The Technical Mission in Panama has been developing the fishing industry in that nation for more than 20 years. In 1973 an agreement was first forged between the ROC and Panama, and in August 1974 a six-man technical team was sent to conduct fishermen's training courses around the country. In January 1975, the ROC government dispatched the Amistad, a 23-ton, six-man fishing trawler based in Vacamonte, used to train fishermen and perform offshore Pacific Ocean fisheries research. The Amistad II, a 35-ton 16-man vessel used for similar purposes, replaced the Amistad in 1995. The Amistad II was staffed by the reorganized Panama Technical Mission, composed of a mission leader, ship captain, navigator, technical trainer and mechanical engineer. A team of technicians from the Panamanian Marine Authority (AMP) also worked with technical mission personnel aboard the Amistad II. These ships and personnel have served the Panamanian fishing industry well, training thousands of fishermen and conducting extensive research over the years. However, after a supervisory tour of mission activities in Panama in August 1998, the ICDF realized that the fishing project needed new direction. Vacamonte had become a large port city, its fishing industry composed primarily of larger fishing companies. This scale no longer suited the ICDF's aims of enriching and
empowering smaller companies, local cooperatives, traditional industries and lower-income citizens at the foundation of national economies. The mission's activities were reorganized and a new project, focusing on these groups, was launched. The Amistad II *amistad* means friendship in Spanish was turned over to the Panamanian government to continue its productive training and research. The Panama Technical Mission then negotiated the new project with the AMP, and in November 1998 the Panama Technical Mission Fishing Village Development Project was founded. The project has been a resounding success, and an excellent example of one of the ICDF's core strategies the transformation of technical mission activities into new areas and locales in a country.

The Panama Fishing Village Development Project is located in Las Tablas, a small fishing village of hardworking fishermen in Panama's Los Santos province. In its first stage, the project trained local fishermen in new techniques such as efficient high-yield night fishing methods, the use of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and sonar fish school locators, proper catch handling methods, improved safety measures and equipment maintenance skills. The project simultaneously provided guidance and support to nascent and existing fishermen's cooperatives and associations. Currently the project works with several of the cooperatives and associations, each with 20-35 members. Most members are low-income fishermen working two-man fishing boats, and many are young Panamanians just launching their careers.

As the work of the project and the technical mission became more established through 1999 and 2000, the mission began to school members of the fishermen's cooperatives in financial and business matters, including the necessity of accurate record keeping, cost analysis and sales and marketing techniques. In 2000, warehouses and storage facilities were constructed in the townships of Pedasi, Gorgona, Salao Aguadulce, Enea Guarare and Santa Ana. Equipped with modern refrigeration and processing equipment, the new facilities enabled the cooperatives to more efficiently store and sell their fresh catches. Sales of high-value export fish increased, middlemen were eliminated and gradually the fishermen's incomes began to rise. An association of fishermen's cooperatives was formed to share the new facilities, and a revolving fund was created to purchase new equipment and distribute profits.

In addition to fishermen, the technical mission integrated other citizens in Enea Guarare into the project. Local women were trained in food processing skills, and they turned previously discarded low-value fish into nourishing food products such as fish balls. This not only improved local nutrition, but also nudged family incomes a bit higher. It is a good example of how the project extended efficiencies into new areas wherever it could.

When the first stage of the Fishing Village Development Project was well established, the second stage was launched. During their regular cooperative meetings, the technical mission began to give fishermen information about loan management and other requirements, in preparation for loan availability. The ICDF had slated US$200,000 to be used by members of participating fishermen's cooperatives to buy new boats and equipment. Until late 2000, many fishermen who did not own their own equipment had used boats and equipment owned by other fishermen or companies, paying for their use with various in-kind payments. The Panama Technical Mission organized new methods, whereby fishermen who received loans for new equipment could repay their loans, through the fishermen's cooperatives, using a sliding scale based on the volume of their catches. As their skills, catches and incomes grew during 1999 and 2000, many of the fishermen were ready to purchase their own
equipment something they could not do in years past. In the first months of 2001, nine fishermen from the Pedasi, Gorgona, Salao Aguadulce, Enea Guarare and Santa Ana fishermen’s cooperatives were selected as recipients of the first US$50,000 installment of the US$200,000 ICDF loan. Each fisherman will receive a loan of approximately US$5,000 for the purchase of new boats, outboard motors and other equipment. The fishermen were selected for their hardworking personalities and proven ability to repay their loans. That the incomes of all the fishermen who have participated in the project have increased was established by a study performed by the Panamanian government and the technical mission, covering the period from January 1999 through the end of 2000. The study found that the Fishing Village Development Project had resulted in fishermen’s incomes rising by 20 percent. Enthusiasm has spread, and currently there are more than 50 fishermen who have expressed interest in applying for loans. The provincial governor of Los Santos and Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso have given their ringing endorsements to the project, and expressed their gratitude to Mission Leader Clifford S.P. Li and his four staff members. As with so many other technical missions, long-lasting friendships have been forged, which will deepen as the project runs its course until the end of 2001.

The Panama Technical Mission Fishing Village Development Project is a primary example of the successful revitalization of technical mission activities. The project’s well-planned design and superior execution will be a model for other fishing village projects. In January 2001, the ICDF launched a new Fishing Project in Costa Rica, based on the lessons learned in Panama. Projects like these comprise one of the building blocks of ICDF work, and have increased fishermen’s incomes and the quality of their lives, and consequently the economic strength and quality of life in many of the ROC’s partner nations, around the world.