

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2025

October 28–30, 2025
Clermont-Ferrand, France

INCLUSIVE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

SOCIAL IMPACTS AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS




CONFERENCE CONCEPT NOTE

The GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE is the Global Development Network's (GDN) flagship event, held in a different region and on a different theme each year. It hosts high-level, inclusive, evidence-based debates on current development challenges and priorities, with most participants from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), which is its trademark. This event provides promising and established researchers with an opportunity to disseminate their work, share their ideas, and foment Global North-South interactions between academics and policymakers aiming to foster a global network. Moreover, it offers new, Southern perspectives on sustainable development issues and reinforces cooperation and development effectiveness. The format of this global event was expanded in 2024 to go beyond the traditional conference model and balance presentation of new evidence with capacity-sharing and networking opportunities directly connected to the conference theme.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2025

The Global Development Conference 2025 (GDC 2025) will explore the multifaceted dimensions of inclusive digital transformation and its role in shaping sustainable development outcomes through the theme - **'Inclusive Digital Transformation: Social Impacts and Technological Innovations'**. As digital technologies continue to revolutionise economies and societies worldwide, it is crucial to examine their social impacts and ensure that technological innovations benefit all segments of society, particularly in **low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)**.



The conference will examine the social implications of this change, debate novel solutions, and discuss digital inclusion policies. It will also explore how technology can advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly focused on digital inclusion, equality, and sustainable development, while bringing stakeholders together to leverage digital technologies for social and economic progress.

GDC 2025, organised by the [Global Development Network](#) will take place in Clermont-Ferrand, France from October 28 to 30, 2025. It will be co-hosted by the [Fondation pour les Études et Recherches sur le Développement International \(FERDI\)](#) [1] and the [Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Développement International \(CERDI\)](#) [2] as part of their collaboration under the [Pôle Clermontois de Développement International \(PCDI\)](#).

Given the conference's focus on inclusive digital transformation, we are delighted to confirm a [keynote address by Nandan Nilekani](#). His pioneering work on Aadhaar and large-scale digital public infrastructure has profoundly shaped India's development, setting a global benchmark for leveraging technology to drive financial inclusion, governance reforms, and digital empowerment. His insights will highlight the transformative potential of digital innovation and reinforce the conference's commitment to fostering meaningful discussions on digital inclusion.

WHY INCLUSIVE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?

Digital transformation is no longer a future trend but a reality that profoundly impacts development worldwide. While digital technologies offer significant opportunities to accelerate sustainable development, their impact is complex and requires careful consideration. It is important to recognise both the potential for progress and the inherent risks of exacerbating existing inequalities, both within and between nations. Furthermore, it's vital to acknowledge that leadership and innovation in the digital sphere are not confined to the Global North; many LMICs are pioneering context-specific solutions and demonstrating best practices from which the world can learn.

Digital technologies can be powerful catalysts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).. They fuel economic growth by connecting individuals to markets and opportunities. From precision agriculture and telemedicine to e-governance, their impact is vast. Importantly, *digital platforms facilitate global collaboration, enabling a two-way exchange of knowledge and the scaling of innovative solutions, regardless of their origin*. This includes, and values, South-South, North-South, and North-North collaborations.

However, the transformative power of digital technologies is not inherently inclusive or universally beneficial. The advantages are not equally distributed, and the risks extend beyond the commonly discussed "digital divide." The very structure of the global digital economy presents challenges to equitable development. While access to technology within countries is vital, *inclusivity must also encompass a fair distribution of the economic benefits of digital transformation across nations*. All countries must have the opportunity to shape the digital future, and the global architecture must support, not hinder, their participation.

