processes. Despite growing public commitments, institutional mechanisms such as gender audits, equitable data governance frameworks and sustained financing for women-led innovation remain limited.

Across the Summit, conversations made clear that gender inequality in AI extends beyond representation. Women are increasingly present as users and participants in digital economies, yet remain underrepresented in research leadership, standards-setting bodies, venture capital networks and data governance institutions where technological direction is shaped.



During UNESCO's *Women in AI: A South Asia Outlook* session, speakers referenced UN Women estimates showing that women account for around 30 percent of the global AI workforce and only 16 percent of AI research roles. These figures were used to contextualise structural participation gaps discussed across panels. Christine Arab, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific at UN Women, during this session, described this imbalance as a design gap, noting that limited representation across the AI lifecycle can result in systems that fail to reflect women's lived realities in areas such as healthcare, agriculture, finance and public safety. Gabriela Ramos of UNESCO similarly warned that technological change can reinforce existing inequalities when governance frameworks develop more slowly than innovation.

The session drew on findings from the *Gender & AI Outlook Study for South Asia (2025)*, jointly developed by UNESCO and the Women for Ethical AI network, which provided an inside peek into the consolidated regional baselines on women's participation across the AI value chain. Insights were further supported by the UN Women-LinkedIn *Women and Future Jobs* policy brief examining how AI-driven labour transitions across South and East Asia are reshaping women's economic opportunities while introducing risks of exclusion from emerging digital and technical roles.

Labour stratification within the AI value chain received candid attention, including during Microsoft Research India's session on inclusive AI development pathways. Kalika Bali highlighted how biases present in training data are reproduced and optimized through machine learning systems. Women remain disproportionately concentrated in lower-paid data annotation and moderation roles while remaining underrepresented in technical leadership and investment decision-making positions. This imbalance influences whose knowledge shapes AI systems and whose labour remains largely invisible within value chains.

Related discussions across UNESCO's *Women in AI: A South Asia Outlook*, Karya's *Women, Work and the Future of AI*, and Microsoft Research India's session on *Inclusive AI Development Pathways* examined mobility pathways from data labour to research and governance leadership, including whether governance boards reflect the societies they regulate and whether moderators who absorb algorithmic toxicity have a voice in system redesign. These discussions reinforced links between system design, participation and equitable outcomes.

Climate and agriculture discussions across the Summit brought questions of gender and inclusion into sharper focus, particularly during the session *Women in Climate and AI: Bridging the Gender Gap in Innovation* and the presentation of the *AI Solutions for Gender Empowerment and Gender and Agriculture* casebooks supported by UN Women and India AI partners. These exchanges drew attention to the gap between technological design and on-ground realities, where women continue to shoulder a significant share of agricultural and climate resilience work despite limited land ownership, constrained access to finance, and persistent digital exclusion. Participants noted that AI systems for agriculture and climate adaptation risk reinforcing existing inequalities when these structural conditions remain unaccounted for. Effective advisory and climate intelligence systems, discussions emphasised, must reflect land tenure patterns, access to credit, and household decision-making dynamics that shape adoption in practice.

Building on these concerns, discussions also turned to the role of data infrastructures in shaping equitable AI outcomes. Insights presented during *Women in AI: A South Asia Outlook*, including findings from the *Gender & AI Outlook Study for South Asia (2025)*, highlighted how persistent gaps in gender-disaggregated data continue to limit institutional accountability and evidence-based policy design. Participants observed that when women farmers and informal workers remain inadequately represented within datasets, advisory systems risk bypassing intended beneficiaries, while climate risk assessments fail to reflect differentiated patterns of vulnerability. Within this framing, Gender-responsive AI was therefore framed not as an additional safeguard, but as a prerequisite for establishing systems capable of producing accurate, context-sensitive and operationally relevant outcomes.

These structural concerns extended to questions of safety and misuse. Deepfakes, online harassment and algorithmic discrimination in hiring were discussed as existing harms rather than future risks. Representatives from UNESCO and UN Women emphasised the importance of gender-disaggregated impact assessments, stronger platform accountability measures and participatory governance approach capable of evolving alongside technological adoption.

