





## INTERVIEW : VALÉRIE SCHMITT-DIABATÉ

SOCIAL PROTECTION EXPERT OF THE STEP PROGRAMME, SOCIAL SECURITY DEPARTMENT, ILO



**Within the STEP Programme, will you deal with all these problems? How do you respond?**

(Interview transcribed by Olivier Arnaud-Fréaud, ILO / STEP, Geneva, Switzerland)

**Valérie** : We have various methods of action. In West Africa, in five countries, we are working directly in the field, providing technical and political support. We are supporting mutual health organizations and mutual networks, we are developing arguments to convince the State that the extension of social security is a priority and that it should be included as a genuine element in budget plans. We really act at different levels. In countries where there is less of a need for technical support, we act through established networks and support advocacy. To that end, we are trying to put the various actors in touch with each other, because we think that certain activities in Colombia or India for example, may be useful for other countries, such as Senegal, Cambodia or Laos. So we are trying to document the experiences which seem to us to be interesting, so that the information is shared as widely as possible, and to encourage partnerships or exchanges of ideas.

**The job seems enormous. Are you optimistic about the idea that these countries can succeed?**

**Valérie** : Certainly! In Colombia it has succeeded. What is needed is a subtle mixture of political will, financial resources, the existence or setting-up of civil-society movements, and the progressive development of on-site expertise. There are many examples of where this has worked. Colombia, in 15 years, has covered 80 per cent of the poor population through a linked system, that is regulated and subsidized by the State and mainly managed by mutual organizations (they have 60 per cent of the market). There are also countries like India where cooperatives have developed systems covering millions of people.

**And all that is based on solidarity? Everybody pays, regardless of the risk?**

**Valérie** : Yes, absolutely ! Even if different models emerge. We are very optimistic. But there are countries where things are going more quickly, and others where they are going more slowly ... *(chuckles)*

Lastly I should like to add that for all these purposes we are developing internet platforms, which constitute one of our tools.

**Ah yes, and this brings us back to the point that information is important...**

**Valérie** : Especially since our platforms are very cooperative. We rely on networks of actors, and we have partners in different countries who can create pages or set up discussion and exchange forums.

**Thank you.**