Several critical concerns demand attention. Disparities in digital access, affordability, literacy, and relevant content create and reinforce inequalities, both within countries and between them. Algorithmic bias, inherent in AI systems trained on skewed data, can perpetuate discrimination. Data privacy and security vulnerabilities disproportionately impact vulnerable populations and countries with less robust regulatory frameworks. The rapid pace of automation and AI adoption

[1] Think tank based in the city of Clermont-Ferrand

[2] A joint research centre of Université Clermont Auvergne, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), the Institute for Research on Development (IRD)

threatens job displacement, particularly in sectors crucial to LMIC economies, requiring proactive strategies for reskilling and social protection. Furthermore, the ability of multinational corporations to utilise AI to minimise tax liabilities can erode the fiscal capacity of all nations, hindering their ability to invest in public services and development initiatives. Finally, the spread of misinformation through digital channels and the potential for technology to be used in conflicts pose serious threats to political stability and development progress.

Simply deploying technology is, therefore, insufficient. Uncritical adoption can worsen existing inequalities and create new vulnerabilities. A global perspective, valuing diverse experiences, is paramount.

The conference, therefore, centers on a crucial guiding question: ***How can we harness the transformative potential of digital technologies for sustainable development in a way that is truly inclusive, equitable, and empowering?***

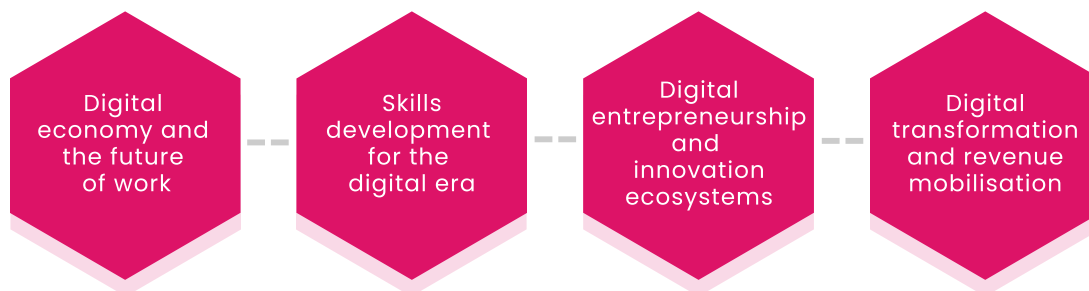
This question is not merely academic; it is a call to action. It demands that we move beyond simplistic narratives of technological progress and critically examine the social, economic, and political forces that shape the digital landscape. We must consider the diverse needs and experiences of all stakeholders, from individuals within communities to entire nations on the global stage, prioritising the most vulnerable. The goal should be to develop strategies that not only maximise the benefits of digital technologies but also minimise and manage their risks, *fostering a digital future where innovation from all parts of the world contributes to genuine global equity and sustainable development.*

KEY TOPICS

The conference will explore this central question through a multifaceted lens, encompassing critical dimensions of economics, governance, and the environment. These areas were chosen because they represent the fundamental pillars upon which sustainable and inclusive development rests:

ECONOMICS

Digital transformation is profoundly reshaping economic landscapes, creating both opportunities and challenges for employment, entrepreneurship, and overall economic growth. Understanding and navigating these changes is crucial for inclusive development. Key areas of focus include:

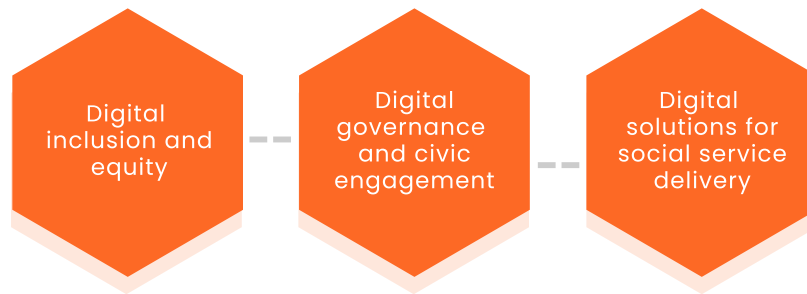


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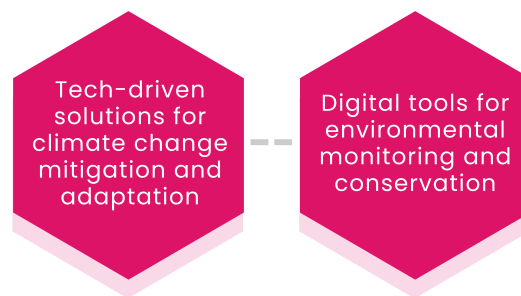
GOVERNANCE

