Written inputs by Saudi Green Building Forum

Agenda Item 6: Role of Governments in ensuring transparency and accountability of artificial intelligence systems in public administration

Facts and Challenges in Urban Artificial Intelligence Governance in the Arab Region

The Arab region is experiencing accelerated urban growth, driven by economic diversification, population increase, and large-scale infrastructure expansion. As cities modernize, artificial intelligence systems are increasingly introduced into public administration to support service delivery, planning, and environmental monitoring. Governments across the region, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have adopted national digital transformation strategies that recognize artificial intelligence as a core enabler of sustainable development.

Despite this progress, challenges remain significant. Many municipalities in the Arab region operate with limited technical expertise, constrained institutional capacity, and an absence of regulatory tools to govern artificial intelligence effectively. Local authorities often lack the means to assess ethical risks, guarantee transparency, or engage the public in decision-making processes related to artificial intelligence systems.

The lack of comprehensive standards tailored to regional conditions further complicates governance. Key urban challenges in the Arab region—such as water scarcity, energy intensity, and climate vulnerability—are not always addressed in global frameworks. Without localized standards and accountability mechanisms, artificial intelligence systems risk being misaligned with regional realities or inadvertently deepening existing inequalities.

In addition, civil society engagement in digital governance remains underdeveloped. The absence of participatory structures limits the diversity of perspectives informing artificial intelligence deployment. Without inclusive co-design and ongoing community oversight, public trust in artificial intelligence systems may erode, reducing their effectiveness and legitimacy.

Opportunities and Risks of Artificial Intelligence Systems and the Leadership Role of Saudi Green Building Forum

Artificial intelligence systems offer a range of opportunities to improve the performance and responsiveness of public institutions. In cities, artificial intelligence can support real-time traffic

optimization, digital permitting, predictive maintenance of infrastructure, and energy efficiency in buildings. These capabilities can strengthen administrative efficiency and improve the quality of urban life.

However, such outcomes are not guaranteed. Artificial intelligence systems can produce biased or opaque results, infringe on privacy, and displace human judgment if deployed without safeguards. Systems not grounded in clear accountability frameworks may be used for purposes that deviate from their original intent, raising ethical concerns and exacerbating inequality.

In this context, and reflecting the national commitment to sustainable digital transformation, the Saudi Green Building Forum contributes to ethical and transparent implementation of artificial intelligence in cities. As the official scheme owner of the Sustainability Assessment Accreditation Framework, we ensure that sustainability and technology performance are measured holistically across energy, water, materials, and infrastructure systems. This regional certification system includes evaluation criteria related to public health, digital responsibility, environmental impact, and user well-being.

The framework supports implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12 by promoting clean water use, renewable energy adoption, resilient infrastructure, sustainable urbanization, and responsible consumption and production. By embedding these goals in locally relevant benchmarks, the system helps bridge the gap between global green building certifications and regional realities. It incorporates local knowledge, cultural context, and environmental priorities—enabling artificial intelligence applications to be designed and evaluated through standards that are both globally aligned and locally meaningful. This approach strengthens regional ownership of digital sustainability and improves the integration of artificial intelligence into the built environment.

We have expanded the system to address artificial intelligence governance directly. Our framework now incorporates digital transparency, safety, and social inclusion metrics for artificial intelligence systems embedded in buildings and public infrastructure. These additions reflect growing demand for integrated, ethical solutions that combine sustainability and digital innovation.

We work in collaboration with municipalities, regulatory authorities, accredited certification bodies, engineering institutions, and academic partners. These stakeholders contribute to the ongoing development of criteria, professional training, third-party verification, and implementation tools. Our joint efforts support the translation of national strategies into measurable, localized action that respects cultural, environmental, and social contexts.

We emphasize a participatory approach to Member Stats. Through city-level conferences, technical panels, and capacity-building programs, we engage local actors in the co-design, monitoring, and evaluation of artificial intelligence systems. This approach reinforces the principles outlined by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, including inclusive governance, ethical system design, and people-centered development.

Call for Enhanced United Nations Engagement with Accredited Non-Governmental Organizations

Governments cannot bear the responsibility for artificial intelligence governance alone. The complexity of digital systems, the rapid pace of deployment, and the wide-ranging impacts on communities require the involvement of civil society, professional institutions, and independent oversight mechanisms. Accredited non-governmental organizations can serve as trusted partners in helping Member States design and implement frameworks that ensure accountability, transparency, and inclusion.

We call on the United Nations and its relevant entities to strengthen collaboration with accredited non-governmental organizations in the following areas:

Invite nongovernmental organizations in multilateral discussions and national implementation frameworks concerning artificial intelligence in public administration. Their contributions reflect real-world experience, regional context, and local knowledge essential for practical governance solutions.

Promote regional standard-setting efforts led by non-governmental organizations in partnership with public institutions. The development and recognition of conformity systems that reflect regional challenges—such as water scarcity, climate risk, or digital inequality—can help ensure artificial intelligence systems are context-sensitive and aligned with global norms.

Support capacity-building initiatives led by non-governmental organizations for local governments, engineers, planners, and civil servants. These programs enable cities to deploy artificial intelligence systems responsibly, with full understanding of their ethical and operational implications.

Establish mechanisms for shared accountability across the artificial intelligence lifecycle. Civil society organizations can provide independent monitoring, gather feedback from affected communities, and support adaptation based on evidence and experience.

Encourage Member States to continue enabling environments for civil society participation in digital transformation. National strategies should reflect the value of cross-sector collaboration

and support governance models that are transparent, participatory, and grounded in the public interest.

Building the Future We Want: Ethical AI for Sustainable Cities

Artificial intelligence holds extraordinary promise to shape the cities of tomorrow—cities that are not only smarter, but also more inclusive, just, and humane. In the Arab region, where urban landscapes are evolving rapidly, this technology offers a historic opportunity to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Saudi Green Building Forum measures buildings, neighborhoods and cities by innovation alone, but by how deeply it reflects human experience, responds to local priorities, and upholds dignity, equity, and collective well-being.

The future of artificial intelligence in public administration is not predetermined—it is ours to design. By embracing inclusive governance, rooted in trust, accountability, and collaboration, we can build intelligent systems that serve the public good and empower communities.

Together—with Member States, civil society, the United Nations, and all those committed to sustainable progress—we can turn artificial intelligence into a transformative force for good. One that connects tradition with innovation, and ambition with justice.

Saudi Green Building Forum stands ready to work alongside international partners to shape an ethical and visionary path forward—where every city is a beacon of opportunity, resilience, and hope for generations to come.