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**International Nutrition Communication Service  
(INCS)**

**CONSULTANT REPORT**

for

**PANAMA**

**(November 22 - 27, 1982)**

**(A field visit to assess the impact of a  
January, 1982 materials development workshop)**

**BY**

**Ron Sawyer  
Consultant**

**Through subcontract to  
Save the Children Federation  
48 Wilton Road  
Westport, CT 06880 USA**

**Submitted by  
Education Development Center  
55 Chapel Street  
Newton, MA 02160**

**To the United States Agency for International Development  
Washington, D.C.**

*This project has been conducted under Contract A.I.D./DSAN-C-0209,  
Office of Nutrition, Development Support Bureau, Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Many Workshops dealing with participatory approaches to health or nutrition issues have been faulted for being one-time only sensitization experiences. An exception is the DINNFA Workshop of January 1982 which had built into its structure plans for follow-up. DINNFA and INCS consultants Griffiths and Sawyer continued to collaborate after the initial Workshop through telephone calls and correspondence. Ron Sawyer's field visit was planned as a mid-point assessment of the degree to which DINNFA staff had assimilated the skills imprinted at the January Workshop. A second Workshop, scheduled for January 1983, will complete the training process, and hopefully leave DINNFA with an enhanced capacity to design, implement, and evaluate participatory nutrition education projects.

Ron Israel  
Director, INCS

December, 1982

December 6, 1982

Panama Field Visit Report - November 22-27, 1982

I. Background and Objectives

This trip was planned as a follow-up to the January 1982 workshop that combined SARAR nonformal education techniques and the formulation of didactic materials to illustrate the possibilities for community nutrition education projects. The workshop was co-facilitated by Marcia Griffiths of Manoff International and myself for participants from DINNFA and the Ministry of Health in Panama. Although this subsequent field assessment had originally been programmed to take place much earlier, a proposed visit for July and then for October were cancelled at the last minute due to conflicting schedules and poor communications.

The specific objectives of the visit were:

- 1 - To check on the progress of the ongoing DINNFA project, with emphasis on the techniques and materials being utilized;
- 2 - To provide on-site assessment, advice, feedback, and technical support in order to assure that the project is "on track"; and
- 3 - To set the groundwork for a follow-up workshop in 1983.

While this consultancy was invaluable for planning a second workshop, it would have been far more useful to the project participants had it taken place months ago, thus serving to provide corrective technical assessment and feedback on a more timely basis; and moral support in a period of considerable political and bureaucratic instability following an abrupt change of government earlier in the year.

Since DINNFA and the AID Panama mission are now particularly anxious to schedule the follow-up workshop for early next

year, I dedicated a considerable amount of my attention towards setting the groundwork. In a similar fashion this report is primarily meant to inform Marcia of the present state of affairs so that she can begin preparing for our forthcoming intervention.

## II. Trip Notes - Travel and Work Schedule

Following is a day-by-day description of my activities while in Panama. In summary, my time was spent between Panama City where I was involved in numerous meetings, primarily with DINNFA and AID; and two field trips, to Chilibre and to David, Chiriqui. Although the David trip was very time consuming --a 7-hour drive each way (DINNFA could not afford the \$75 round-trip air fare for Rina de Barba, my principal counterpart.)-- it was invaluable for giving me a complete picture of the progress being made. It is also important to note that, throughout my visit, Rina provided continual support and assistance and many hours were spent discussing technical issues. I am confident of her ability to transfer my feedback into practice as appropriate.

Monday November 22: Following a tour of the new DINNFA offices and a review of the week's itinerary, Rina gave me a complete run-down of the important events within the program during the past year and showed me some of the materials that have been developed since the January workshop. The rest of the morning was spent in a general program review meeting involving:

### DINNFA -

Orientación Familiar - Rina

Desarrollo Humano - Gregoria Paredes  
- Digna "Mamita" Sanchez  
- Nicolas Wilson

Juventud y Prevención - Vilma de Garcia

Promoción y Capacitación de la Mujer - Bernarda de Vargas  
- Maria Vazquez

### Ministerio de Salud -

Departamento de Nutrición - Nana de Martinez

Organización y Formación de la Comunidad - Francisco Cedeño

### Ministerio de Educación -

Alfabetización y Educación de Adultos - Efraim Escalona

With the exception of Efrain, a participant/observer, everyone present had attended the January workshop.