The effective and equitable governance of digital technologies is paramount. This includes addressing issues of access, digital rights, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the overall framework for regulating the digital sphere. Key areas of focus include:



ENVIRONMENT

Digital technologies have a dual role in relation to the environment – they can be powerful tools for climate action and sustainability, but also contribute to environmental challenges. Addressing this duality is critical for a sustainable future. Key areas of focus include:



WHY CLERMONT-FERRAND AND INCLUSIVE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?

Clermont-Ferrand, with its rich industrial heritage and commitment to innovation, provides a unique context for the conference. The city's ongoing initiatives in digital skills development and technology adoption offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation from the ground up.

The city offers an ideal location for fostering collaboration between the Global South and Global North on socially inclusive digital transformation. Policymakers, practitioners, and academics from across the world will gather to interact, engage and learn from each other's expertise, experiences, knowledge, and insights, paving a way for positive action. The organising partners, all having a base in the city, bring to the conference their rich experience in this domain, which is also at the core of the [Pôle Clermontois de Développement International \(PCDI\)](#).

GDN is leading global efforts to build a community of researchers and evaluators across LMICs to better understand the [socio-economic impacts of digital public infrastructure \(DPI\)](#) and make this knowledge accessible to policymakers.

CERDI is involved in research projects analysing the potential of the digital revolution in promoting development prospects, mobilising innovative data sources to address key research questions.

FERDI through its [Digital Trust Chair](#) has partnered with public and private actors to study, analyse and formulate recommendations to promote the digital transformation of African economies.

WHAT MAKES THIS CONFERENCE UNIQUE?



EVIDENCE AND FRESH IDEAS (FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH)

Opportunities for researchers to talk about their work, share findings, and explore collaborative opportunities, focusing on the social impacts of digital transformation and technological innovations for development.



HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUES

Plenary discussions featuring experts from diverse regions, providing different perspectives on global digital development challenges and innovative solutions.



CAPACITY SHARING (IN-PERSON AND VIRTUALLY)

Engaging workshops designed to cultivate practical skills and facilitate the exchange of actionable knowledge on topics such as digital inclusion, digital governance, and the digital economy.



HYBRID SETTING FOR GLOBALLY CONNECTED DEBATES

To ensure inclusivity and global reach, the conference will be hybrid providing a platform for diverse voices to contribute regardless of location.

