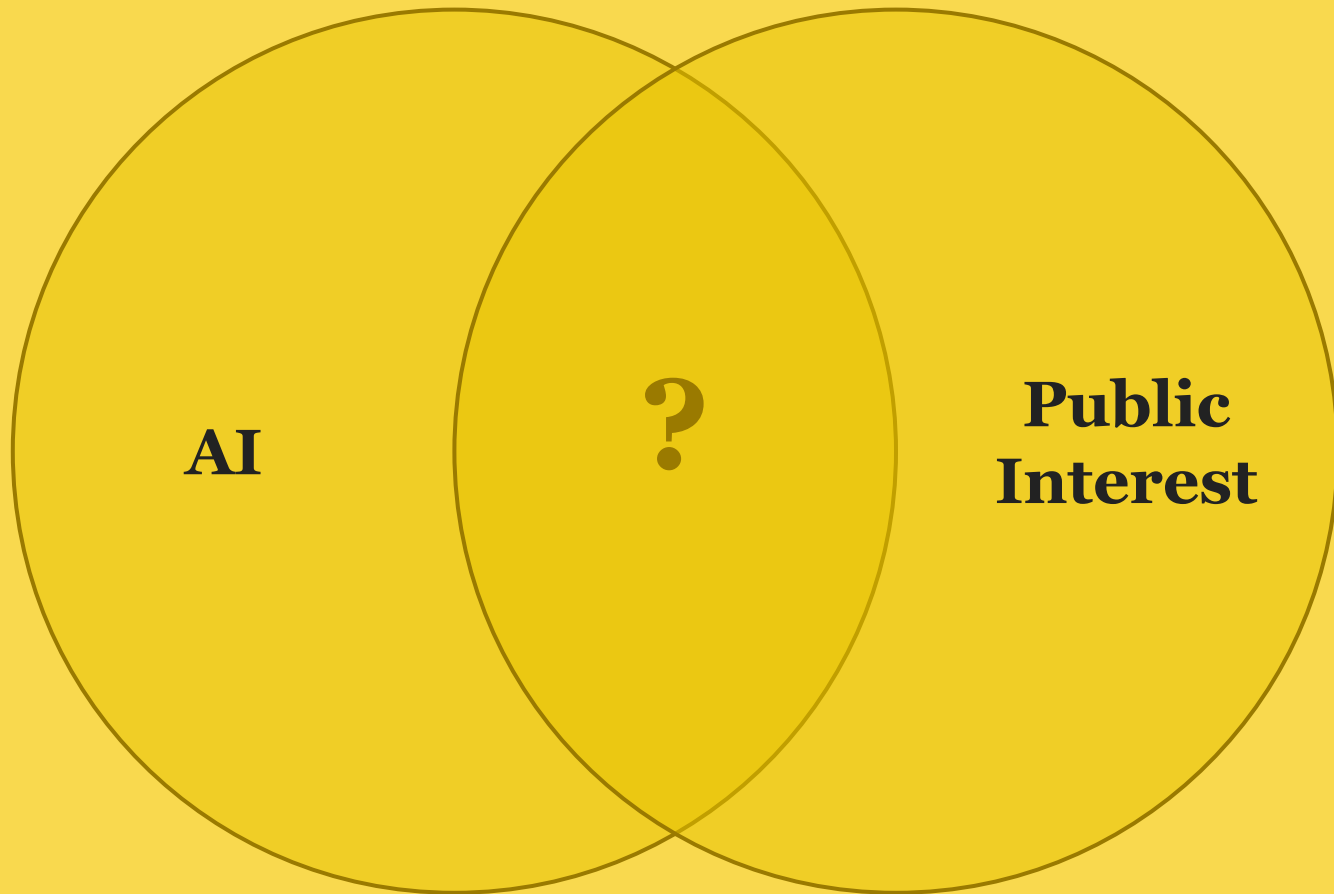




Urvashi Aneja
Digital Futures Lab
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Today

01 Few big picture conundrums



02 Some things we're doing about it



03 Challenges



We are sleepwalking into a growing inequality crisis

The wrong question

Global debate focuses on job displacement.

India's real problem is mobility — where are the pathways up for the next generation?

