



Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn

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Making the Connections: Meeting Knowledge Management Needs of a Global Network

At a Glance...

Over the past decade, the Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn (ASB) partners have been working together to identify a range of sustainable land use options that balance conservation and development. Many of these partners are in developing countries, where lack of access to communication technology acts as a 'digital divide' isolating them from scientists and partners in the north. This North-South gap in Information and Communication Technology/ Knowledge Management (ICT/KM) is a serious hindrance to a spatially-dispersed, global consortium such as ASB. ASB is seeking funding to bridge this divide of information and communication technology and facilitate information sharing and knowledge management among partners.



Strong Links

ASB's work begins at benchmark sites in the tropics, where researchers assess environmental, economic, and social aspects of land-use systems. Results from the various sites are collated and synthesized to draw out policy implications and gain insights into management options at a global scale. A critical part of ASB's success has been the strong relationships among the many and varied partners in the consortium - over 50 research centres, NGOs, universities, and national and local groups.

Building the Bonds

As a global consortium, ASB's work relies on communication and data sharing among partners. Many of these partners are in developing countries - where lack of access to communications technologies increasingly isolates them from Northern partners.

ASB is developing a project to bridge this digital gap among members of the network. This project will equalize access among all ASB partners to appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) for high-quality science and research, and facilitate information sharing and knowledge management (KM) among ASB's widespread partners.

The ASB consortium seeks support for the following:

- 1) **\$20,000** for an **ICT/KM needs assessment** covering 6 national partners and 3 ASB regional facilitators;
- 2) **\$300,000** for **hardware and software upgrades** based on the needs assessment, including **6 IT training workshops** in essential information technology;
- 3) **\$35,000** for the development of reliable, accessible **information systems** to facilitate integration and knowledge-sharing among all ASB partners.

ASB is currently putting significant emphasis on using online workspaces (e.g. D-groups, instant messaging) and other knowledge networking tools, and on making these available to partners for information exchange. So far, these technologies have been used only for specific events or projects but with sufficient funds, ASB partners would be able to use them to their full potential, strengthening the work of the network.

A network-wide needs assessment would be critical leverage for ASB partners to apply for funding of hardware and software upgrades.

The ASB ICT/KM project will enable local and national partners to fully engage with the network - and ultimately, will enable ASB to reach a much wider audience through innovative dissemination of existing and forthcoming results.

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"I really want to analyze these data. I have the digital maps, but I can't open them because I don't have the software or the experience to use them."
Marilia Locatelli, Brazilian researcher

