



Concept Note

International Conference on Public Administration and Governance in South Asia

Nepal Administrative Staff College, Lalitpur, Nepal October 18-20, 2026

Theme

*Reimagining Public Administration in South Asia:
Ethics, Inclusion and State Capacity*

Background and Context

South Asia is navigating a decisive period of transition marked by accelerating development aspirations, democratic pressures, and global uncertainty. Countries across the region are striving to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while several—most notably Nepal—are preparing for or managing the complex process of graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status. These transitions are reshaping the expectations placed upon public administration systems.

At the same time, citizens are increasingly demanding ethical, transparent, and citizen-centric governance. Rising levels of education, digital connectivity, urbanization, and social mobilization have heightened public scrutiny of state institutions. Concerns over corruption, inequitable service delivery, administrative exclusion, and weak accountability are no longer peripheral—

they are central to the legitimacy of democratic governance and the sustainability of development gains.

Public administration systems in South Asia are therefore confronted with a dual imperative: to modernize and strengthen state capacity in order to deliver on development and SDG commitments, and to rebuild public trust through ethical conduct, inclusion, responsiveness, and respect for citizen dignity.

Nepal's experience with democratic transition, federal restructuring, social inclusion policies, SDG localization, and LDC graduation planning offers a timely and relevant context for convening a regional and international dialogue on the future of public administration and governance in South Asia.

Rationale

While the SDGs and LDC graduation frameworks emphasize national ownership, inclusivity, and institutional capacity, their successful implementation ultimately depends on the quality of public administration. However, many reform efforts in South Asia continue to face:

- Weak alignment between SDG commitments and administrative systems
- Limited administrative preparedness for post-LDC economic and institutional demands
- Persistent ethical deficits, corruption risks, and trust erosion
- Service delivery models that are supply-driven rather than citizen-centred
- Fragmented approaches to modernization, digitalization, and accountability

The conference will reposition public administration as a strategic enabler of sustainable development, ethical governance, and democratic deepening, and will foreground practical pathways for modernization that strengthen capability without undermining accountability and inclusion.

Objectives

The conference seeks to:

- Examine the role of public administration in achieving the SDGs and sustaining post-LDC development pathways;
- Explore how ethical governance and integrity systems can be institutionalized within public administration;
- Analyze citizen-centric service delivery as a foundation for trust, legitimacy, and democratic governance;
- Assess administrative readiness for managing economic transformation, fiscal transitions, and development financing;
- Share regional experiences in SDG localization, inclusive governance, and public sector modernization;
- Strengthen regional collaboration among public administration institutions, practitioners, and scholars.

Conference Theme and Sub-Themes

Main Theme: Reimagining Public Administration in South Asia: Ethics, Inclusion and State Capacity

Sub-Themes / Conference Tracks

Track 1: Public Administration and the SDGs

The SDGs provide a shared roadmap for governments to improve citizens' living standards in ways that uphold dignity, freedom, and recognition. Since the adoption of the SDGs, however, the world has faced an increasingly complex set of natural, health, economic, and political shocks that threaten human security and development progress. Crises such as COVID-19, earthquakes, floods, and episodes of civil unrest—alongside intensifying political tensions—have disrupted development pathways and constrained state capacity, particularly in developing countries.

In this context, public administration has remained the principal custodian of SDG implementation: translating global commitments into national priorities, coordinating action across sectors and levels of government, mobilizing resources, and ensuring accountable delivery. This track invites papers and case-based contributions from scholars and practitioners on (but not limited to) the following areas:

- Institutionalizing the SDGs within public administration systems
- SDG localization and the role of subnational governments
- Policy coherence, coordination, and whole-of-government approaches
- Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability for SDG delivery

Track 2: Public Administration in Post-LDC and Transitional Economies

Several South Asian countries have recently graduated from Least Developed Country (LDC) status or are preparing to do so in the near future. While this transition can expand economic opportunities—through greater scope for innovation, investment, production, trade, and market integration—it also introduces new vulnerabilities and policy demands. Managing graduation effectively is therefore essential to sustain development gains, reduce transition risks, and ensure that emerging opportunities are broadened and shared.

Realizing post-LDC benefits requires more than economic readiness. It depends fundamentally on the capability of public administration to manage the institutional and governance implications of graduation, including financing transitions, regulatory and trade-related reforms, strategic public investment, and service delivery systems that support inclusion and competitiveness. In this sense, LDC graduation is not only an economic milestone; it is a whole-of-government and whole-of-administration transition.