At an institutional level, civil society and multilateral discussions at the Summit highlighted persistent data gaps, including limited publicly available information on women's participation across India's AI workforce, leadership pipelines, and decision-making ecosystems. Sessions such as *Women in AI: A South Asia Outlook* underscored how the absence of gender-disaggregated data constrains accountability and inclusive policy design. While scholarship programmes, mentorship initiatives and AI literacy efforts received strong institutional support through India AI and UN Women engagements, more structural interventions, including mechanisms such as gender audits for large AI deployments, remain at an early stage of policy development.

Although gender inclusion was consistently reflected within policy discussions, concerns that AI systems trained primarily on English-language, urban and socially privileged datasets may reinforce existing hierarchies, were largely acknowledged at a conceptual level, with limited empirical examination presented during the Summit.

The discussions nevertheless carried significance beyond the Summit itself. Hosting the convening in New Delhi reflected the growing role of emerging economies in shaping global AI governance debates, which have historically been centred in advanced economies. India's experience with digital public infrastructure has already influenced international conversations on digital public goods, and participants noted that embedding gender-responsive design within AI governance could similarly inform policy approaches across countries navigating demographic scale, labour transitions and climate vulnerability. Efforts to translate these discussions into practice were reflected in initiatives such as *AI by HER: Catalysing Women-Led Innovation in Artificial Intelligence*, a global innovation challenge organised as part of the India AI Impact Summit to support and showcase women-led AI solutions. The initiative signalled recognition that inclusive AI ecosystems depend not only on expanding access to technology, but on enabling women to participate as innovators, designers and decision-makers shaping technological development.



Taken together, discussions at the Summit underscored that gender equality in artificial intelligence cannot be approached as an ancillary policy objective, but must form part of the institutional foundations through which digital technologies are developed and applied. Across conversations on labour transformation, climate resilience, data ecosystems and technological safety, a shared recognition emerged that access to digital opportunities alone does not confer influence over technological direction. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integral to public service delivery, agricultural decision-making, climate adaptation and financial inclusion in India, the enduring challenge will be to ensure that women's expanding presence within digital environments is matched by a substantive role in shaping the priorities, rules and trajectories that define these technologies.

Key Takeaways

1. **The Design Gap Is Structural: UNESCO's Women in AI:** A South Asia Outlook and UN Women data show women remain underrepresented in research leadership and governance bodies, not just participation.
2. **Gender-Disaggregated Data Is Missing:** The Gender & AI Outlook Study (2025) highlighted gaps in workforce and leadership metrics, constraining accountability.
3. **Value Chain Stratification Persists:** Discussions in Microsoft Research India and Karya's Women, Work and the Future of AI revealed concentration of women in annotation and data moderation roles versus more higher-paying and visible roles.
4. A chapter on **YASHODA AI**, an initiative of **Future Shift Labs** with the National Commission for Women, was published as a case study in the UN Women AI and Gender Casebook, unveiled by the India AI Mission in collaboration with UN Women at the India AI Impact Summit.
5. When women are absent from AI leadership, research, and capital allocation, systems inherit narrower priorities, risk framings, and data assumptions.

IV. Climate Change and Sustainability

The climate track at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 positioned artificial intelligence not merely as a mitigation tool, but as a systems-level enabler across decarbonisation, infrastructure sustainability, energy transition and climate resilience. Across discussions, a dual imperative was clear: AI can accelerate climate action, but its own environmental footprint must be governed responsibly. Technological ambition and ecological accountability were treated as interdependent rather than sequential concerns.

As India accelerates data centre development, with capacity projected to scale several-fold by 2030 and electricity demand potentially reaching 40–45 TWh annually, the energy and water dimensions become systemically relevant. While speakers highlighted efficiency gains and green AI innovation, there was limited engagement with the reality that, in several regions, the marginal unit of electricity remains fossil-based. Without structured renewable procurement mandates, rapid compute growth could increase short-term grid emissions even as long-term net-zero commitments are maintained.

