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Editorial

This December 2022 issue of the journal exemplifies our founding goal of facilitating a conversation between researchers and practitioners that will inform the work of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, as well as policy-making by governments across the Commonwealth and elsewhere. It includes six research papers, six country perspectives on one of those papers, two other commentaries and a policy and practice note. All offer important insights into two central issues concerning the future of local governance: the quality of local democracy and the place of local government in broader national and federal systems.

Deficiencies in central–local relations are the focus of Olanrewaju O. Ogunnubi’s paper on decentralisation and local governance in Nigeria. Within Nigeria’s three-tier system of federal, state and local governments, the latter were expected to play a pivotal role in grassroots governance and development. In theory the constitution empowers them to do so, and decentralisation policies received strong support under military governments. But since the return to civilian rule in 1999, implementation of those policies has largely failed to deliver autonomy to local governments, whose funds, functions and activities are controlled under discretionary powers held by the states. Ogunnubi identifies constitutional ambivalence, leading to abuse of state control and inadequate funding, political instability and corruption as key challenges to the effective performance of local government. A similar picture is painted in Eghosa Osaghae’s contribution to the Perspectives on local government’s place in federal systems and central–local relations later in this issue.

Another contentious dimension of central–local relations is the power of national and/or state governments to alter local government boundaries. Mpfareleni Mavis Netswera examines the

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implications of municipal re-demarcations for service delivery in two quite different local municipalities in South Africa. Both were recently established by mergers following a controversial request by the responsible national minister for the independent Municipal Demarcation Board, which has determined local government boundaries since 1998, to revisit its 2013 review. Since 1995, South Africa has seen a series of re-demarcations from over 800 racially based local authorities to 257 democratically elected municipalities. This trend reflects both the goals of post-apartheid governments and a belief that smaller municipalities may be inefficient and financially unviable. However, in common with other studies, Netswera's findings suggest that mergers do not necessarily improve municipal capacity or service delivery, and identify a need for further consideration of alternative collaborative arrangements, special-purpose districts and greater use of South Africa's district municipalities.

The following two papers, one from Australia and the other New Zealand, consider critical issues concerning the representativeness of elected councils. Delanie Sky and Hedy Bryant examine the motivation and leadership styles of six women campaigning for election in 2017 to neighbouring all-male councils in regional New South Wales (NSW). They note that women who aspire to election as a local government councillor in such areas still often face opposition as they challenge the status quo, but a key finding was that gender disparity was not a significant motivator for five of the six women. Their primary focus was service to their community, and this was associated with a 'servant leader' style that tends to uphold conservative views of gender roles. However, Sky and Bryant argue that a 'second wave' of younger, well-educated women councillors is now challenging the previous stereotype, and this should help to attract more women to seek election. Only one of the six women in the study was elected, and in 2017 women still comprised only 31% of councillors across NSW. In 2021 that figure improved markedly to 39.5%, but clearly more needs to be done to encourage, support and develop women to successfully contest elections.

Karen Webster and Charles Crothers review the extent to which candidates and those elected to office in New Zealand's Auckland Council reflect the ethnic and gender diversity of the city's population. The paper examines triennial local elections held in 2013, 2016 and 2019. Overall, the findings present an optimistic picture of increasingly diverse community representation, but this largely applies to elections for Auckland's 21 Local Boards rather than the city-wide Council. The results highlight the emergence of women's leadership; an incremental and visible increase in Pacific and Asian representation; but at the same time ongoing challenges facing achievement of fair and effective representation for Māori. Looking ahead, a key factor will be whether Auckland Council introduces a 'single transferable vote' (STV) and establishes Māori wards. The STV makes it easier for candidates from minority groups to get elected, but the council has persistently retained first-past-the-post voting. Also, the existence in Auckland of the Independent Māori Statutory Board presents an obstacle to creating Māori wards.

