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From far left: SMU Urban Institute director Orlando Woods; provost Tim Clark; SMU chairman Piyush Gupta; Ms Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State for National Development as well as Foreign Affairs; SMU president Lily Kong; and vice-provost (research) Archan Misra at the launch of Urban Institute held at the Yong Pung How School of Law on Jan 17.  
ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

## SMU launches Urban Institute to address complex issues faced by cities in Asia

Thian Wen Li

The Singapore Management University (SMU) on Jan 17 launched a new Urban Institute that will carry out research on Asian cities to address challenges such as climate change and ageing infrastructure.

The institute will bring together experts from different backgrounds to conduct research on urban cities in Singapore and South-east Asia.

SMU chairman Piyush Gupta

noted that cities are facing unprecedented challenges, from demographic shifts due to migration to the rising demand for access to education and jobs. The new institute will create a hub for urban planners, designers, economists, social scientists and policymakers to work together to explore solutions, he said.

The research produced will not just be for academia, but also for industry and policymakers, he said.

The Urban Institute will focus on three areas of research. The urban

life pillar will explore what makes a city liveable and how place-making can contribute to improve its diversity and vibrancy.

The urban growth pillar will look at strategies for equitable access to urban services, such as housing and employment opportunities, among other things.

Under the urban infrastructure pillar, researchers will examine topics such as how hard infrastructure – materials – and soft infrastructure like social or regulatory constraints affect urban development. The institute also

plans to partner global universities and think-tanks that are focused on studying cities.

SMU on Jan 17 signed a memorandum of understanding with Thailand's Thammasat University to facilitate student exchanges, the sharing of research materials and the joint organisation of seminars and symposiums.

Speaking at the event, Senior Minister of State for National Development as well as Foreign Affairs Sim Ann said the institute will "play an important role in promoting the exchange of experience and research between Singapore and our regional neighbours, and in helping policymakers and practitioners create a better built environment for all".

SMU Associate Professor of Geography Orlando Woods, who helps the Urban Institute, hopes it

will further develop the three main pillars to create more impact for government stakeholders and partner South-east Asian cities.

He said that as a social science and humanities university, SMU can provide a unique perspective on issues in urban cities.

There are currently about nine projects under the institute, according to its website, with plans to increase this number further. The institute is also in talks to form research partnerships with institutions in Toronto and Melbourne.

Noting that SMU has launched overseas centres in Bangkok and Jakarta to promote knowledge sharing, Prof Woods hopes the new institute will build a footprint in South-east Asia.

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