The World Bank Family Network (WBFN) is the family association of the Bank Group. Created in 1972, the group has more than 4,600 members and welcomes about 400 families every year. In addition to helping spouses and families find their footing when a new staff member joins the institution, WBFN offers opportunities to learn and play together.

“A happy family makes a happy staff member,” said Annmarie Brink Olsen, WBFN President. “Our objective is to be a ‘home away from home.’”

“In essence, we build community,” said Johannes Tonn, a volunteer member of the WBFN executive committee. “We support, educate, and advocate, making a real contribution to the Bank by helping it retain its staff. This is our added value.”

Most multinational corporations and international organizations have global mobility offices that serve as resource hubs for relocating staff. WBFN is recognized as one of the highest performing, having recently garnered two 2011 EMMA Awards at the Forum for Expatriate Management: Winner of Best Practice in Challenging Locations and Winner of Best Spousal Support Program.

At 40, Bank Group Family Network Still Creates “Home Away From Home”

On March 22, to mark the WBG Celebration of Diversity Month, ECA VP Philippe Le Houérou hosted a lunch for 21 senior level women and Chief Diversity Officer Julie Oyegun. The purpose was to explore ways ECA could attract mid-career women, particularly to Country Manager (CM) and Country Director (CD) positions. Attendees included managers and technical leads from Operations, an ECA sector director, and an adviser to MD Sri Mulyani Indrawati.

Philippe described ECA work as interesting and challenging. He pointed out that ECA countries range from low-income to very sophisticated economies and that the Bank’s work focused on improving living standards, promoting economic growth, and ensuring that future generations benefit from sound economic policies, progressive environmental practices and targeted social development.

A key suggestion from the attendees was a needed re-branding of the Region and of field assignments in general. ECA has a new dynamic strategy and growth trajectory; however, it is not clear they said that ECA has sufficiently marketed itself as such to mid-career women. Communications on the CM job should aim at redressing negative assumptions of deskilling and derogative terms such as “serial CMs” which hamper CMs from returning successfully to HQ and also reduce the attractiveness of field assignments for both genders.

Another suggestion was for HR to identify women who are ready and willing to take up field-based managerial assignments. Through better HR coordination and targeted effort, ECA could work with Sector Boards to generate a pool of high-performing women, actively nurturing and preparing them to compete for field managerial positions.

The same as with all other Regions, decentralization in ECA faces challenges of spousal employment and inadequate or expensive schooling. Tackling this issue would end the perennial underrepresentation of women in field assignments.

Other ideas included promoting job opportunities in IFC, other multilaterals, NGOs and consulting firms for spouses; creating spousal employment Memoranda.
DEC Makes D&I Fun

DEC hosted an international potluck lunch on March 22 to celebrate diversity and inclusion. Staff from all five units contributed plates from about 15 different countries.

“We don’t do this very often, so it’s nice to get together,” said Vivian Hon, special assistant to the Chief Economist, who co-organized the event. “We’re using it as a chance to meet new people and also raise funds for a worthy cause.”

DEC Chief Economist and Sr. VP Justin Lin introduced the keynote speaker, whom he called “my dearest love for 38 years.” Lin’s wife, Dr. Yunying Chen, is a renowned child development specialist in her own right. With an endearing charm and discernable resolve, Dr. Chen shared her experience as a professional, a wife, and her decision to accompany Lin to the United States for four years during his tenure at the Bank Group.

“As a girl, when I was young, I didn’t want to have a husband, because I know how hard it is when a man kills all your time, energy, and hopes of a career,” said Dr. Chen, with a twinkle in her eye. “But then I fell in love with Justin.”

She spoke of establishing herself in China: “Here at the World Bank, when people see me, they think ‘here comes Mrs. Lin.’ But in China, people see me and think, here comes Dr. Chen,” she said. “I know he is happy with all of you. He has a big family in DEC. I want to give you a million thanks.”

Following the brief keynote, several staff snapped photos with Lin, perhaps in anticipation of his imminent departure.

The next day, Lin thanked everybody, reporting the good news: “Those of you who supported this effort by buying food helped DEC to raise $700 for the Margaret McNamara Memorial fund for the education of women and girls in developing countries.”

“We have an effort to really create one DEC,” said Shiva Makki, a Sr. Economist and DEC’s D&I Coordinator. “We’ve tried consciously to become more united, and I think events like this really improve our cohesiveness.”

Staff agreed. “DEC is so diverse, but we don’t have a lot of opportunities to meet other people. I’m always doing my own research,” said Shweta Arya, who works in Macroeconomics and Growth—and who contributed the chicken kabobs. “So I love times like this to get out and meet other staff.”

