

ISI Committee Brings Challenges Facing Women to the Forefront
A Report on Activities of the Committee on Women in Statistics
2009 ISI Meetings in Durban, South Africa

The Committee on Women in Statistics, chaired by Dr. Cynthia Clark (USDA/NASS), upheld its commitment to promote and strengthen the representation of women in statistics and to support the compilation of statistics on women by spearheading several well-received activities at the 2009 International Statistical Institute (ISI) meetings in Durban, South Africa. The activities were strongly supported by Professor Denise Lievesley, who is the first woman to serve as the president of ISI, and provided an opportunity for members to initiate a dialogue on the many challenges women face around the world – including leadership and professional development as well as violence and personal struggles.

Significant thought and planning went into organizing the committee sponsored activities to ensure a diverse offering of meeting platforms was afforded to attendees. The activities ranged from a panel discussion on *Issues Facing Women in Leadership Roles in Official Statistics*, and a formal presentation on *Violence against Women: How Indicators can Influence Policy Development*, to a mentoring reception and dinner hosted by the 2009 ISI President Denise Lievesley at the Mayoral Building, and a meeting of country representatives. Additionally, Dr. Cynthia Clark, chair of the Committee on Women in Statistics, presented a short report on the committee at the 2009 Executive meeting and was invited to meet with the 2011 ISI President, Jef Teugels and the President-elect, J.C. Lee.

One of the highlights of the committee's activities was a Special Topics Session (STCPM 25), a panel discussion on the *Issues Facing Women in Leadership Roles in Official Statistics*. The session was organized and chaired by Martha Farrar, the ISI Committee webmaster, and featured panellist Inger Eklund, Director of Regions and Environment Department, Statistics Sweden; Susan Linacre, Advisor for Strategic Projects, Australian Bureau of Statistics; Eva Laczka, Director of Department for Agricultural and Environmental Statistics, Hungarian Statistical Office; and Awa Thiongane, Senior Regional Advisor of the African Centre for Statistics of the United Nations. The committee was honoured to have Denise Lievesley, ISI President, serve as the panel moderator.

Each panellist brought a unique perspective on how gender has influenced their careers. The topics of discussion included:

- Personal drivers – Why I am a leader, what is driving me, what are my personal goals and how do I reach them?
- General influences that effect women in advancing to leadership positions – What are the impacts of culture, impacts of role models, and advantages and disadvantages of being a female leader?
- Managing career transitions for women – How to successfully join the workforce (part-time or full-time), start a family, and transition to retirement.

- Organizational drivers – What are strategies to build management and leadership confidence in young women, to increase the number of female leaders in science, and to mentor female statisticians?

The *Issues Facing Women in Leadership Roles in Official Statistics* session was a popular choice among ISI meeting attendees filling the room to full capacity with approximately 60 people. A summary of the discussion will appear in the next issue of the ISI Newsletter.

Another highlight from the Committee on Women in Statistics was Special Topics Contributed Paper Session (STCPM 24), a sponsored session titled *Violence against Women: How Indicators can Influence Policy Development*. The session, organized and chaired by Dr. Cynthia Clark, addressed one of the 12 critical areas of concern relating to women that emerged in the 1995 U.N. Beijing Platform for Action. A jointly sponsored session at the 2008 meetings of the U.N. Commissions on Statistics and on the Status of Women discussed a report authored by an expert group that recommended indicators to measure the scope, prevalence, and incidence of violence against women covering physical violence, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and the practices of female genital mutilation and early marriage.

This ISI session was conceived as an opportunity to present results of surveys in three countries with a focus on how the data has influenced policy. The presentations included:

- Luay Shababeh, Director, Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics – *Some Insights on Policy Implications and Methodology of Quantitative Measurement of Domestic Violence*
- Linda Osterberg, Committee Secretary, Commission of Inquiry (Delegation for Gender Equality in Higher Education), and Carolina Nordstrom, Department of Population and Welfare Statistician, Statistics Sweden – *Statistics and Policy-Making on Men's Violence against Women: the Swedish Example*
- Linda Laura Sabbadini, Division Director for Surveys on Living Conditions and Quality of Life, Italian National Statistical Institute (also a member of the U.N. expert group that reported to the Commissions in February 2008) – *Italian Violence against Women Survey: Lessons for Policy Makers*.

The committee was pleased to have Grace Bediako, Government Statistician (Director) of the Ghana Statistical Service, as the session discussant. The *Violence against Women: How Indicators can Influence Policy Development* session was a topic of interest for many with approximately 30 participants attending the meeting. A paper on this topic, with a case study from each of the three papers, is planned for submission to the *ISI Statistical Review*.

Beyond providing intriguing sessions to stimulate intellectual thought and debate, the Committee on Women in Statistics seized the 2009 ISI meetings as a unique opportunity to also provide activities for professional and personal growth and development. Denise Lievesley conceived the idea of hosting a reception and dinner for women attendees at ISI with the goal of providing an opportunity for mentoring among women, inviting a motivational speaker, and celebrating female professional leadership. The evening proved to be a fun celebration with African music and dance performances, excellent table discussion, and delicious food.

The Committee presented a memento of its appreciation to Denise Lievesley for her leadership in tackling issues that have been important to her – giving every person the opportunity to develop their full potential and tackling poverty and injustice across the world. She was recognized as being an example of leadership with the words of Pauline Tangiora, a Maori Elder, *“Those who lead give sight to those who follow; those who follow give life to those who lead.”*

The efforts put forth by the Committee on Women in Statistics for the 2009 ISI meetings were deemed a great success. The committee sponsored activities were not only well attended but also initiated great discussions for future endeavours and continued to promote and strengthen the representation of women in statistics and leadership. Members of the committee have already taken an active role in the 2011 ISI meetings in Dublin by attending planning meetings and proposing topics for invited sessions.