

LAUNCH EVENT CONCEPT NOTE

Building Responsible Smart Cities:

A Toolkit for Public and Private Sector Action

11 July 2025 | 09:00-13:00 | InterContinental Singapore

Registration: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/aqJvwFRDDP>

Context

Asian cities are at the heart of the world's urban future. By 2050, nearly 7 in 10 people are expected to live in urban areas. Asia is at the epicentre of this shift, home to more than half of the world's 100 most populous cities and 18 of the 32 megacities (cities with over 10 million people). The UN Habitat's World Cities Report (2020) estimates that some 96% of urban growth up to 2050 will occur in Asia and Africa, with India, China, and Nigeria accounting for nearly a third of the total increase.

This rapid urbanization presents significant development challenges. Cities must deliver basic services, build resilient infrastructure, create housing and public spaces, and ensure all residents, regardless of their length of stay, can enjoy their fundamental rights, including access to education, healthcare, housing, and recreation.

To support this, governments in the region are increasingly embracing smart city solutions, which leverage data and digital technologies to optimize urban systems and services, offering an opportunity to address many of these pressures and meet rising demand. Across Asia, particularly in East Asia, governments have been early adopters, investing heavily in technological solutions to manage growing urban populations. By 2025, Asia is expected to account for 40% of global smart city investments, totalling an estimated USD 320 billion.

Yet, as highlighted in the [2025 Human Development Report](#) (HDR), technology is not neutral – it reflects choices about who benefits, who participates, and who is protected. The report underscores the urgency of embedding agency, inclusion, and accountability in digital transitions. While these technological solutions aim to improve service delivery and livelihoods and increase efficiency, they also pose human rights risks. These include risks from increased surveillance and inadequate data protection laws, and the potential exclusion of populations who do not have access to or cannot effectively access the benefits. Without adequate safeguards, technology deployment can reinforce inequalities or even undermine rights. In other words, Smart cities, if not guided by standards and principles for responsible business, risk exacerbating inequality, marginalizing communities, and undermining trust.

The HDR emphasizes that the promise of digital innovation can only be realized if people, not systems, remain at the center. In the context of smart cities, this means planning with meaningful participation, applying human rights due diligence, and ensuring that digital transformation reinforces, not replaces, human development outcomes. While technology deployment offers clear benefits, a rights-centred approach is essential and should focus on ensuring that technological solutions are appropriately applied and that the deployment of new technologies enhance, rather than undermine, access to essential services.

Toolkit on Building Responsible Smart Cities

A new toolkit, developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Business and Human Rights in Asia (B+HR Asia) in partnership with the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), provides governments (both national and local) and private sector companies with a practical framework for integrating business respect for human rights into smart city planning and implementation.

It offers local and national governments and private sector actors working in the area of smart cities on how to adhere to their respective duties and responsibilities for human rights, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. The *Building Responsible Smart Cities: A Toolkit for Public and Private Sector Action* is grounded in international human rights standards and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), providing both foundational-level and stage-specific recommendations throughout the smart city project lifecycle. An accompanying report provides additional context and conceptual background. Though focused on the Asia-Pacific region, the toolkit could be applicable to other regions as well. It was developed through consultation with stakeholders from government, business, academia and civil society.

About the Launch

To mark the release of the toolkit, UNDP will host a launch event, in collaboration with IHRB and the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities (LKYCIC) at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. The launch event will bring together government and private sector stakeholders involved in smart city planning and implementation. This half day session will introduce the toolkit and accompanying report, with a focus on practical application. It aims to convene representatives from:

- Government actors involved in smart city initiatives
- Private sector actors, including consulting firms, contractors, and technology companies
- Civil society and academia engaged in digital governance, urban development, and human rights

Objectives

1. Raise awareness among public and private sector actors on the importance of integrating human rights into smart city planning and implementation
2. Introduce the toolkit as a practical resource grounded in the UNGPs
3. Foster dialogue among governments, companies and civil society on shared challenges and solutions

Venue:

InterContinental Singapore
80 Middle Road, Singapore 188966
([map of location](#))

Agenda

TIME	SEGMENT
9:00-9:30	Registration and Tea/Coffee
9:30-9:45	Welcome Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harpreet Kaur, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP
9:45-10:15	Introduction to the Toolkit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaping Smart Cities (<i>video message</i>) Salil Tripathi, Senior Adviser, Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) • Toolkit Walkthrough: Key Features, How to Use It, and Who It's For Annabel Short, Senior Adviser, IHRB
10:15-11:45	PANEL DISCUSSION Building Responsible and Inclusive Smart Cities: Roles and Responsibilities of States and Businesses <i>Including practical examples and insights from Asia</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jamie KO, Director, Regional Public Affairs and Policy, Grab • Jared Ragland, Senior Director, Policy – APAC, Business Software Alliance • POON King Wang, Chief Strategy and Design AI Officer; Director, Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities; Singapore University of Technology and Design • Harpreet Kaur, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP (<i>moderator</i>)
11:45-12:00	Closing Remarks
12:00-13:00	Networking Lunch