The Summit also celebrated the policy and fiscal push supporting digital infrastructure. Union Budget prioritisation, state-level incentives, and the absence of a dedicated Union-level tax specific to data centres reflect a deliberate strategy to position India competitively in global AI supply chains. Yet sustainability conditionalities were not embedded with equal clarity in these discussions.



Water intensity, estimated at ~150 billion litres annually for cooling, received comparatively little structured attention. This is notable given parallel national efforts such as the Jal Jeevan Mission, the Atal Bhujal Yojana, and the National Water Mission, all of which aim to strengthen water security and groundwater sustainability. In water-stressed urban clusters where many data centres are concentrated, industrial cooling demand intersects directly with broader development and resilience priorities. As an exception, the panel on *Harnessing AI for Water Resilience and Sustainable Growth*, did examine AI-enabled responses to water scarcity, leakage and flooding, and the resource intensity of data centres, particularly their energy and water demands.

In the *Roundtable on AI for Decarbonisation and Circularity: Building India's Low-Carbon Infrastructure*, participants examined how AI could optimise supply chains, infrastructure systems and waste networks in support of India's circularity ambitions. The emphasis extended beyond technical capacity to the institutional conditions required for scale, interoperable data systems, regulatory alignment, and coordination across public and private actors. Decarbonisation was framed as a systems challenge requiring governance coherence, not isolated innovation.

The session introducing the *Sustainable Digital Infrastructure Accord (SDIA)* outlined voluntary industry benchmarks across energy efficiency, clean energy sourcing, water stewardship and circular economy practices. Complementing this, *Building Resilient, Sustainable AI Infrastructure for People, Planet and Progress* explored shared compute models, efficient system architectures and hybrid cloud-to-edge strategies as mechanisms to reduce environmental strain while expanding access. Together, these discussions reflected growing awareness that AI infrastructure must be optimised for sustainability from inception.

Inclusion was also present within the climate discourse. *Women in Climate and AI – Bridging the Gender Gap in Innovation* highlighted gender as a structural factor in climate technology ecosystems, particularly in agriculture and local adaptation contexts. Meanwhile, *AI for Humanity as SDG 18* advanced a broader framing of AI as a cross-cutting enabler of sustainable development, contingent on human-centred design and multistakeholder coordination.

The summit also showcased advancements in applied AI models, such as AI-enabled high-resolution weather forecasting reaching village-level Panchayats through the Bharat Forecasting System and other AI-based climate risk tools that enhance disaster preparedness, renewable optimisation and environmental monitoring across scales.

Finally, from a Global South perspective, a theme invoked throughout the Summit, the central challenge is not whether to scale AI infrastructure, but how to do so without replicating carbon- and resource-intensive development pathways. The discourse foregrounded competitiveness and innovation. A deeper integration of energy transition planning, water governance, and climate accountability mechanisms would strengthen the coherence between India's digital ambitions and its climate leadership narrative.

Key Takeaways

- 1. Compute Growth Has Climate Consequences:** Data centre expansion could reach ~40-45 TWh annually by 2030; renewable integration remains uneven.
- 2. Water Stress Is a Silent Variable:** Estimated ~150 billion litres annually for cooling intersects with urban water scarcity, yet received limited structured policy attention.
- 3. Voluntary Benchmarks Are Emerging:** The Sustainable Digital Infrastructure Accord (SDIA) introduces efficiency and stewardship standards, but remains non-binding.
- 4. AI for Decarbonisation Is Systemic, Not Sectoral:** The Roundtable on AI for Decarbonisation and Circularity reframed climate optimisation as an interoperability and governance challenge.
- 5. Competitiveness vs Sustainability:** Fiscal incentives for data centres were clear; sustainability conditions were less embedded in industrial strategy.

V. Agriculture

For agriculture at the India AI Impact Summit 2026, the framing was not technological optimism, but farmer-centric deployment. Across panels, the central question was how AI can be implemented in agriculture in ways that are evidence-based, inclusive and scalable.

