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Editorial

This issue is the first under our new continuous publishing model, whereby papers are published as soon as they have successfully completed their double-blind peer review and copy-editing processes. This has enabled a reduction in the turnaround time, and we're grateful to our partners at the University of Technology Sydney Press, all our volunteer reviewers and to our fantastic editorial team for enabling this to happen. We hope you find the papers and case studies included here of interest and would encourage any practitioner and academic colleagues across the Commonwealth and beyond to consider submitting their latest work for consideration for publication in this, your journal.

The issue's lead paper is from Joydeep Guha and Bhaskar Chakrabarti and is a systematic review on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through decentralisation and the role of local governments. The paper explores the role of local democracy and governance in achieving the United Nations SDGs. Through highlighting how increased reliance on locally generated revenue, difficulties in managing networks of actors, and imperfect flows of information pose major challenges to achieving SDGs locally, the paper outlines ways in which these challenges could be addressed. The paper concludes by emphasising the need for enhancing local leadership capabilities and demarcation of responsibilities among local politicians and bureaucrats, a point which is missed in the SDG agenda.

Our second paper comes from Sara Dewachter, Patricia Bamanyaki and Nathalie Holvoet whose research on the Ugandan rural water service utilises social network analysis to map upward and downward water-related information flows between the actors of local government from village to district level to compare theoretical and actual information-sharing networks in the sector in Uganda. They find a less reciprocal and more centralised network than that theoretically envisaged, and conclude that information communication technology holds potential to overcome some of the bottlenecks hindering the flow of water-related information between actors at different levels.

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Staying in Africa, our third paper by Hoolo 'Nyane examines the newly drafted Lesotho Local Government Bill 2016. Through a comparison with earlier iterations of local government legislation, the paper contends that whilst the Bill does introduce some semblance of autonomy for local authorities, the model of devolution it introduces is in fact very weak and needs significant strengthening if decentralisation is to succeed in the country. Moving next to West Africa, Justice Nuse Sosu looks into performance management in Ghana's local government through a case study of Ada East District Assembly. Whilst performance management has been envisaged through the preparation of action plans, the evidence showed that severe logistical constraints and poor staff capacity remain key challenges. He concludes that performance management may achieve its intended results when accompanied by continuous employee performance evaluation.

Heading over to South Asia, our next paper by Moazzam Ali Janjua and Rainer Rohdewohld is a comparative critique of the functional assignment architecture of Punjab's local governance legislation of 2013 and 2019. The study finds that the marginal improvements introduced by the 2019 Act are offset by continuing inconsistencies and lack of clarity over 'who does what' in the functions assigned to local governments. The authors suggest that improving the functionality of local governments requires full implementation of the design features of the new system, and the institutional strengthening of provincial-level entities which regulate and oversee the local government system. Heading back to Ghana, Abdulai Kuyini Mohammed assesses whether or not property rates in Ghana are a good potential source of local revenue. Through detailed analysis of six local government case studies, he finds that present prospects for most rural local areas to raise substantial rate revenue are circumscribed, but in urban councils they are more promising.

Moving on to Australia, Chris Taylor and Jed Donoghue explore the sustainability of non-government organisations (NGOs) providing services to older people in North Sydney. They suggest that government support is essential for the ongoing financial sustainability of community aged care services and a good working relationship with local and state government is crucial for organisations to access community grants, donations and subsidised premises. Whilst recruitment, training and retention of volunteers were some of the most important issues identified, such NGOs will also need to develop strategic plans that factor in rental, recycling, transport, renewable energy and water costs to ensure sustainability.

We wrap up this issue with two complementary comment papers on local economic development. The first: a practice note from Bilathey Bimi on Ghanaian local government's experience during the Covid-19 pandemic and how a local economic development approach can help with an inclusive recovery. The second is a review by Gareth Wall of *The case for Community Wealth Building* by Joe Guinan and Marin O'Neill. This short accessible introductory book explores local government's potential to promote greater democratic ownership of institutions in local economy to ensure wealth stays within the community, and how this approach complements councils' wider work on local economic development across the Commonwealth.