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This issue is published on the eve of the **CLGF Research Colloquium**, hosted by Ugandan Institute of Management on 13/14 May 2013 in Kampala, to launch the *2013 Commonwealth Local Government Conference*. The theme – *Developmental Local Government: Putting local government at the heart of development* – ushers in some exciting new papers, covering issues of urban finance and development, strengthening local democracy, local economic development, and the crucial Post-2015 agenda, which will be published in the next edition of CJLG. Our thanks to Rose Namara and Sylvester Kugonza, coordinators at UIM, Philip Amis of the University of Birmingham, who chairs the CLGF research group, and Gareth Wall who organised the Colloquium.

This issue starts with an authoritative paper by **Nicola Brakertz**, who argues compellingly for a stronger role and status for Australian local government, to address the constitutional, financial and historic constraints that affect its autonomy and performance. Perceived until the 1970s as responsible only for 'roads, rates and rubbish', she argues for constitutional or legislative change to ensure that democratically elected local councils have adequate finance and safeguards from arbitrary dismissal to secure effective local governance.

Two papers explore the shifting status of local government under authoritarian rule. In Pakistan, **Munawwar Alam** and **Mohammad Abuzar Waljidi** examine the Devolution of Power Plan introduced by General Musharraf in 2001, which held a brief promise of effective local democracy but they argue that since 2009 decentralisation has faltered and that, despite general elections in May 2013, local government elections seem a far cry. In Nigeria, **Jude Okafor** and **Ikechukwu Orjinta** illustrate how elected local councils were strengthened under military rule, but legislative loopholes mean that today 617 of the country's 774 local governments are run by caretaker committees rather than elected councils.

From Zimbabwe, **David Mandiyanike** tackles the complex problems of staffing capacity, arguing that executive turnover can have far-reaching consequences for a local authority's development and effectiveness. Based on a study of senior staff changes in rural district councils over 10 years, he asks whether CEOs and senior staff should be employed as civil servants or as locally engaged in order to achieve a virtuous rather than vicious cycle of leadership in smaller authorities.

Sudheesh Chemmencheri demonstrates that, even in inclusive Kerala, indigenous tribal and forest communities are marginalised in claiming land rights to protect their lifestyles. Mainstream political parties seem to have missed the case of the *adavasis*, and the *Forest Rights Act 2007* has failed to

achieve effective devolution and community consultation to secure their land titles. Thus the 'claimed spaces' of decentralisation initiated under the act have failed to produce results on the ground.

Two papers look at local government financing in Ghana. **Maxwell Petio** returns to the knotty problem of effective property rating and taxation. He argues that the blame for weak internal revenue collection lies not only with District Assemblies, but also with the centrally administered Land Valuation Division which is plagued by lack of finance and limited staffing capacities. **Nana Danquah, Emmanuel Sakyi** and **Nana Appiah-Agyekum** explore the administration of the MPs' share of the District Assemblies Common Fund, the central government transfer intended to help MPs commission development projects of direct relevance to their electorates. In practice politics interferes, and Chief Executives may sometimes be at odds with local MPs on how funds should be spent.