



ABSTRACTS: AMSI-SSAI LECTURER 2010 - PROFESSOR DENISE LIEVESLEY

Values and virtues in a statistical agency

The UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics – what are they and why were they developed? Denise will draw on her experience of working in the UN to address the question as to the relevance of these principles to both developed and developing statistical systems. The Principles relate to the statistical systems rather than the people working in them. Is there also a need for codes of conduct for statisticians themselves? What professional codes exist and do they meet this need? How do we build values into our statistical agencies?

The role of an International Statistician

Denise will use her experience of working in UNESCO and the UN Economic Commission for Africa to explore how statisticians can exploit their skills and expertise effectively to ensure that development strategies are pro poor and pro equity. Many papers in statistical journals have addressed the work of national official statisticians but few have examined the work of statisticians in international, supranational or bilateral agencies. Denise will redress this imbalance by highlighting some of the dilemmas facing international statisticians. She aims to raise consciousness of the role of statisticians employed in an international context, to explain some of the constraints under which they work, to address principles which ought to govern the activities of statisticians generally and to evaluate the relevance of such principles to international statisticians in particular.

The power of comparative data

Denise will talk about the challenges of collecting cross-nationally comparable data and the arguments for doing so. She will describe different models of comparability ranging from the post hoc methods employed by international agencies (drawing on her experience in the UN) which aim to obtain globally comparative data through to surveys based on harmonized methodologies. One of the best examples of such a quality cross-national survey is the European Social survey (the ESS). The central aim of the ESS is to gather data about changing values, attitudes, attributes and behaviour patterns within European polities. Academically driven but designed to feed into key European policy debates, the ESS hopes to measure and explain how people's social values, cultural norms and behaviour patterns are distributed, the way in which they differ within and between nations, and the direction and speed at which they are changing.

Building Trust in Official Statistics

Trust is at the core of all successful relationships but it can be difficult to achieve and maintain, as, for example, politicians and bankers have demonstrated in recent months. If organisations are to successfully navigate through a crisis then trust in the leader is crucial if senior managers – and all staff – are to go the extra mile. Trust is developed over time as we get to know people and we trust them on the basis of what we see them doing, not on the basis of what they say they are going to do. To develop sustainable trust requires consistency of message and action, clear communication and a willingness to tackle – and be seen to tackle - difficult issues. Denise will draw on her experience of UN and UK statistical systems in discussing the importance of building trust in official statistics.

Getting data used

A recent OECD report concluded that “Publicly funded research data are a public good, produced in the public interest. As such they should remain in the public realm. Availability should be restricted only by legitimate considerations of national security restrictions; protection of confidentiality and privacy; intellectual property rights; and time-limited exclusive use by principal investigators.”

Denise will discuss conditions which support widening the informed use of data, and ways in which user/producer relationships might be fostered.