Gytis Kanchas is an Information Analyst who has lived in DC for 21 years and worked at the Bank Group for eight. “Sometimes our diversity presents challenges, because you can’t always assume that you’ll be able to communicate well with people the first time,” said Kanchas, who is originally from Lithuania. “But for me, I do a lot of desk-side training and help people learn how to use computers and applications. Actions speak louder than words sometimes, and I can always find something in common with my colleagues.”

Jeehye Kim is a Junior Professional Officer who joined DEC about a year ago: “It’s a dynamic atmosphere, and it’s been a pleasant surprise in the way different people have different perspectives,” she said. “What I’ve learned is that I can’t take for granted social cues. I have to make sure I’m not misunderstood. This is not a negative, just something I’ve learned. Once I was able to adjust, I saw that there’s an inclusive environment here where you can express yourself.”
of Understanding with host
governments; and sponsoring
language training for spousal
employability in host countries.

In their view, the Bank provides
inadequate support to families for
schooling, housing, and moving
household effects. The current “leave
it to the families” Bank approach is a
disincentive and an added burden af-
fecting female staff disproportionately.

Comparisons were made between
benefit packages for split households
versus whole family relocation.
Philippe asked the D&I Office to
analyze mobility policies from the
female staff perspective. He noted
that effective use could be made of
strategic reassignments to address
gender and other diversity challenges
such as low numbers of SSA/CR staff
in the field.

Traditionally, CD/CM jobs
and front office positions such
as Operations Director and Chief
Economist are filled by men.
Attendees cited cultural assumptions
about women’s competence for
this institutional gender bias. An
attendee suggested that learning
budgets be invested in preparing
talented women for the field,
training short listing and interview
panels in better assessment, and
strengthening capacities of all
first-time managers. Attendees also
called for male equality in parental
leave benefits.

The lunch ended on a high note
with the reminder that ECA’s pipeline
of GF/GG women could be enhanced
by tapping into locally-recruited staff
in country offices.
Helping Twenty-First Century Women Lead at IFC
Contributed by Julie Ziegler

Women lead differently than men, and the corporate world has fewer women leaders than men. The reasons why are surprising.

The absence of women leaders in the workplace stems more from a lack of tapping into a network than from performance, having children or a lack of credentials, according to Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an economist and founder of the New York-based Center for Talent Innovation, who recently spoke at IFC.

Women offer a different strategic point of view from men, women are committed to rebuilding stakeholder trust. Hiring and retaining women at all levels of leadership enlarges the talent pool. Yet leadership styles and expectations can often be unwittingly biased towards men, and policies—particularly when it comes to historical assumptions about career paths—can disadvantage women.

To help its women leaders better navigate the labyrinth of IFC, the Financial Markets department developed the year-long agenda to address these concerns and ensure that women leaders are able to thrive. The program, which launched on April 9, targets women in senior management as well as those with future leadership potential.

The Women’s Leadership Program hopes to serve as a pilot throughout IFC. The 40 participants selected for the inaugural series will register for formal learning programs, receive coaching, learn from world-class speakers and trainers, and create mentoring networks with senior-level managers and directors.

“The program will build a pipeline of women in leadership, recognize the specific challenges of women leaders, and ensure an increase in inclusiveness among leadership,” said Dolika Banda, Director, Financial Markets, Africa and Latin America.

“The goal of the program is not to ask women to behave as men, but to heighten their understanding of the corporate landscape and the backdrop in which they work,” said Jeffery Halter, President of YWomen, who was an invited speaker at the inaugural event.

The Women in Leadership Program will continue throughout the year to help the greatness that already lies within each participant to emerge.

Diversity, Through a Latino Lens
Rick Najera delights packed house

The IFC and MIGA were joint hosts of comedian Rick Najera on March 27 in a session that attracted nearly 200 guests. Najera is a Latino-American who grew up in California, 15 miles from the Mexican border. He has credits as a writer, actor, and producer.

Kenroy Dowers opened the event, noting that the Bank Group is focusing more than ever on inclusion. Ana-Mita Betancourt, MIGA’s General Counsel, said the event was an opportunity to laugh and learn. “As we laugh, we may discover our own biases,” she said.

Betancourt gave examples of how the Bank Group’s commitment to D&I is becoming more concrete. “At MIGA, 50 percent of managers are now women,” she said. In IFC, diversity is now one of the core institutional values.

Comedian Rick Najera enthralled guests for an hour, poking fun at common biases and stereotypes that people have about people of Latin American descent. He shared his own personal experiences, growing up in America as a Latino, and challenged Bank staff to value and harness their diversity.

Rick Najera is an actor-writer-director-producer with credits in film, television, and theater.

For more information on the junction, contact Pauline Ramprasad, 202-473-0821, pramprasad@worldbank.org.