

The STEP Programme

The international STEP (Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty) programme constitutes an operational instrument of the ILO Social Security Department for combating social exclusion and extending social protection to the informal and rural sectors.

STEP conducts activities in five continents and concentrates its efforts on excluded persons. It essentially focuses on micro-insurance and is designed to promote the democratization of the insurance systems as well as equality of access to them. This is an avant-garde initiative that is both welcomed by specialists and is applicable to many activity areas, notably the health sector. The activities mainly focus on the enhancement of knowledge, development of services and advocacy.

In Africa, about 90% of the population are not covered by any social protection system. In order to ensure the development of its activities on the continent, STEP has set up an office in Dakar. In coordination with STEP Geneva, STEP Africa implements various regional projects such as the STEP Portugal Project for Promoting Social Inclusion and Reducing Poverty in Portuguese-Speaking Countries (PALOP) and the “Micro-Health Insurance Development Project for Women and their Families” (Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry and Benin) as well as national projects in Tanzania and Mauritius.

STEP also responds to many requests from African countries for the identification and formulation of action plans.

The “Micro-Health Insurance Project for Women and their Families” aims at establishing micro-health insurance systems to meet the urgent need for extending social protection to workers in the informal and rural sectors. In recent years, several grassroots women’s groups have mobilized themselves to address their priority health needs, including reproductive health.

These health micro-insurance systems will help them to share the risks and better manage their incomes under an improved providence scheme. They will also build the capacity of women’s organizations in identifying their needs, in negotiations skills as well as in building their own confidence.

Moreover, in partnership with several support structures, STEP initiated consultation between developers of health mutual societies aimed at promoting health-oriented mutual systems in 11 countries of West and Central Africa. The consultation provides a framework for exchanging experiences, skills and information through a website (www.concertation.org) a periodic newsletter, a system of monitoring health-oriented mutual systems and thematic workshops.

Currently, STEP is setting up two new projects in Africa.

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