

# The 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Statistical Institute

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Durban, South Africa, August 16-22, 2009

The 57th session of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) was held in Durban, South Africa, from August 16-22, 2009. This was the first time in the ISI's 124-year history that such a conference had taken place in Sub-Saharan Africa. The 57th session, as with other past sessions, brought together more than 4,000 participants, including academicians, professional statisticians, econometricians, and other statistics practitioners from about 130 countries. The African Development Bank (AfDB) was one of the three major sponsors of the 2009 ISI Conference, together with Statistics South Africa and the KwaZulu Natal Government.

The ISI is one of the oldest scientific organizations in the world. The biennial ISI conference is the biggest gathering in the area of statistics. It provides a forum for exchanging ideas, developing new professional links, and discussing current trends and developments in the field of statistics. It also provides an opportunity for the training of statisticians, especially from developing countries, on the latest developments in statistical methods and their applications.

In his opening remarks, the President of the Republic of South Africa, H.E. Jacob Zuma, warned of challenges facing statistics. He urged leaders to beef up the resources allocated to the international financial institutions to help them deal adequately with the global financial crisis. He warned about the grave danger posed by the global financial meltdown and challenged statisticians to help find solutions to the crisis: "The world economic meltdown,



which began in developed economies, also dictates that statisticians search for solutions which will benefit all nations,” said President Zuma in his concluding remarks. (A transcript of President Zuma’s full speech can be found on p. 485.)

In his ministerial address (see p. 493 for full transcript), the South African Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Trevor Manuel, called on delegates to maximize the output of this “rare, highly representative and exceedingly important conference.” He called on statisticians to have a dose of humility and accept that “we measure (or sometimes deploy others to measure on our behalf) because we don’t know the answer or we don’t know nearly enough.” To stress the importance of statistics for development policy management, he recounted the famous slogan that says, “In God we trust, all others must produce statistical support.”

The African Statistical Coordination Committee (ASCC), comprising the AfDB, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) worked hard to make ISI 2009 truly an African event. Several African organizations, scholars, and statisticians were able to participate and present research papers. The discussions largely dealt with the challenges of statistical development in Africa.

The ASCC is also working to ensure a lasting legacy not only for South Africa as the host country but also for the entire African continent. A major part of this strategy is the *Isibalo* “Statistical Capacity Building Program.”





The program is designed to facilitate the participation of Africa's statistical community in debates over key issues on measurement, monitoring, and evaluation; encourage the improvement of statistical methodologies and foster innovations. It includes issues such as: statistical research and capacity development; training and support for young statisticians; mathematics, statistics and the girl-child; the statistical education program; and African women in statistics.

*Isibalo* also aims at developing cadres of statisticians and demographers in Africa; developing statistics education in Africa; and promoting statistical data utilization in Africa for evidence-based policy-making while creating a platform for sharing best practices.

It is therefore vital that African countries continue cultivating a culture of evidence-based policy making and fostering partnerships for improved availability and use of statistics. Future challenges include developing strategic leadership and management of statistical offices in African countries and increasing advocacy for sustainable funding from governments.

The AfDB organized six workshops and three high-level meetings. The principal objective of the AfDB's workshops was to impart the necessary knowledge to African participants to facilitate enhanced use of harmonized approaches and standard statistical methods and practices in RMCs that would ultimately result in improved data quality. The workshops comprised the following:

- ***The ISI Satellite Workshop on the Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics:*** Jointly organized in Maputo, Mozambique, by the AfDB and FAO, in collaboration with the World Bank and the European Commission, to review and finalize the Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The meeting sought inputs from over 200 participants from all over the world, representing international organizations and national agencies responsible for producing and analyzing agricultural and rural statistics.
- ***The International Comparison Program for Africa (ICP-Africa) Data Quality and Validation Workshop:*** Organized by the AfDB to provide participants with tools and guidelines for improving the quality of ICP-Africa price data by reducing errors due to units of measurements, quantities, quality differences and other observational errors. This will ensure data reliability and comparability within and across countries.
- ***Labor Statistics – New Developments in the Measurement of Economic Characteristics through Population Censuses:*** Jointly organized by AfDB and ILO to train participants from African countries and enhance their capacity in the collection and use of data on economic characteristics in population censuses. This experience has set the ground for very fruitful collaboration between AfDB and ILO on activities aimed at improving labor statistics in Africa.





- ***Workshop on Implementing the New 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA-2008) in Africa: Conceptual and practical challenges and issues related to ICP requirements:*** Organized by the AfDB to discuss the implementation of the new SNA-2008 in Africa and the validation of GDP data broken down into detailed Basic Headings (BHs) for 2007 and 2008. African country participants (i) reviewed the methodology for breaking down GDP and used case studies to illustrate practical situations, (ii) carried out practical validation exercises on actual countries' GDP data for 2007 and 2008. Participants provided valuable inputs and also generated a regional matrix of national vectors of GDP expenditures broken down into basic headings for the years 2007 and 2008.
- ***Workshop on Consumer Price Index (CPI) Compilation:*** Organized by the AfDB to train African price statisticians on CPI compilation methods based on the recommendations in the new International Supplementary Handbook on Consumer Price Indices.
- ***Workshop on Harmonization of CPI (HCPI) in SADC and COMESA Countries:*** Organized by AfDB, COMESA and SADC to discuss and agree on the framework, product coverage and appropriate methodology for compiling a Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI).

The three high-level meetings included: (i) The African Group on National Accounts; (ii) African countries' Heads of National Statistics Offices (NSOs); and (iii) SADC Heads of National Statistics Offices.

- ***The 3rd Meeting of the African Group on National Accounts (AGNA)***: Organized by the AfDB in collaboration with the AUC and the ECA to review and amend the draft African Strategy on the Implementation of the new System of National Accounts (SNA-2008).
- ***Meeting of Heads of National Statistics Offices from all African countries***: organized by the AfDB to discuss progress in the implementation of the Bank's Phase II Statistical Capacity Building (SCB) program and other outstanding matters. The meeting provided a forum for exchanging ideas, experiences and best practices for better and harmonized implementation of the SCB program.
- ***Meeting of Heads of National Statistics Offices from SADC member countries***: Organized by the AfDB at the request of SADC member countries. The objective of the meeting was to review the progress toward establishing a regional statistical training institute in the region, whose goal is to coordinate and provide statistical training to staff of NSOs (and others) with a view to building the capacity of a critical mass of statisticians in SADC countries.