The proposed answers

Mass entrepreneurship — viable for some, not most

+ a few large platforms dominate key sectors, using data and capital to crowd out small players. You cannot discuss entrepreneurship as a strategy without addressing market concentration.

Data annotation work — global race to the bottom on wages

+ nature of AI industry is changing > content moderators

Evidence points toward deepening inequality, with returns flowing to capital over labour, and to large technology companies over everyone else.

The state is changing shape



AI as state power

AI could expand the administrative capacity of the state — and sometimes does. But the dominant pattern is different:

- Increased surveillance of citizens
- Coercion dressed as automation
- Power centralising, not distributing

AI is becoming about diffusion of state power.



Retreat of the state

At the same time, the state is withdrawing from its responsibilities to citizens.

People are seen data-rich. This is their pathway to becoming economically rich.

'AI for Good' is distorting the conversation



The use-case trap

Building applications is not system change. Problems are framed as information gaps — ignoring structural constraints. The business model is never questioned.



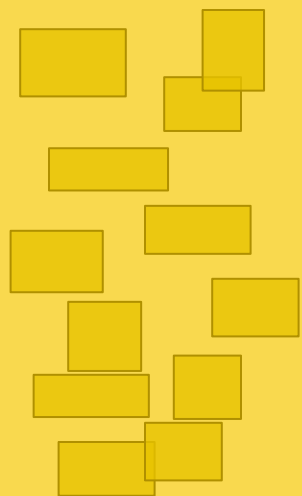
Philanthropy + tech

Tech-for-good is the new development aid. Philanthropies depend on the same companies whose products they fund. AI is the solution for the AI problem.



The state steps back

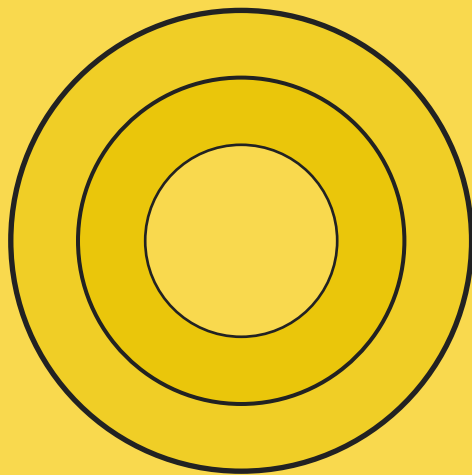
Hands off governance. The state builds infrastructure for market actors, not institutions for citizens. State as a platform. The citizen becomes a customer. Accountability largely disappears.



data



*needs
better*



model

What we need is not more data, but better models.

We made data a deity.

Collect enough of it and the answers will emerge. Dashboards became governance. Metrics became accountability. What could not be counted ceased to count.

+ Machine learning as a status quo technology / not designed for transformation.

02

Our Theory of Change

How our thinking has shifted

Where we started

A direct theory of change: better evidence leads to better policy



Evidence Building

CONTEXTUAL EVALUATIONS: Evaluate AI systems in real-world contexts — hospitals, courts, schools.

Benchmark performance and real-world harm are barely correlated. We need evaluations that reflect how these systems actually land.



Policy Shaping

PROCUREMENT: Use evidence to shape procurement standards and regulatory frameworks.

If you change what governments can demand, you change what the market builds.

informs

The assumption: if the evidence is good enough, the policy will follow. It often doesn't.

Where we're heading

A rethink: change needs different levers



Participatory Foresight

Build shared imagination of alternative futures before decisions get locked in. Expand what policymakers think they are allowed to ask.



Public Engagement

Reach people outside institutions. Fiction, art, and deliberation as sites where different futures become thinkable.



Capacity Building

Equip civil society and governments to engage AI on their own terms — not just respond to what the market presents.

Coalition Building runs through all of this — amplifying Global South voices at every stage.

03

Honest Reflection

Four structural difficulties

Four difficulties



A funding problem

We depend on the philanthropic ecosystem we critique.
Funders reward building over thinking.



An attention problem

Issues multiply faster than a small org can track.
Grounded, theorised knowledge is the slowest to produce.



A space problem

Very little room for critical AI discussion in India. Asking
whether the direction of travel is wrong is not welcome.



A knowledge representation problem

Who gets a seat at the table? Monopolised by a few
players whose values and theory of change are never
laid bare.