TRADITIONAL CONFERENCE



Presentations



Networking

GDC



Presentation of
New Evidence



Thematic Capacity
Building and Sharing



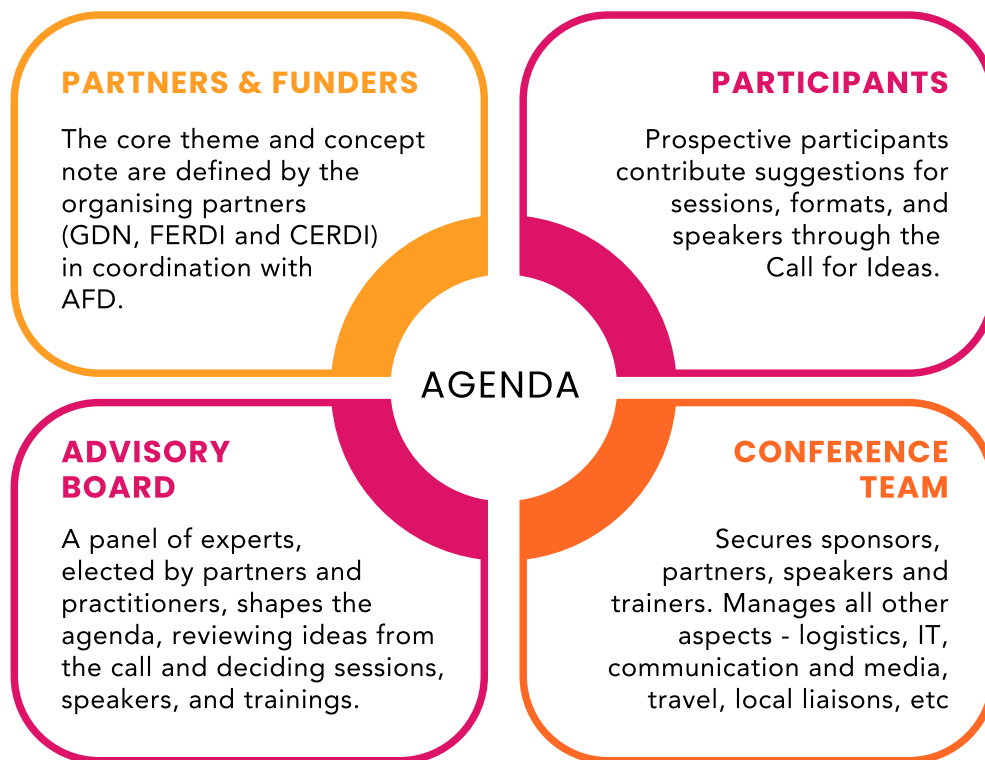
Networking



Global South
Representation

HOW WE BUILD OUR CONFERENCE

The conference agenda is shaped through a collaborative and inclusive process that combines inputs from partner organisations, an Advisory Board and prospective participants, through a global 'Call for Ideas'. This approach is a key ingredient for the event's success and diversity. The partners, funders and the Conference Core Team build the conference up, relying on various expertise and managing myriad aspects of this global event.



KEY AUDIENCES



ORGANISING COMMITTEE AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

The conference is organised by the Global Development Network (GDN) in partnership with its PCDI partners, CERDI and FERDI. The Organising Committee comprises representatives of the conference partners who play a key role in spearheading the event.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The **Global Development Network (GDN)** is a public international organisation that supports high quality, policy-oriented, social science research in LMICs. Through its global platform, GDN connects social science researchers with policymakers and development stakeholders across the world. Over the years, GDN has acquired expertise and a global pool of partners and committed resource persons involved in research management and capacity-building activities that link economic analysis to environmental protection. This includes a pioneering programme on natural capital accounting in LMICs; multidisciplinary research cutting across economics and other social and natural sciences, including the ongoing Biodiversity and Development Awards programme; as well as outreach activities to bridge research and policy for sustainable development.

FERDI

The **Fondation pour les Études et Recherches sur le Développement International (FERDI)** is a think tank actively engaged in international development discussions, with a research-based approach and a strong capacity to influence policy. Independent and not-for-profit, FERDI provides a forum for reflection and discussion by welcoming expertise from both the Global North and Global South. It advocates for poor and vulnerable countries in shaping the international architecture for development financing, and contributes its expertise to the formulation of public policies that promote sustainable and inclusive development, especially in Africa. Through events, seminars, training courses, publications, and the creation of innovative indicators, FERDI contributes to the evolution of ideas on sustainable development policies.