The performance of local government is underpinned by its financial base, and especially its capacity to raise revenues from local taxes and charges. Gerard Turley reports on progress since the Republic of Ireland's move in 2013 to introduce a new residential property tax. There had been no annual tax on residential properties since 1978 when the previous system of domestic 'rates' was abolished, but following the 2008 financial crisis Ireland needed to raise additional revenues. A residential property tax could make a significant contribution while also reducing local government's dependency on grant funding. Moreover, a wholly new tax provided an opportunity to adopt international best practice with lesser than usual constraints arising from distributional impacts. The resulting tax has several interesting and novel features, including the use of self-assessment and valuation bands, innovative payment methods, central rather than local collection, and multiple compliance mechanisms for taxpayers. Turley concludes that elements of Ireland's approach offer potential lessons for other jurisdictions. These relate to achieving simplicity and public acceptability, as well as specific design features around assessment and valuation, and collection and compliance.

The final research paper, by Tomas Hachard, returns to the theme of central–local relationships and considers how Canada's intergovernmental infrastructure could be reformed to engage more fully with municipalities. While Canadian local governments are increasingly involved in broader regional, provincial and national policy agendas, they are largely excluded from intergovernmental forums and negotiating agreements that may affect them and their communities. Hachard reviews how other countries have made space for municipalities in their intergovernmental processes and identifies four approaches to reforming relations in Canada. These involve ensuring municipalities have the capacity, voice and structures to participate effectively in intergovernmental relations; increasing municipal involvement in provincial policy-making; reducing the effects of unfunded mandates through, for example, legislation or agreements that require consultation on federal and provincial initiatives that impact municipalities; and strengthening trilateral federal relations, including through location- or policy-specific agreements, and inter-government councils.

To complement Hachard's paper, the journal commissioned six country-specific perspectives on the theme of local government's place in federal systems and central–local relations. These are presented with an editor's introduction as the first Commentary piece in this issue.

The second Commentary, by Astrid Haas, reflects on the demise in 2010 of Kampala City Council (KCC), and its replacement by the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA). Like Nigeria, Uganda underwent ambitious decentralisation reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. These were pursued by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) party when it came to power in 1986, both to foster economic development and as a path to national unity after decades of dictatorships and civil conflict. In Kampala, some 80% of all local service delivery was devolved to the elected City Council. However, from 2005 onwards the council was subject to increasing central intervention, including severe constraints on

raising own-source revenues. This reflected the President's wish to exercise more control over the capital city, which was an opposition stronghold. Ultimately events led to the establishment of the KCCA and diminished local democracy. While the KCCA has introduced important reforms, notably a major increase in locally raised revenues, improved administration and less corruption, its structure and style of operations have generated new political tensions, and it remains to be seen whether it can successfully steer Kampala towards becoming a megacity.

The third Commentary, by Bronwyn Kelly, explores the proposition that local governments can show national governments how to plan better. It focuses on the system of Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) that has applied to local governments in NSW since 2009. Kelly argues forcefully that the principles and policies embodied in these local planning processes – especially the way they engage and empower communities to exercise much more control over the policy agenda and to steer their own futures – can and should also apply at the national level. Kelly finds that communities can now forge new 'social contracts' with their elected councils to increase their share of power and to influence how and where money is spent: a similar 'social contract' between electors and elected is needed nationally. Research is under way to develop a form of 'National IP&R' that 'can be just as successful in drawing Australians into the centre of decision-making in their democracy at the national level as its forerunner has been locally.'

The final article in this issue is a Policy and Practice note by Sarah Artist that summarises information collected from 56 interviews with outgoing and newly elected councillors across four municipalities in NSW, Australia, after the local elections held in December 2021. The starting point was a view that councillors play a vital role in community democracy and need tailored support to fulfil their roles. Findings pointed to four broad areas for improvement: the induction process for newly elected councillors and design of ongoing professional development; accessing and managing the information they and their constituents require; establishing effective working relations with council staff, based on mutual understanding of respective roles; and building and maintaining a productive culture within the governing body – the councillors as a decision-making group. Artist observes that none of this is easily achieved, especially in a climate where some long-serving councillors felt disillusioned and disempowered by legislative changes to their role and state interventions.

As 2022 comes to a close, thanks are due once again to all members of the editorial and publication team, especially Diane Bowden, Juliet Chalk, Gareth Wall and Duncan Loxton, also to our growing number of authors and peer reviewers. CJLG can fairly be described as a niche publication and its resources are limited, but the journal's reach appears to have widened significantly over the past year and we look forward to further success in 2023.