

RESEARCH PROJECT ON "LAND AND WATER RIGHTS IN IRRIGATED SCHEMES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

"Many irrigation projects," observes Prof. Francoise Conac, "are planned and executed according to modern law, against which farmers are making an open defiance because they don't know it and want to apply their local customary law. I have seen in several countries of Africa irrigation schemes which have been abandoned for many years because the decision makers have disregarded customary rights in sharing land and water."

Prof. Conac, of the Center for Comparative Law Studies at the University of Paris, heads a research project on land and water rights in both traditional and modern irrigation systems in Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar. Research teams are working in 8 countries: Madagascar, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Kenya, Zambia, and Nigeria.

In addition to adding to a

general understanding of land and water rights, the research has practical aims. "We wish [the research] to be useful to the people in charge of planning, designing, and operating irrigation systems. Our intent is to carry out this research in close collaboration with government agency staff, consulting engineers, local development authorities, and non-governmental organizations."

A training component to the project provides local opportunities for developing research skills and deriving knowledge partly through "consultation with peasants who are more and more longing to take an active part in the decisions concerning them."

Research began in 1986 and will continue through 1987. During 1988, the third and final year of the project, a book will be prepared presenting the research results. A practical "Guide" is also envisaged which will outline "the principles and concrete steps to be applied in order to solve land problems in a satisfactory way before constructing new schemes. The suggestions will derive from traditional or modern systems which have been successful in terms of land/water laws, as well as from results obtained in looking for solutions in less successful schemes." [In the next issue of the Newsletter, we hope to provide an update on this project. - Ed.]