The leadership role of local government has never been more critical with the convergence of climate change, rapid urbanisation and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic playing out in our cities and human settlements. Good local leadership is a key to sustainable development.

Small island states in the Pacific are particularly vulnerable and the importance of empowering local government in small states cannot be overstated. Local Government is still not strong enough in the Pacific. More attention is needed by central governments to the cultivation of local government in the spirit of true multi-level governance.

Local Government is the most accessible governing authority when disaster strikes and has the potential to respond faster and more effectively to local climate related events. Local government must be given a greater role in preparedness for and management of natural disasters. Local Government should be given better access to climate funds for adaptation and also supported with capacity development to plan for and adapt to changes.

It is also important to recognise and enhance the significant role of local government in building local economic resilience, particularly post COVID-19. Local authorities are well placed to promote inclusive local economic development through creating an enabling environment and encouraging economic empowerment of all citizens. A multi sector/multi actor approach is required, consistent with the SDG multi-level governance commitment.

The 'Whole of Government' and 'Whole of Society' approaches are applauded, but must include local government. Local government is well placed to collaborate with civil society, particularly when new approaches to service delivery will likely be needed post-COVID.

Regional and national collaboration in achieving sustainable development is essential. In the Pacific there are several regional frameworks and platforms that can be better used to promote sustainable urbanisation, including national and regional local government associations.

Finally, we need make better use of nature based solutions, traditional knowledge and values which are integral to the Pacific.