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## Editorial

This issue of the *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* arrives at a moment when local governments across the Commonwealth and beyond are being asked to do more: with greater integrity, responsiveness, and effectiveness, often amid constrained resources and contested authority. The papers gathered here reaffirm that ‘local’ is not peripheral: it is where citizens most directly experience the state, whether through service delivery, public finance, food security, environmental health, or representation and voice.

A first cluster of contributions engages with decentralisation, autonomy and accountability, drawing especially on Ghana and Nigeria. Mensah and Venyellu’s paper on Ghana’s District Performance Assessment Tool (DPAT) shows how structured performance measurement can encourage improved planning and compliance, while also pointing to obstacles that can blunt its impact. These include uneven indicators, limited understanding, staffing constraints, and delays in fiscal transfers. Adamtey, Mahama and Salia take the discussion further by examining Ghana’s decentralisation framework itself, arguing that authority-sharing remains partial and that legal ambiguity and limited fiscal devolution continue to weaken the promise of decentralised governance. Their analysis is complemented by Bamidele’s commentary on Nigeria, which situates local government reform within a longer struggle over fiscal federalism and revenue control, revealing how institutional design can be undermined when political incentives remain centralising.

A second set of papers turns to the ethical and organisational foundations of local governance. Aliu and Salifu’s study of ethical conduct among local government accountants in Ghana reminds us that integrity is not only a personal virtue but also an institutional outcome. The authors show how ethical

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intent may be eroded by weak enforcement, organisational pressures and political interference, highlighting the need for strong ethical infrastructure within local administrations.

Other papers in this issue focus on governance as service delivery experienced by citizens, offering important reminders that policy success is ultimately judged locally. Alam and Rumi's evaluation of Bangladesh's Open Market Sale (OMS) programme demonstrates that food security initiatives can falter when mistargeting, leakage, and long queues undermine both efficiency and public trust. Tshiyoyo and Moloantoa's practice-oriented paper on municipal health service devolution in South Africa's Northern Cape offers a more cautiously optimistic account, noting progress in integrating environmental health services into municipal planning and performance systems.

This issue also expands our lens beyond administrative systems to consider democratic inclusion and the quality of local deliberation. Bird, Forbes, Liu and Rousseau provide a distinctive comparative contribution through their study of debates on Indigenous representation in Canada and New Zealand. Their central insight, that talk matters, is a timely reminder that legitimacy and trust depend not only on institutional reforms such as indigenous seats or Māori wards, but also on the evidence base and respectfulness of deliberation that accompanies such reforms.

We conclude with Sekhomba's book review of social protection in Botswana, which complements the issue's wider concerns by examining how social protection effectiveness depends on sound governance arrangements. The review highlights Botswana's significant fiscal commitment while drawing attention to gaps in coordination, monitoring and evaluation. This reinforces the theme that institutional capability and coherence are central to local governance outcomes.

Across all contributions runs a common thread: local governance is ultimately about trust. Trust that authority is real rather than symbolic; trust that public resources are managed ethically; trust that services will be delivered fairly and with dignity; and trust that representation and voice will be inclusive.

With this issue, we also wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the former editors Alison Brown and Graham Sansom, who did phenomenal work in taking this journal to new heights. Their leadership strengthened our journal's intellectual standing and firmly established CJLG as a vital platform for scholarship and practice in local governance. We are grateful for the foundations they have laid.

We warmly thank all contributors, reviewers, and colleagues, especially Lucy Slack, Diane Bowden and Samantha Page, who have made this issue possible. We hope readers will find in this collection not only rigorous analysis, but also practical insight and comparative perspective, supporting the shared endeavour of strengthening local governance where it matters most.