This track invites papers and case-based contributions on (but not limited to) the following areas:

- Administrative implications of LDC graduation
- Managing fiscal transitions, aid restructuring, and development finance
- Trade, industrial policy, and regulatory governance
- Strengthening institutions for inclusive economic growth

Track 3: Ethical Governance, Integrity, and Public Trust

Across the world, public trust in institutions is widely understood to be under sustained pressure. In South Asia, this challenge is compounded by heightened citizen expectations, rapid information flows, and greater public scrutiny of decision-making and service delivery. Questions of ethical conduct and integrity are no longer confined to public office alone; they extend across the wider governance ecosystem, including political actors, public servants, the private sector, civil society, and citizens themselves.

While digitalization, transparency reforms, civic education, and social accountability have strengthened oversight and raised ethical standards in many settings, they have also expanded the benchmark by which integrity is assessed. As parameters of ethical governance become more demanding—covering conflicts of interest, procurement integrity, responsiveness, equity, and respectful treatment of citizens—public institutions face persistent gaps between expectations and performance. Strengthening ethical governance is therefore not only a compliance agenda; it is central to legitimacy, effective policy implementation, and citizen-centred public service.

This track invites scholarly papers and practice-oriented, problem-solving cases on the dynamics of ethical governance and integrity systems, including (but not limited to):

- Ethics management and integrity systems in public administration
- Anti-corruption strategies and administrative accountability
- Transparency, open government, and right to information
- Rebuilding citizen trust in public institutions

Track 4: Citizen-Centric Governance and Service Delivery

A renewed social contract between the state and citizens is increasingly judged not through formal declarations, but through everyday interactions with public institutions—how services are accessed, how decisions are communicated, how grievances are resolved, and whether citizens experience dignity, fairness, and responsiveness. In this sense, citizen-centric governance is not an abstract aspiration; it is made tangible through the quality, equity, and reliability of public service delivery.

Across South Asia, rising expectations, digital connectivity, and widening inequalities are reshaping what citizens demand from the state. Governments are therefore under growing pressure to redesign services around citizen needs, reduce administrative burdens, ensure inclusion of marginalized groups, and strengthen mechanisms that enable citizens to provide feedback and hold institutions accountable. Citizen-centric delivery also requires new approaches to collaboration, including co-production with communities, civil society, and the private sector—especially in complex areas such as urban services, health, education, climate adaptation, and local governance.

This track invites papers and case-based contributions assessing the challenges, innovations, and reform pathways for citizen-centric governance and high-quality service delivery, including (but not limited to):

- Designing services around citizen needs and experiences
- Administrative inclusion and reaching marginalized populations

- Grievance redress, social accountability, and feedback mechanisms
- Co-production of public services and participatory governance

Track 5: Modernizing Public Administration for Democracy, Development and State Capacity

Over the past two decades, rapid advances in digital technology have reshaped economies, societies, and governance. These innovations provide not only new tools, but also new ways of thinking about the state—how governments design policies, manage institutions, interact with citizens, and deliver services. Digital transformation has reduced long-standing barriers in communication and information flows, expanded opportunities for participation, and enabled new models of collaboration with non-government actors in service delivery and oversight.

At the same time, modernization is not automatically democratic or inclusive. Digital systems can widen inequality when access is uneven; they can erode trust when data governance is weak; and they can amplify administrative risk when AI systems are deployed without adequate transparency, accountability, and safeguards. Modernizing public administration must therefore be approached as both a technological and institutional reform agenda—one that strengthens capability and effectiveness while protecting rights, ensuring fairness, and deepening democratic accountability.

This track invites scholarly papers and applied cases on emerging approaches to modernizing public administration—including digital government and AI—and their implications for democratic governance and development outcomes. Topics include (but are not limited to):

- Digital government, AI, and ethical public service delivery
- Civil service reform, performance management, and diversity
- Innovation, adaptive governance, and administrative resilience
- Balancing efficiency with equity and democratic accountability

Track 6: Climate Change, Sustainability, and Inclusive Governance

South Asia is widely recognized as a climate hotspot, facing increasing frequency and intensity of climate-related hazards and growing uncertainty in weather patterns. Erratic rainfall, floods, heatwaves, droughts, landslides, and glacial and riverine risks are placing severe pressure on livelihoods, infrastructure, and public services—especially for communities already experiencing poverty, exclusion, and geographic vulnerability. These impacts are not only environmental; they are fundamentally governance challenges that test the preparedness, coordination capacity, and legitimacy of public institutions.

Advances in forecasting, early warning systems, and disaster response capabilities have helped reduce loss of life and damage in many contexts. However, short-term response improvements alone are insufficient to address the deeper, long-term risks to ecosystems, development pathways, and social resilience. Climate change therefore requires a shift toward climate-informed development—embedding risk and sustainability considerations into planning, budgeting, regulation, investment decisions, and service delivery across all levels of government. It also demands inclusive governance approaches that ensure climate action does not reproduce inequality, and that vulnerable groups are protected and empowered.