In *AI for Smart and Resilient Agriculture: From Research to Solutions*, speakers examined how AI systems must respond directly to farmers' needs while navigating fragmented data, diverse agro-ecological zones and scientific uncertainty. The emphasis was on bridging research and field realities, ensuring context-aware design rather than importing models built for large, mechanised farming systems. A similar grounding shaped *AI in Climate and Agriculture: Building Resilient Communities*, which presented findings from a randomised evaluation of AI-based flood Early Warning Systems. The discussion highlighted measurable adaptation outcomes and reinforced that rigorously evaluated tools are essential for strengthening climate preparedness among vulnerable households.



Governance and standards emerged as defining themes. *Standards and Policies for AI in Farmer-Centric Smart Agrifood Systems* addressed sustainability, food and nutrition security, inclusive income growth, interoperability and trust. Participants examined standards gaps and policy levers required to move from isolated pilots to secure, widely adopted systems. In *Agri AI: Advancing Responsible AI for Agriculture*, dialogue extended beyond technical architecture to ecosystem-building, international collaboration, startup engagement and impact-driven deployment models. Across these sessions, scaling was framed as institutional integration requiring regulatory clarity, validation layers and sustained coordination across agencies.

Digital Public Infrastructure was repeatedly identified as a foundational enabler. *Unlocking AI's Potential for Agricultural Innovation and DPI-Enabled Economic Growth* explored how interoperable public infrastructure can support trusted advisory systems and data-driven decision-making. Real-world implementations discussed in *Farmer Productivity and Employment: Transforming Agriculture for a Sustainable Future*, including examples from Maharashtra and ATI Ethiopia, demonstrated improvements in access to advisories, finance, inputs and markets. The underlying proposition was that open, interoperable systems can enhance food security and strengthen resilience when supported by governance safeguards.

In *Planet-Scale Intelligence for Economic Growth: AgriStack, Climate AI, and Foundational Models for Global Impact*, attention turned to scaling India's AgriStack as a DPI layer capable of enabling climate-smart credit, risk-informed public spending and resilient food systems. The emphasis was on public-private architectures that can transition from pilots to production. AgriStack was presented as a potential interoperability backbone for advisory services, provided governance and validation mechanisms are robust.

The panel on *Innovations from India's AI Centres of Excellence in Health, Education, Agriculture and Sustainable Cities* reinforced the shift from experimentation to structured deployment. Discussions highlighted measurable service delivery outcomes and the governance foundations required for responsible public-sector adoption. Similarly, *From Policy to Harvest: Leveraging Generative AI for Data-Driven Agricultural Transformation* examined how generative AI tools can support precision farming, crop forecasting, climate risk modelling and supply chain optimisation. The focus remained on translating policy intent into field-level productivity and resilience gains.

A notable shift in narrative across the track was the recognition that Indian agricultural AI cannot replicate Western models designed for large commercial farms. As raised during discussions in the AGX AI session, systems optimised for industrial-scale farming fail to account for India's fragmented smallholder structure. Thus, context-specific design is non-negotiable.

Additionally, while AgriStack received considerable attention as a DPI layer enabling interoperability, farmer trust in data-sharing, including land records, soil data and crop histories, remains uneven. Data sovereignty questions persist: the legal framework governing ownership and benefit-sharing of agricultural data is still evolving, creating risk of asymmetric value extraction. Global collaborations, including engagement with partners such as the Netherlands, OECD, Gates Foundation and FAO, bring financing and methodological rigour, but they also reinforce the need for clear domestic governance standards.

Finally, last-mile infrastructure constraints continue to limit real-time advisory potential. Internet connectivity gaps in several agricultural regions complicate deployment of AI-driven services at scale. Without addressing these structural barriers, the transition from pilot innovation to system-wide adoption will remain uneven.

The agriculture track reflected policy maturity: AI deployment must be anchored in governance, interoperability and farmer trust. For India, where agriculture remains central to livelihoods and food security, productivity gains cannot be separated from climate resilience or equity considerations.