CERDI

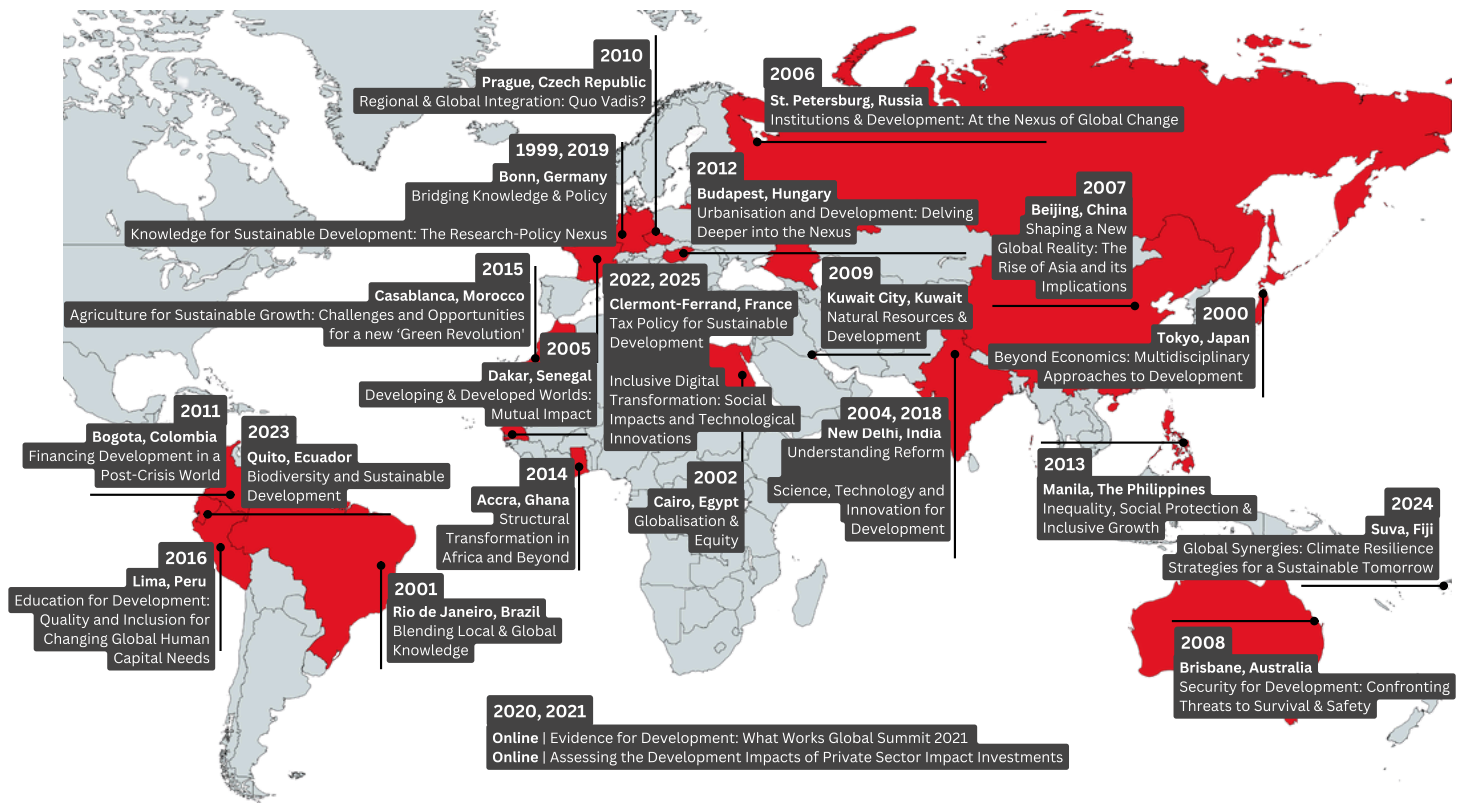
The **Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Développement International (CERDI)** is a joint research centre, exclusively focused on development economics, of the Université Clermont Auvergne, of the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and of the Institute for Research on Development (IRD). The publications and expertise of the members of the CERDI cover all the aspects of economic development from the engines of growth to the social, economic and environmental consequences of development. The CERDI has long-standing relationships with major international organisations, such as the IMF and the World Bank, that regularly hire young scholars that have been formed in Clermont-Ferrand.

PÔLE CLERMONTOIS DE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTERNATIONAL (PCDI)

This project aims to strengthen skills and synergies in a regional centre of expertise in international development, located in the city of Clermont-Ferrand, France, and its international outreach. This involves funding training activities, research capacity building for stakeholders from the Global South (executives, young researchers, etc.), and research activities on development.

Through Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the French State supports the research and training activities of the Clermont International Development Hub and the establishment of the Clermont-Ferrand branch of GDN within the framework of a single project. This initiative aims to strengthen the ecosystem of local expertise and to develop synergies among key actors to benefit partners in the Global South.

OVERVIEW OF PAST CONFERENCES (1999 ONWARDS)



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