In order to fulfill its mission of sharing Taiwan’s successful economic development experience, alleviate poverty, enable economic efficiency, and create wealth for people in partner nations, the ICDF manages technical cooperation projects around the world. ICDF technical cooperation consists of three major components:

1. Technical assistance projects, including SME consulting and advisory services, governmental and societal capacity building, and specialized research.

2. Technical mission projects commissioned by the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

3. The ICDF Overseas Volunteers Program.

Aid Strategy

During its five years of existence, the ICDF has tailored its technical assistance development projects to reflect the characteristics and levels of development of each country and region in which it works. The ICDF strategy for African countries, for example, has been to increase crop production and reinforce medical services. The ICDF has focused on SME development in Central America, while promoting agricultural diversification in the Caribbean in order to reduce dependence on imports and thereby decrease foreign exchange outflows. In Central America, the Middle East and Asia Pacific the ICDF is strengthening integration of agricultural production and marketing, providing farmers with more control over complete production and sales cycles, transferring technology, and spurring new investment.

Shaping Technical Assistance

Three major criteria have shaped ICDF technical mission projects over the last five years: effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. If any of these criteria are not sufficiently met, the ICDF modifies, merges or even terminates projects. Since 1997, the number of ICDF technical missions has been reduced from 50 to 40, and projects from 124 to 100, because some did not meet these requirements.

During the last five years, the ICDF has changed the focus of its technical assistance strategy, moving from an emphasis on farming demonstration projects to more comprehensive and far-reaching roles in development issues. Integrated production and marketing systems have been introduced into rural areas, improved food processing technologies have had a positive impact on villagers’ livelihoods, and local farmers have been trained in advanced agribusiness and trade theory and skills. The
women’s vegetable project in the Gambia, a livestock project in St. Vincent, a food processing project in Belize, and the mushroom business management project in Indonesia have all used these approaches and methods. Furthermore, trade and investment operations were established in ICDF missions in Central America and the Balkan region, which encouraged trade between Taiwan and host countries, and provided consulting services—from high-level topics such as national and international regulatory structures, to practical advice on private investment.

**Small Farmholder Financing Enables Growth and Project Replication**

In order to enhance the outcomes of technical cooperation projects, extend the scope and scale of agriculture in host countries, and generate employment, the ICDF has provided financing to local farmers who lacked capital. In 1999, a small farmholders financing scheme was introduced in Eastern Caribbean countries. The financing scheme has enabled farmers to purchase machinery, repair and build essential infrastructure, and set up wholly new agribusinesses. To date, there have been nine financing credits for small farmholders in Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Grenada and St. Christopher and Nevis.

Small farmholders financing schema often spawn circulating funds that can be drawn upon and reinvested in by local farmers and cooperatives. These funds have become self-sustaining, and have yielded fruitful results in many instances of ICDF work. Such funds also enable replication of successful projects in other local areas or regions of a country (and from there, to other countries and regions of the world). Project replication, readers are no doubt aware, is a core ICDF principle, extending benefits and increasing the number of beneficiaries of successful ICDF projects.

**On-the-Job Training Program**

During the last five years, the ICDF has employed two methods to increase the professional knowledge of its overseas technical mission members. One is to recruit new mission members with master’s degrees, who can train existing mission members who do not have advanced degrees. The other is the ICDF scholarship program, which provides support for graduate agricultural study at National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. The ICDF has also requested mission members to biannually attend seven days of intensive training at Taiwan’s agricultural research institutions and improvement stations. This has helped staff members obtain the latest agricultural information and trained them in new technologies, resulting in better service to cooperating nations.

**Technical Mission Operations and Results**

**Technical Mission Projects and Programs**

Since its founding, the ICDF has managed 41 technical missions which have overseen 47 technical assistance projects, with approximately 290 staff members, in 34 countries worldwide. Of the technical assistance projects the ICDF has managed, 15 have been SME advisory projects, 19 have been capacity building projects, and 13 have been feasibility studies. In addition to these projects, 58 overseas volunteers have been sent to 14 countries.

In April 1997, the ICDF dispatched an advisory group to Central America to develop SME strategies. The project conducted seminars in organizational and systems procedures, assisted participating nations in establishing SME policy environments, and set up allocated networks for industrial production, all of which improved competitiveness and stimulated exports in the region. Similar SME advisory projects have since been implemented in many other countries and regions during the past
five years, including in Senegal, Swaziland, Poland, the Balkan region, Mongolia, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and three Baltic nations.

The ICDF supports a variety of capacity building projects. To raise overall standards of medical care, the ICDF has implemented medical services and management projects in the African nations of Chad, Burkina Faso and São Tomé and Principe. Also in Africa, the ICDF has provided agricultural equipment to Senegal and the Gambia, enabling the two nations to increase food production. A handicrafts training project in Swaziland and garment manufacturing training center in Burkina Faso have also been established during the last five years. Product packaging and inspection centers were launched in El Salvador, vocational training projects were conducted in Vietnam and Burkina Faso, and computer hardware and software to improve government efficiency were distributed in the Solomon Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, the Balkan region and Liberia.

Specialized research studies from 1996-2001 addressed major industrial and agricultural issues. Analyses, evaluations and feasibility studies served as bases for governmental planning and policy-making. The research also helped the ICDF to better understand the development needs of its partner nations. In Central and South America, the ICDF studied investment and trade in the bicycle and garment industries, and in export processing zones. In Africa, studies focused on agriculture and aquaculture, such as the lake fishing study in Malawi, and the minimal fertilizer application in rice culture study in the Gambia and Chad. The ICDF also carried out a study on agricultural diversification and agricultural processing in the Eastern Caribbean, and a sugar industry study in Fiji.

In other research, the Collaborative Vegetable Research and Development Network for Central America, and the Vegetable Research Cooperation Program in five Central American Countries were both financed by the ICDF in cooperation with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and the Inter-American Development Bank. ICDF technical assistance projects are frequently based on co-financing with international institutions such as these, and the combination of financial strength and project expertise has been beneficial for all parties.

**Overseas Volunteers Program**

During the past five years, the ICDF volunteers program has dispatched 58 volunteers to 14 countries around the world. These young volunteers work with local government, social institutions and ICDF professionals. They have provided diverse assistance to host countries, including consulting services, vocational and computer training, rural development work, medical services, and instruction in Chinese, science, mathematics and other academic subjects. There are currently 17 volunteers serving in Central America, the Eastern Caribbean and Myanmar. The ICDF plans to recruit and train 20-25 volunteers in June 2001, and will dispatch them to host countries in October.

**Conclusion**

In the past five years, the ICDF has modified not only its technical assistance project methods and volunteers program, but also the essential operation of the technical missions commissioned by MOFA. The ICDF has shifted its focus from the creation of simple demonstration farms, to providing modern promotional methods, production and marketing systems, food processing technologies, and agribusiness expertise. The ICDF has also emphasized the replication of successful projects, the expansion of trade and investment cooperation, and SME development. With these new strategies and methodologies, the ICDF has made its operations much more efficient and effective, and is looking forward to the next five years, and its first decade of existence.