Key Takeaways

- 1. Evidence-Based Climate Tools Work:** Randomised evaluation of AI-based flood Early Warning Systems demonstrated measurable adaptation gains.
- 2. AgriStack as Interoperability Backbone:** In Planet-Scale Intelligence for Economic Growth, AgriStack was positioned as DPI enabling climate-smart credit and advisory systems, contingent on governance safeguards.
- 3. Western Models Do Not Translate:** The AGX AI discussions underscored that systems built for large mechanised farms fail in fragmented smallholder contexts.
- 4. Trust Is the Scaling Constraint:** Farmer willingness to share land, soil and crop data remains uneven; data sovereignty and benefit-sharing frameworks are still evolving.
- 5. Last-Mile Infrastructure Remains Structural Barrier:** Connectivity gaps limit real-time advisory deployment despite policy ambition.

CONCLUSION: AMBITION, ARCHITECTURE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The India AI Impact Summit 2026 demonstrated that AI in India is no longer framed primarily as frontier experimentation or abstract safety debate. It is being positioned as public infrastructure, embedded in healthcare diagnostics, climate resilience, agriculture, skilling systems and labour market transitions. Across sectors, examples presented were not speculative - AI-assisted diagnostics in rural health systems, flood early warning tools, agricultural advisory platforms and workforce mapping pilots reflect real deployments with measurable potential.

The summit's most important shift was narrative: AI was articulated as a development instrument at population scale. For a country of 1.5 billion people, marked by geographic, linguistic and economic diversity, this is not a marginal ambition. India is attempting to design an intelligence architecture that functions across fragmented access conditions and informal economies. If successful, such a model would hold significance far beyond national borders, particularly for the Global South. Yet, ambition now confronts following structural questions:

- First, data architecture remains uneven. Digital public infrastructure layers are expanding, but datasets remain fragmented, inconsistently standardised and difficult to access across institutions. Without interoperable, high-quality data foundations, showcased AI deployments will struggle to scale or sustain impact.
- Second, accountability mechanisms are underdeveloped. Panels frequently referenced impact, risk mitigation and responsible AI, yet enforcement pathways were rarely specified. Who audits deployed systems? What indicators define acceptable risk? What consequences follow non-compliance? Governance frameworks were announced, but operational oversight architecture remains emergent.
- Third, distributional equity requires sharper attention. AI-driven productivity gains do not automatically translate into broad-based welfare improvements. Labour exposure, informal sector absorption, gender representation and value capture within AI supply chains demand sustained policy design. Without explicit redistributive thinking, AI could amplify existing inequalities even while expanding aggregate output.
- Fourth, environmental sustainability was insufficiently integrated into AI growth planning. Data centre expansion, energy intensity and water usage pose real trade-offs, particularly in urban regions already under ecological stress. An AI strategy that increases fossil-fuel dependence risks undermining long-term developmental gains.

- Fifth, institutional leadership and decision authority require consolidation. Advisory ecosystems are forming, but durable governance depends on empowered institutions capable of making binding, technically informed decisions. Strategic coherence will matter as much as innovation capacity.

Beyond substance, the summit raises a broader question about summitry itself. Large-scale gatherings perform valuable functions: they align narratives, mobilise investment signals and reposition countries within diplomatic hierarchies. In Delhi, AI governance was reframed from a narrow safety discourse toward a development-centred agenda and that reframing is consequential. However, summit platforms are structurally limited in producing enforceable governance regimes. Technical standards, procurement reform, audit systems and cross-border data agreements emerge through iterative institutional processes, not plenary sessions. The India AI Impact Summit succeeded in signalling ambition; it did not, and perhaps could not, deliver binding regulatory harmonisation.

Two commitments may prove more consequential than the public optics:

- First, the emphasis on real-world evidence generation around AI deployment that signals a move from speculative regulation towards empirically grounded policymaking.
- Second, the push for multilingual and contextual evaluation frameworks that challenges benchmark dominance historically centred in Anglophone contexts.

If institutionalised, these initiatives could shift global knowledge production in meaningful ways. Their credibility will depend on custodianship, transparency and sustained funding.

Ultimately, the summit marked a geopolitical inflection point. AI governance is no longer shaped exclusively in Western capitals as emerging powers are asserting developmental priorities within the global discourse. Delhi provided a stage and articulated intent. The durability of India's AI ambition will now depend not on announcements, but on architecture: data governance, accountability systems, environmental safeguards, institutional authority and distributive design. Symbolism has been achieved, implementation now determines legacy.

