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MEDIA RELEASE

For release on March 3, 2010

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IWMI and the Government of LAO PDR Sign MOU – Towards the Sustainable Management of Water and Land Resources in Laos

Vientiane, Lao PDR, March 3 2010. The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the Government of Lao PDR today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize and establish an IWMI Southeast Asia Regional Office in Vientiane and work towards the sustainable development of land and water resources in Laos. In December 2008 IWMI established a project office in Vientiane with permission from the Government of Lao PDR. Through this office IWMI coordinated and managed its research activities in Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Yunnan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The choice of Laos for IWMI's new regional office was for a number of reasons. Laos has significant water resources and is the largest contributing nation to the Mekong. Land and water resources are underdeveloped and there are opportunities to assist the government in developing these resources in a sustainable way for the benefit of all. There are also many opportunities for building capacity for land and water resources management and research. Dr Andrew Noble IWMI Regional Director for Southeast and Central Asia says "Laos is the least populated country in the Mekong basin and annually contributes 36% of the total volume of water in the Mekong river. Although water resources are underdeveloped, there is a significant potential for generating income through agriculture, fisheries, tourism and hydropower. The Government of Lao PDR sees IWMI as a valuable partner in continuing efforts to manage the country's land and water resources in a sustainable manner".

IWMI and its partner IRD are no strangers to Laos. Over the years there has been a long and successful partnership between IWMI/IRD and the government of Lao PDR, through the Management of Soil Erosion Consortium (MSEC) which was initially funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and later by IWMI. The research carried out through MSEC gave new insights into the causes of sedimentation in uplands and their impact on water quality. The program also contributed to the development of sediment models which were useful to predict erosion from watersheds.

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IWMI worked with the National Agriculture and Forestry research Institute (NAFRI) in the implementation of Conservation Farming Villages in northern Lao PDR. This project evaluated a range of land use interventions that reduced the risk of sediment generation and enhanced the livelihoods of upland communities. Model villages where successful interventions were carried out have been promoted in Lao PDR, and subsequently in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia as an approach to achieving sustainable land use management in upper watersheds.

This year IWMI celebrates 25 years of research. In the 15 years of IWMI's presence in Southeast Asia, it has established collaborative activities in research, education, training and capacity building, and information exchange in the sustainable management of land and water resources through collaboration with Government Departments, Universities, NGO's, farmer organizations and networks. The major areas of collaboration with our partners have been in the broad areas of policy and governance, land degradation and water management.

The research activities in IWMI Southeast Asia range from understanding the processes of soil erosion and its management at both individual and community level, to the development of models to identify sediment discharge from catchments; research into heavy metal contamination of rice, the rehabilitation of degraded soils of Northeast Thailand, and the development of strategies to limit conflict between fishers and rice growers in the lower Mekong delta. All these research activities have their focus on food security and human health and increasing productivity and farm incomes.

The new MOU moves IWMI from the project based MOU that it previously held to the status of an International Organization under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It will also enable IWMI and the government to work closely together on the sustainable development of land and water resources in Laos through the introduction of best practices, and recommendations for better policies and good governance.

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Notes to editors:

- 1. About IWMI:** IWMI is a nonprofit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in agriculture, to benefit poor people in developing countries. IWMI's mission is "Improving the management of water and land resources for food, livelihoods and the environment ." The Institute is one of 15 research centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. IWMI has its headquarters in Sri Lanka and regional offices in Africa and Asia. The Institute works in partnership with developing countries, international and national research institutes, universities and other organizations to develop tools and technologies that contribute to poverty reduction as well as food and livelihood security: www.iwmi.org
- 2. For information on IWMI Southeast Asia:** <http://sea.iwmi.org/iwmi-southeast-asia.aspx>