During the meeting each department group was asked to graph, on a 10-point scale from "total failure" to "total success", all the events during the past year in which they had applied one or more aspects of the SARAR participatory methodology. The graphs were then used to reinforce each group's presentation and as a guide for the discussion which followed. By focussing primarily on the low points of the graphs the group was able to identify and analyze some of the obstacles that have inhibited success in their NFE sessions. The obstacles that emerged were classified roughly as follows:

Environment ("ambiente") - Physical and emotional;

Group composition - Heterogeneity versus homogeneity;

Facilitators - Lack of preparation, inexperience, etc.;

Objectives - Lack of specificity or clarity; overly ambitious;

Materials and Techniques - Not congruent with objectives.

In analyzing the overall pattern that emerged the group was able to hypothesize that increasing "success" in implementation was directly proportional to frequency of utilization of the techniques. ("Practice makes perfect.") The very full and ascending Orientación Familiar graph stood out as the clearest example of this; while the low level of activity in certain departments over the past year could generally be attributed to the absence of support at the supervisory level, compounded by instability at the policy levels of the ministries. Nevertheless, on the whole, the group appeared to have a continuing commitment to the methodology and revealed a considerable internalization of the basic principles.

After a lunch meeting with Rina to review the results of the morning session, I met briefly with Dr. Edgar Altafulla, Rina's direct supervisor, to discuss the INCS program and to express my appreciation for his very positive support to date.

At 2:30pm I met with Charles Hesellyn, on contract to CARE/AID to develop a "paper" (draft) for the national Breastfeeding Campaign. In brief, he expects funding to be approved by sometime early next year. Although the program would be coordinated by a National Oversight Commission whose titular head would be the Vice Minister of Health, each of the participating entities would receive -- and be responsible for administering -- its own funds. Within the Ministry itself both the Nutrition and Maternal/Child Health ("Materno-Infantil") departments would be involved, with the Vice Minister "mediating". Since the budget makes provisions for logistical and materials

support for a number of NFE/communications workshops, but not for consultant/trainers, it would appear that INCS might be expected to fill the gap -- particularly in light of its recent experiences with DINNFA which will be represented on the Commission.

I visited the Ministry of Health later in the afternoon, where I discovered that Dr. Parillón was very involved with the INCAP international nutrition conference and, therefore, I would not be able to meet with him during the entire week. Instead, I met with Francisco Cedeño's supervisor, Dr. Julio Rodríguez, the director of the Organización y Formación de la Comunidad department. Although he is a very recent appointee and, as such, unsure of himself, Dr. Rodríguez seemed open to experimenting with a more participatory approach and would like to send an additional participant to the follow-up workshop.

Tuesday November 23: From my hotel I walked to the offices of AID/Panama where I met first with Pedro Martíz, a Panamanian health sociologist on contract to the Health and Population Office of the mission. Pedro has acted as the primary liaison person between DINNFA and AID, and was instrumental in identifying INCS as a potential resource for local institutions. His logistical support and insight were invaluable contributions to the success of my visit.

Following a brief meeting with Diamantina Wong to reconfirm my travel arrangements and with Eugenia Monterroso of Development Associates, Inc., I met with John H. Coury, the AID Health and Population Officer. John was clearly pleased to be receiving a visit from an INCS consultant after the many months delay. During our meeting we discussed DINNFA, the objectives of my consultancy, the National Breastfeeding Campaign, etcetera, and arranged to meet again for a debriefing later in the week.

In the afternoon I visited Chilibre, about an hour from Panama City, where the DINNFA Orientación Familiar division has been working intensively (two days/week) since September with a group of about 30 mothers. On this particular occasion María Vazquez, from the Promoción y Capacitación de la Mujer division, and I co-facilitated the 3-hour session during which they involved the women in two group activities designed to stimulate discussion and analysis of family composition, sexual roles, and task distribution within the family unit. Of particular interest was an innovative adaptation of un-serialized posters, entitled "Tres Familias". The meeting concluded with a simple, low-cost, nutritionally balanced meal prepared by one of the women with food provided by DINNFA. Since the participants have been selected on the basis of their low income and large family size (as many as 12 children), the meals are viewed, not only as an incentive, but also, as a way of introducing wholesome and accessible nutrition practices.

