

# **Editorial**

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Climate change, sustainability, diversity, financial probity, gender and governance are profound and complex challenges facing local government today, and are all topics raised by the researchers and practitioners contributing to CJLG Issue 10. Cash-strapped local governments are required to deliver core services ('roads, rates and rubbish' as Heather Zeppel's interviewee said), yet are increasingly required to embrace broad social inclusion and environmental concerns, as our contributors show.

The five **research papers** in this issue touch at the heart of equity and democratic governance. The role of critical theory in delivering good practice is explored by Eris Schoburgh in her reflection on local government and local development, and her comparison of Trinidad & Tobago's structured decentralisation and Jamaica's communitarian approach. She dismisses the 'leading laggard' model where linked settlement economies sink or swim together, and the 'learning region' which maximise local synergies to promote economic growth, to propose a new 'hybrid model' of local growth that tackles on-going issues such as gender equality, the informal economy and the local commons.

In Canada's federal system with 13 provinces, and over 3,600 municipalities, dealing with diversity is a major challenge. John Martin, Gary Paget and Brian Walisser highlight the problems of capacity in rural administrations covering vast areas and diverse communities, and argue the need to strengthen capacity and innovation. There is no universal local government system in Canada, and each province varies in its approach, so the *Symposium on Strengthening the Rural* held in Québec city in 2008 provided an important opportunity for debating structure, practices and processes, highlighting a new role for local government associations in advocating strategic system reform

'What happens when women are in charge' asks Hilde Bjørnå in her fascinating study of a local council in Australia where women representatives are the majority. In her

(anonymous) council, 8 of the 11 representatives elected in 2008 were women. Compared to the previous pro-development administration, the new council focused on community and green politics, e.g.: social welfare for (aboriginal) island communities; council meetings were no longer like an auction, and councillors ‘talked things out’. Yet, Hilde concluded that it was the community orientation rather than the women’s platform that led the agendas, and that women’s contribution is strongly contingent.

Heather Zeppel explores how local governments tackle climate change in her survey of the carbon mitigation measures taken by 14 Greater Adelaide councils. All had faced environmental challenges of drought, heat waves, flooding, bush fires or coastal erosion, but were tackling the issues with innovation and verve, acting strategically to provide leadership in climate change adaptation planning and raising community awareness, and internally to reduce their own carbon emissions. Interestingly she notes that street lighting is one of the largest contributors to local government carbon emissions.

Transparent and effective management of local government finance is crucial to underpin democratic governance, argues Umar Kakumba in his study in Uganda of the agencies that audit and inspect local government. He suggests that, instead of blaming local councils for inefficiencies, it is also necessary to ‘audit the auditors’. He found the agencies plagued by staffing gaps and budget shortfalls, and in 2006/7 almost half of the accounts they held had not been completed, and calls for greater support for these agencies to foster better public management.

In the **Commentary** section Jude Okafor explores how a squabble between Nigerian state and federal government has hindered local government evolution. In 1976 local government was recognised as in the military government’s political transition programme. This landmark reform was enshrined in the 1977 and 1999 Constitutions, which listed the then existing local governments. One side now argues that State Governors have powers to create new local government areas, while the other that the number is fixed by the Constitution. In burgeoning Lagos and elsewhere new areas were not allocated Federal Funds, although a High Court Judgement has now deemed this illegal.

Jade Herriman, Hazel Storey, Phil Smith, and Grahame Collier argue that effective working relationships are a pivotal but frequently undervalued variable in local government sustainability programmes. In this richly illustrated piece, they argue that complex sustainability agendas need a deliberate approach to building relationships amongst multiple

partners, requiring commitment, time, and resources, and conclude with helpful ideas on how this challenge may be approached.

Delivering effective participation through the medium of SEA (strategic environmental appraisal) is the focus Corrado Zoppi's comparison of SEA in two coastal authorities, Torbay Council in the UK and the Cagliari port area in Sardinia. The timing of participation is crucial to its influence on the plan; in Torbay the goals of the SEA location-specific and directly fed into the transport plan, whereas in Cagliari a long-drawn out planning process and late start to SEA meant that the goals were generic and much less influential.

The first of the two **Practice Notes** by CLGF Project Officer Rachael Duchnowski, summarises the final phase of CLGF's three year Good Practice Scheme, funded by DFID, which finished in late 2011. The programme partnered councils and local government associations from Jamaica, India, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Ghana with counterparts in South Africa, India and the UK to exchange good practice and generate innovative solutions to local governments' challenges. Finally Chris Berry explores the 2009 local government reform in Western Australia, the last Australian state to embrace structural change. He evaluates two different approaches to reform, Regional Transition Groups and Regional Collaborative Groups, giving flexibility for voluntary reform arrangements.

Finally please follow our contributor John Martin's blog as he cycles across Canada, and look out for the next Research Colloquium in Kampala, Uganda on 13/14 May 2013 for which new ideas and papers are welcome, with an interim issue of the e-journal at the end of 2012.