Report to the Ford Foundation on:

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1. Introduction

In 1995 the Ford Foundation approved a three-year grant to the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) that enabled ICRAF to launch a policy research program on alternatives to slash and burn agriculture in mountain areas of mainland Southeast Asia. In addition to providing a major new component for the global Alternatives to Slash and Burn Initiative, this project also seeks to help build research capacity within key national institutions and facilitate multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and international collaboration in addressing key land-use and rural poverty issues and problems in this eco-region. This report presents progress made during the first three years of implementation under this effort.

A number of key elements of the environment in which this program is developing have changed during the last three years, and our efforts have sought to co-evolve with these conditions. Section 2 of this report focuses on overall program development within its context at global, Southeast Asia, MMSEA, and Thailand levels. The policy orientation of MMSEA work, the logic for and suitability of the north Thailand benchmark site, and the extent to which activities have helped influence thinking regarding overall ICRAF programs and global ASB analysis, have all surpassed our expectations. The most serious setback was a severe funding crisis in ASB and ICRAF, triggered by GEF withdrawal from further major support for ASB. We are pleased that we have since been able to restore our financial health, and have obtained substantial funding for activities in MMSEA from other sources. In the process, we have refined and strengthened our implementation strategy, and are now back on course seeking to make up for lost time.

Progress in implementing the MMSEA strategy is presented in Section 3, beginning with the north Thailand benchmark site. All field research is designed to fill important data and information gaps, needed to answer key questions in our policy research framework. The framework provides a process wherein proposed agroforestry improvements can be evaluated relative to current practices and other alternatives, and whether key
institutional, infrastructure and policy factors favor or constrain their widespread adoption. Impacts on household livelihoods and agronomic sustainability are considered, along with costs and benefits to national society, and regional and global externalities. Major methodology training and the first round of economic studies are nearly completed, the spatial database is developing rapidly, and most all major field research activities will be at full scale by the end of this reporting period. We have also obtained funding and formed partnerships with several other projects, including the WRI REPSI project, enabling us to overcome our earlier constraints and move forward with linkages in other MMSEA countries during 1998.

Although we are still about one year behind our initial schedule, we are now making swift progress on all fronts. Sections 4 and 5 outline our program directions and plans, and request modest additional funding for a key resources gap through the year 2000.