Although the work with the group in Chilibre has been deliberately slow, it is a pilot program through which the DINNFA staff are developing an integrated NFE curriculum -- "Educación para la Vida Familiar y la Sexualidad" --, combining sex education, breastfeeding and general nutrition guidance. The ultimate goal is to increase food production for local family consumption. By preparing meals for the group using only natural, locally available foods, there is an experiential basis for influencing participant food habits. Many of the women and their children are now eating salads for the first time; they have learned to combine papaya with CARE milk powder; they have eaten locally caught fish; and they are now familiar with "Hojaldrá" (soy flour). These practices have been reinforced through supportive visits from Hilda de Castellero and Emma de Martínez from the Nutrición division of the Ministry of Health. Among various other materials, food cards have been used by the group to plan their own balanced menus.

In the evening we left Panama City for Chiriqui to attend the last two days of a 9-day Sex Education/Materials Development Workshop. Just before midnight Pedro, Rina and I checked into a hotel in Santiago, half way to our destination.

Wednesday November 24: When we arrived mid-morning in David, the capital of Chiriquí province, we found the 20 workshop participants busy designing materials for their next day's presentations. This gave me an opportunity to study the agenda and content hand-outs, as well as to pay a brief courtesy visit to the provincial Ministry of Labor offices.

After lunch, while the participants continued to work on their materials, Rina and I met with the three workshop facilitators. With the exception of ongoing discussions with Rina, this was the most materials-oriented and creative meeting of my entire visit. In response to my concern that certain closed, didactic materials were being called open-ended stories ("historias o cartas abiertas"), we began the working session by identifying and listing the principal elements of open-ended, analytic materials. We then were able to generate ideas for several alternative stories for which the DINNFA staff will work out the specific details and dialogue.

During the session we also addressed a strong tendency of the trainers to use participatory techniques gratuitously, as merely a means of "beautifying" -- and, thus, manipulating -- the participants to accept and assimilate pre-conceived messages. To do this we worked on the design of mini-learning modules that are more open-ended, beginning with the perceptual universe of the participants, involving them in a structured analysis of their attitudes and behaviors, and then introducing informative, didactic materials only as appropriate. I reinforced our discussion by demonstrating some simple techniques for participatory

investigation that were not covered during the January workshop. By applying our theoretical model to specific units selected from the sex education workshop plan, the facilitators were able to see how different modules might overlap, thus satisfying multiple objectives simultaneously and, in this manner, permitting the workshops themselves to be more organic and open-ended and tailored to meet the varying needs of distinct groups.

A discussion of training evaluation forms and techniques was cut short, so that the DINNFA facilitators could close the day's workshop activities with a brief, informal feedback session.

Thursday November 25: We spent the morning observing the activities and materials presentations of two of the five participant groups. We then met with the facilitators to give them some last minute feedback before beginning our long drive back to Panama City.

In the car Rina and I talked about the workshop, the sex education curriculum, and the work of her division and of DINNFA in general. Having identified the lack of support at the supervisory levels as a major obstacle to broader application of, and experimentation with, participatory techniques and materials, we discussed possible strategies and designed specific activities to increase the involvement and commitment of the division heads in the INCS program.

I arrived at my hotel at 8:30pm.

Friday November 26: Rina and I met at the DINNFA offices to prepare simple materials for the morning program meeting. Then at 9am I met with Efrain Escalona to discuss methodological aspects of the INCS program and ways in which he might continue to be of assistance to the DINNFA participants. For example, we agreed that his particular skills in participatory investigation could help in the design of educational strategies that directly meet learner needs. During the remainder of the morning I facilitated a session with the DINNFA staff to set objectives for the upcoming workshop, based, as much as possible, on their own felt needs.

After lunch with Rina and Pedro, I met again with John Coury at AID to provide him with feedback on my visit and to review the plans and objectives for the proposed workshop. Then Rina, Pedro and I met with Dr. Altafulla to seek his advice and assure his support for the workshop.

Saturday November 27: At 8:30am I met with John Coury and Eugenia Monterroso regarding her work with the mission. I was especially interested in Development Associates' involvement in a special AID funded project which proposes to integrate

relevant aspects of nutrition education with ongoing family planning and sex education programs in the region. Eugenia was encouraged to hear that this is precisely the type of integrated curriculum that DINNFA is evolving, utilizing SARAR-type participatory techniques and materials. She would appreciate being sent materials as they are reproduced and will try to visit their programs on her next trip to Panama.

I then had a final wrap-up session with Rina lasting until noon, leaving me just enough time to pack my bags, check out of the hotel, and get to the airport before my 3:45pm flight to Mexico.