This track invites scholarly papers and applied cases on climate-responsive public administration, innovative climate-informed development practices, and effective approaches to disaster risk reduction, including (but not limited to):

- Climate-responsive public institutions and SDG 13
- Disaster risk governance and resilient service delivery
- Environmental justice and inclusive climate action
- Governing climate finance and adaptation initiatives

Deliberative Studio

A facilitated, structured deliberation among senior practitioners, scholars, civil society, and development partners. Outputs will include a set of agreed problem frames, design principles for ethical service delivery, and a short 'practice note' for administrations in South Asia.

Policy Studio

A design-sprint style studio where mixed teams work on concrete governance challenges (e.g., SDG localization, financing transitions, regulatory strengthening, infrastructure governance). Outputs will include draft policy prototypes, implementation pathways, and evidence needs, which can be converted into chapters and policy briefs.

Nepal Dialogue

A dedicated plenary dialogue reflecting on Nepal's governance trajectory in light of recent civic contestation and rising expectations for accountable, ethical, and responsive public service and enhancing state capacity. This session will connect Nepal's lessons to regional debates on legitimacy, inclusion, and modernization.

Learning Lab

To leverage the expertise of scholars and senior practitioners participating in the conference, a set of purposefully designed Learning Lab sessions will be offered under the overarching themes of public policy, public administration, and governance. These sessions will be structured as applied, skills-oriented modules to strengthen the capacity of academics, policymakers, and researchers.

Conference Structure and Format

The conference will be held over two and a half days, structured to integrate strategic vision, empirical evidence, and practical experience.

Day 1: Development Commitments and Governance Foundations

- Opening Ceremony and Keynote Address
- Plenary: *Reimagining Public Administration in South Asia: Ethics, Inclusion and State Capacity*
- Thematic Sessions (Tracks 1 & 2)
- Deliberative Studio: *Ethics, Integrity and Trust under uncertain times*
- Policy Studio: *SDGs and Post-LDC Readiness*

Day 2: Citizen-Centric and Ethical Modernization

- Plenary: *Modernizing the State for Citizens, Not Just Efficiency*
- Thematic Sessions (Tracks 3 & 4)
- Learning Lab: Multiple workstreams (Training sessions to faculties, civil officials, students, civil society and freelance on specific areas of public policy and public administration will be organized).
- Nepal Dialogue (Special focus)

Day 3 (Half Day): Synthesis and Forward Agenda

- Plenary: *Ethical and Inclusive States for Development Delivery*
- Thematic Sessions (Tracks 5 & 6)
- Deliberative Studio: *Reimagining Public Administration in South Asia*
- Closing Session

Key Dates

Abstract Submission Deadline: May 15, 2026

Abstract Acceptance Notification: June 15, 2026

Conference Registration: July 20 onwards

Conference Dates: Oct 18-20, 2026

Who Shall Participate?

- Senior policymakers and civil servants
- Public administration scholars and governance experts
- Leaders of civil service and public administration training institutions
- Representatives of development partners and international organizations
- Civil society leaders and policy think tanks
- Early-career researchers and practitioners

What Will be the Outcome?

- Edited volume or special journal issue on public administration and sustainable development
- Policy briefs on SDGs, LDC graduation, and ethical governance
- Teaching cases on citizen-centric service delivery and integrity systems
- Conference note as Kathmandu Declaration

Organizing Institutions

- Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC)
- Public Administration Association of Nepal (PAAN)
- South Asia Network for Public Administration (SANPA)

Conference Organizing Committee

Conference Chair

Mr Ram Sharan Pudasaini, Executive Director, Nepal Administrative Staff College & former Secretary, Government of Nepal

Co-Chair

Prof Akhlaque Haq, President, South Asia Network for Public Administration (SANPA) & Professor at Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Alabama at Birmingham, United States

Co-Chair

Amb. Madhu Raman Acharya, President, Public Administration Association of Nepal (PAAN) & former Secretary, Government of Nepal

Co-Chair

Prof Uddhab Pyakurel, Dean, Kathmandu University School of Arts

Conference Secretary

Mr Trilochan Pokharel, Senior Director, Nepal Administrative Staff College & Deputy Secretary-General, SANPA

Members

Dr Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, Secretary-General, SANPA

Prof Yaamina Salman, Academic Affairs Secretary, SANPA & Prof of Public Administration, Institute of Administrative Sciences, University of Panjab

Prof Fara Azmat, Executive Committee Member, SANPA & Prof at Deakin University, Australia

Prof Durga Chettri, Executive Committee Member, SANPA & Prof of Political Sciences at Sikkim University

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