

# Preface

The Ph.D. researcher course on *Access, Control and Management of Resources*, generously funded by the Danish Researcher Academy and held at Roskilde University 1 - 3 June 1994, was based on the more and more widespread notion that the African rural scene cannot be satisfactorily understood neither within the classical or neo-classical school, nor exclusively within more structuralist or Marxist inspired interpretations, concepts and theories.

Increasingly it is recognised that a whole range of activities, such as efforts in strengthening social identities, ties and relationships, memberships in social networks and institutions, "investments" in productive as well as non-productive resources, impact of clientilistic structures and institutions governing access rights or settling disputes, are of importance for understanding the dynamics of social change in rural Africa. - and that such notions tend to fall outside the scope and interest of prevailing grand theories and schools of thought.

In other words, the mentioned aspects create a number of theoretical problems to everyone of us, but in particular they pose a long range of methodological problems. Contrary to previously held Ph.D. researcher courses on Institutional Aspects of Natural Resource Management - see the proceedings from previously held seminars published in Occasional Paper No. 9, Institutional Issues in Natural Resource Management, Roskilde University, 1993 and Occasional Paper No. 12, Improved Natural Resource Management. The Role of the State versus That of the Local Community, Roskilde University, 1994 - this Ph.D. researcher course on *Access, Control and Management of Resources* has been formulated with a view as to particularly addressing methodological issues, as indicated by the sub-title *methodological problems in studying agrarian change in sub-Saharan Africa*.

The basic problem is that if African cultures and institutions are fluid, dynamic and ambiguous, then how do we study them? If transactions are subject to multiple meanings, if social exchanges are open-ended and multidimensional, rather than single-stranded and definitive, then how do we study them? If people are constantly reviewing and reformulating their preferences,

strategies and their understandings of social relations based on their experiences, and if rules, transactions and values are ambiguous and negotiable, then how do we study them? How do we study fluidity and ambiguity and a "moving target", as rural dwellers increasingly are seen?

These and other similar questions motivated the formulation of the Ph.D. researcher course on *Access, Control and Management of Resources*, which very much benefitted from the attendance by some well-known international scholars, invited to take part as guest speakers. At the same time, the course was arranged in such a way as to allowing for the presentation of current Ph.D. research work at the International Development Studies Department at Roskilde University, which again very much benefitted from the invited guest lecturers acting as discussants on these presentations.

Among the invited guest speakers were **Sara Berry**, professor in History at the Johns Hopkins University, who has been pioneering work on agrarian change in Africa, based on field studies in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia. Also attending the Ph.D. researcher course was professor in agricultural economics and resource development **A. Allan Schmid** from Michigan State University in East Lansing, who has carried out research on institutional economics and acted as a consultant in African countries, among others in Mali.

**Richard Moorehead** is attached to the International Institute for the Environment and Development in London, where he is on the Editorial Team for the quarterly *Haramata*, informing about people, policies and programmes in drylands areas. He did his Ph.D. on Mali and has extensive knowledge about the Sahelian countries in West Africa. Finally, **Agnete Weis Bentzon**, now a retired professor but still very much active on the research scene, participated in the Ph.D. researcher course. Professor Weis Bentzon has a long-standing interest and devotion to legal and social problems and solutions. This has entailed longer stays and commitments in Greenland; lately also an interest for women and law in Southern Africa.

Not least thanks to the invited guest lecturers, the Ph.D. researcher course succeeded in bringing to the fore some of the methodological problems involved when studying agrarian change in Africa. Needless to say, the methodological problems are of a magnitude so that expecting the final answers to the big

problems would definitely be expecting too much. - But the seminar surely made a contribution.

We would like to thank the invited guest lecturers and the Ph.D. students for their participation, and also wish to extend our gratitude to the Danish Researcher Academy, who made the course possible.

**International Development Studies, Roskilde University**

**December 1994**

*Christian Lund*

*Henrik Secher Marcussen*