

## EDITORIAL

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Publication of this third issue of the Commonwealth e-Journal of Local Governance coincides with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's 5<sup>th</sup> conference being held in Freeport, Bahamas. As part of the conference, the CLGF Research Advisory Group held a two-day research colloquium attended by over 40 delegates from 14 countries, representing research and training institutes, donor agencies, other international organisations and local government bodies.

The colloquium was in two parts:

- Discussion of the conference Background Paper *Improving Local Government: The Commonwealth Vision*
- Fifteen presentations on current research and practice.

Topics covered by the presentations included:

- Democratic local governance issues and reforms in the Caribbean, Southern Africa and India
- Public participation in local government in South Africa and rural India
- Challenges of urban development and poverty in Sri Lanka and Uganda
- Governance of capital cities in federations
- Inter-government relations in small island states of the Pacific and in rural India
- Internal structures and governance of municipalities in South Africa

- Infrastructure finance
- Performance monitoring and management systems
- Human resource development in the Canadian public sector
- New directions in New Zealand local government.

We plan to publish many of these presentations in future issues of this Journal, perhaps including a special edition in August-September 2009.

In the meantime, this current issue covers a broad set of themes ranging from progress in developing local government in the Caribbean, East Africa and Melanesia; to training of elected councillors in South Asia; to issues of structural reform, both broadly and specifically in the major cities of Canada; to gender equity in rural India and the United Kingdom; to relations between local governments and indigenous communities in Ontario, Canada; to the role of local authorities in tackling human trafficking in the UK.

Bishnu Ragoonath documents recent moves to reform local government in the Caribbean countries of St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. He argues that whilst reform proposals are ostensibly based on a philosophy of elected local government, in practice central governments appear reluctant to implement changes that would facilitate substantive levels of participatory democracy and citizen involvement. With reforms having stalled, he wonders whether the next step could be the dissolution of systems of local government in some of these states.

Per Tidemand summarises key findings from a comprehensive analysis of the nature of decentralisation in the three East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. He shows that the potential for decentralised service delivery through local governments has not been fully realised because sector – rather than place-based funding of services predominates, and sectoral central agencies remain dominant in setting priorities and controlling staff. Despite some systems for local financial management and coordination in Uganda and Tanzania, cross-sector coordination is often deficient.

David Hegarty surveys some of the recent research and commentary on local-level governance relating to Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands. This material highlights the limited development and poor performance of formal institutions of local-level government, as well as the rise of informal governance-type activities at the local

level. Hegarty concludes that social and cultural heterogeneity, fragile economies, patronage-style politics, and the difficulties faced by communities in articulating and communicating their needs, are all constraining both strengthening of civil society and the effectiveness of government at the local level.

Strengthening local governance requires, amongst other things, more highly skilled elected representatives. Lucy Slack reports on CLGF's work in South Asia to develop training modules for elected members, based on practical case studies from the region. CLGF linked up a regional network of training institutions, each of which reported on the key challenges relating to advancement of democratic local governance in their respective countries, and on training currently available for elected representatives. It became clear that training opportunities are extremely limited, and as a follow-up to the project, CLGF and the Commonwealth Secretariat will encourage ministries for local government to make more adequate training available.

Lorenzo Robotti and Brian Dollery examine aspects of structural reform of local government, chiefly from a theoretical perspective. They argue that the long-run success of structural change hinges on three key factors: voluntary rather than compulsory council mergers; a high degree of local autonomy in both the composition and operation of decentralized governmental functions; and according adequate and appropriate powers of taxation to local government to provide financial autonomy. A suitable package of local taxes might include traditional property taxes, appropriate user charges, a local sales tax and a new form of local business tax.

Jim Lightbody offers a contrasting perspective on structural reform through a review of recent consolidation (mergers) of municipalities in the major cities of Canada. He focuses on Toronto and Montreal and suggests that the superficially unique circumstances of each case might be misleading. By applying Clarence Stone's urban regime model he seeks to clarify what influences constituted the political tipping point for central government action to force mergers, and argues that the decisive element lay in the pervasive influence of corporate Canada. Once business leaders become convinced that change is necessary they will act behind the scenes to convince provincial government, especially premiers, that change is necessary and should be effected expeditiously. In the Canadian system, central (provincial) governments have the power to do so, and in Lightbody's view should not be deterred from imposing integration when

it is in the broader public interest. The evidence suggests that opposition will quickly dissipate.

The issue of gender equity is explored in very different, but related, contexts by Chris Game and Nupur Tiwari. Chris Game probes the reasons behind the severe under-representation of women in UK local government, and identifies the nature of the electoral system – typically ‘first past the post’ in single member electorates – as a major part of the problem. Whilst parts of the UK have moved towards multi-member electorates (but not England), he suggests that serious consideration needs to be given to quota systems such as those operating in Uganda, India and elsewhere to accelerate previously glacial progress towards gender equality.

Nupur Tiwari outlines the successes and limitations of the system of reserved seats for women and disadvantaged groups used in local government elections in rural India. She quotes the argument that women need to be ‘empowered’ in the realm of political decision-making so as to facilitate their ‘real’ empowerment, and goes on to assert that the impact of reserving at least one third of seats for women in rural local governments has been immense. There are ‘many shining examples’ of the potential of women’s leadership. However, there is a significant difference between representation and participation, and increased numbers of elected women representatives does not necessarily translate into real influence and decision-making power. In particular, there is a need to change the current rotation system for reserved seats, so that women can be elected in the same seat two or three times, and thus have the opportunity to learn more about the role of an elected representative and gain greater influence.

Alia Hanif and colleagues from the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing discuss the need for closer engagement between municipalities and Aboriginal communities, and the benefits to be derived. They provide an overview of Aboriginal and treaty rights and the constitutional duty to consult, as well as examples from Ontario of engagement that has produced positive outcomes. These examples show the value of building broader relationships with Aboriginal peoples that go beyond purely legal-based forms of engagement. In an environment of cultural and economic change, it is expected that there is more to be learned as both municipal and Aboriginal communities address local needs and interests on a collaborative basis.

Finally, Kathryn Rossiter and Jo Benfield report on a year-long project undertaken by the UK Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) to identify how local authorities can improve their response to the crime of human trafficking. The project identified core competencies that local authorities need to develop if they are to address the challenges of human trafficking. It found that one of the greatest challenges is a lack of knowledge and understanding about the crime of trafficking and the needs of the victims. A human rights-based approach must be adopted, which puts the needs of the victim above the need to catch the traffickers. Moreover, a multi-disciplinary and cooperative effort is needed, involving a wide range of stakeholders. Local authorities have an important role to play, but will not be successful if they try to operate in a vacuum.

This issue also includes two book reviews, both of which relate to the issue of structural reform. Steve Martin reviews *The Theory and Practice of Local Government Reform*, a series of studies edited by Brian Dollery and Lorenzo Robotti. Jeremy Dawkins writes about Andrew Sancton's new book *The Limits of Boundaries: Why city-regions cannot be self-governing*.