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### Editorial

Good news at last – the path for local government involvement in Habitat III is finally approved. On the 22 December 2015, the United Nations adopted resolution A/70/473 on procedures for Habitat III (the *United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development*) to recognise the participation of accredited local authorities, as happened in Habitat II in 1996. Municipal, local and regional governments can now register for Habitat III either through their national delegations or an accredited NGO. Until December it was not clear that local government – the main implementing agency for the Habitat III and sustainable development agendas – would be involved in the UN member-state conference, but following extensive lobbying local government will now have a presence on this global platform. Meanwhile the *2nd World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments*, will be held in Quito in on 17–20 October 2016, in parallel to the Habitat III conference.

**Issue 18** of CJLG again highlights the importance of strong institutions and innovative delivery in strengthening effective local government. **Terry Parker** leads with his research report on the groundbreaking *Commonwealth Local Government Forum* programme, funded by DFID, on improving governance and service delivery in Africa and Asia. Experience in Swaziland shows how a national focus and local pilots in three local government areas are redefining approaches to local economic development. In a compelling case study from South Africa, lawyer **Oliver Fuo** concludes that, while the scope of local government's environmental powers under the 1996 constitution is not always clear, environmental litigation provides courts with an opportunity to clarify powers and foster the environmental guardianship role of local authorities in South Africa.

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From India, CLGF Research Advisory Group Chair, **Philip Amis**, examines support for the informal economy through the inclusion of street vendors in municipal policy. From his case study of both federal laws and state legislation in Madhya Pradesh, he illustrates the chasm between legislation and practice, arguing that while the rights-based approach to recognition of the urban poor as effective economic actors is important, it needs political consensus before implementation is effective. Meanwhile, **Aloysious Mosha** examines the role of urban agriculture in promoting food security in Botswana, and the role of local government in enabling small- and medium-scale food production.

Two papers return to the challenge of local economic development. **Kizzann Lee Sam** makes the case for a gender-led approach to local economic development, as pioneered in the *Caribbean Local Economic Development Project (CARILED)*, demonstrating how a gendered approach to business development and gender-awareness amongst local authority staff can support both new and existing enterprises. From a study of Kyenjojo District in Uganda, **Rose Namara, Gerald Karyeija and Betty Mubangizi** suggest that networked governance across local government administrations can build capacity, improve financial autonomy and deliver income to invest in local economic development.

Two papers consider the potential and challenges of strengthening the operations of local government. **Ronald Woods, Sarah Artist and Geraldine O'Connor** find a need for tailored education and professional development for Australia's scattered local government workforce. From a case study of Buikwe District in Uganda, **Sylvester Kugonza and Robert Mukobi** argue that three key factors support effective public participation in local service delivery: access to information, ability to respond effectively, and awareness of citizen's rights and responsibilities.

In the first of three papers from West Africa, **Felix Puopiel and Musah Chimsi** examine the challenges to mobilising internally generated funds to finance development projects in northern Ghana, based on case studies of Tamale, Yendi and Saboba, finding many potential sources of revenue from property rates to business taxes, but numerous challenges in effective revenue collection. **Issah Justice Musah-Surugu and Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah** analyse the unsavoury conflict between District Chief Executives and Presiding Members in Ghana, which creates underlying tensions in local government operations. Meanwhile from Nigeria, **Ozohu-Suleiman Abdulhamid and Paul Chima** explore the Nigeria's weaknesses of constitutional provision for local government, with adverse effects on the independence and fiscal autonomy of local authorities.

In our fascinating book review section, **Bligh Grant's** report of Dollery and Tiley's authoritative edited book on *Perspectives on Australian Local Government Reform* finds that the book provides a valuable update on continuing structural reform across Australia's federal system of local government, presented by leading national academics and practitioners. From another continent, **Tofail Ahmed's** review of Mohammad Talukdar's book on *Local Governance in Bangladesh: Policy and Strategy Framework* examines the ups and downs of local government policy in Bangladesh,

arguing that democratic decentralisation and administrative reform has been in abeyance for decades. Both contribute to the world-wide body of academic and practice debate on innovations and challenges to local government.