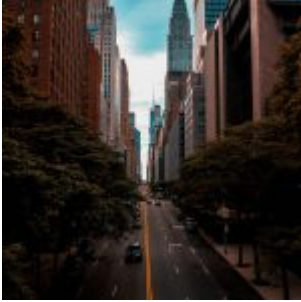# Smart Cities Research Gap

Section: Society and gender
written by Mar Joanpere Foraster | March 14, 2025

Despite the growing enthusiasm around the concept of 'smart cities', recent research highlights a significant oversight: the insufficient attention paid to empirical evidence and the real-world impact of smart city initiatives. As noted in a recent paper published in [Nature (2025),](#) proponents of smart cities often prioritize technological advancement and infrastructural innovation without adequately investigating whether these measures truly enhance urban life, and if so, for whom.

The paper "Why are proponents of 'smart cities' neglecting research?" emphasizes that much of the existing literature focuses disproportionately on infrastructure and technological implementation rather than examining broader socioeconomic implications. A systematic review of studies from southern African countries revealed this imbalance clearly: research efforts frequently overlooked critical factors such as social equity, governance structures, and the broader implications of technology-driven urban planning.

Furthermore, the study calls attention to projects like "The Line" in Saudi Arabia and community-driven initiatives such as "Map Kibera" in Kenya to illustrate how different approaches to smart cities carry unique benefits and potential pitfalls. While futuristic projects promise environmental sustainability and innovation, community-based projects like Map Kibera empower residents to hold authorities accountable for

improving basic services, showing the importance of inclusive, participatory governance.

The authors underscore the urgent need for comprehensive research to guide the development of truly inclusive smart cities. They advocate for incorporating perspectives of local communities, assessing environmental impacts rigorously, and critically evaluating who benefits from these innovations. The forthcoming UN-Habitat guidelines on "people-centred smart cities" are cited as a promising initiative to encourage a universal standard that places community needs, human rights, and sustainability at the core of urban technology initiatives.

This contribution serves as a critical reminder to policymakers, urban planners, and technology enthusiasts alike that genuine smart-city development must be grounded in robust, inclusive research to ensure equitable benefits for all urban residents.