### III. The 1982 Program

#### Past

In evaluating the work that has taken place since the January workshop, it is important to keep in mind that Rina is the only one of our three original counterpart facilitators who is still involved with the program. In September, Vicky Valdez, the DINNFA staff nutritionist, accepted a scholarship for special studies at Cornell University. It is unlikely that she will be returning to DINNFA. Elvia Aviles, who was seconded to the program only for the duration of the workshop, has continued her work with the Caja de Ahorros de Bienestar Social. Whatever accomplishments there have been are, therefore, to a very large extent attributable to Rina's energy, commitment, and internalization of the methodology.

It is no surprise, then, that the Orientación Familiar division has been by far the most consistent in experimenting with KFE participatory techniques in their work, both intensively --as with the women's group in Chilibre-- and extensively --as with the sex education workshop for social workers, teachers, and other change agents in David. By experimenting with the methodology at both levels, the staff have been able to refine their facilitating skills, increase their confidence in handling the new techniques and materials, and, as a result, they are strongly committed to the participatory methodology.

The other two divisions that have been more or less consistent in applying participatory techniques are Desarrollo Humano and Promoción y Capacitación de la Mujer. In the former case, there has been positive support from the division head, a friend of Rina's.

In all of the other divisions --i.e. Juventud y Prevención, Tercera edad, Orientación Infantil--, as well as in the Ministry of Health departments, there has been only sporadic application of the methodology, although in some cases with note-

worthy success. What does seem to stand out is that these departments were only minimally represented in January and their participants have experienced little or no support from their supervisors. It would seem, therefore, that a supportive, team environment is essential for the methodology to evolve.

In spite of the obstacles, by sending out frequent circulars and by scheduling periodic joint reviews, Rina has helped the original group of workshop participants to maintain a common sense of purpose and commitment. For example, in May, Efrain conducted a mini, refresher workshop, which, while methodologically distinct from that of SARAR, nevertheless reinforced some of the basic principles. Then, again, in October the group met to review their experiences and began drafting an internal manual.

During my own visit, I was pleased to note that the group had managed to preserve a strong and positive mutual identification after almost a year since the workshop. Not only were most of the units (with the exception of the Caja de Seguridad Social and IFARHU, each of which sent only one participant to the January workshop) represented at our Monday meeting, but the quality of the interchange between the participants revealed a continuing commitment in the approach and considerable integration of the key elements.

#### Future

Desarrollo Humano and Orientación Familiar have planned a two-week workshop from December 3 to 17 which would involve all the DINNEFA staff who have been working in sex education, as well as all those who have been applying NFE participatory techniques --in whatever content areas-- introduced during the January workshop. The purpose will be to consolidate the combined experiences to draft a comprehensive participatory Sex Education and Family Life Curriculum and Program for 1983. A secondary objective will be to involve the various division supervisors in such a way that they will be more receptive to, and more disposed to support, non-directive approaches in the coming year.

#### IV. The 1983 Workshop

DINNEFA will be requesting INCS support for a 5 to 6-day workshop to take place during the first or second week of January 1983. Besides wanting to build directly upon the December experience, there is a very real need to provide some sort of general closure to this first year's experience and to better prepare DINNEFA for the potentially important role that it might play during the coming year in the National Breastfeeding Cur-

paign. In addition to the several technical areas that will need to be worked on before the participants can go much further with the participatory approach, Marcia's input will be invaluable in assisting the group to deal more effectively with nutrition-related issues as they arise. It would appear that, with the appropriate continuing support from INCS, the DINNEFA and Ministry of Health program participants will be in an ideal position to integrate their participatory community-level experiences with national and regional nutrition strategies.

In light of the above, the DINNEFA group set the following, tentative objectives for the January workshop. The objectives --and my comments-- are listed according to the staff's own order of priorities:

- 1 - Experiment with and develop new techniques for participatory investigation and analysis, with emphasis on nutrition.

Although the group has experimented with the materials and techniques introduced in January and have come up with some interesting adaptations (for example, the Food Habits Chart has been adapted to contraceptive habits), in general, they have not been particularly innovative. This is partly due to the fact that Jim --wisely, I think-- cautioned the group not to experiment too widely until they had mastered the basic elements of the methodology. But, now, after almost a year, they are anxious to expand their skills and move into new areas. In particular, a common concern of all the departments is to acquire new participatory investigation and analytic skills that can be applied to nutrition-related issues.

- 2 - Produce materials.

Although DINNEFA has been able to take advantage of the periodic services of an art student, no attempt has been made to reproduce his work in any quantity. Consequently, there is a tremendous shortage of effective, field-tested educational materials. Most of what is being used is improvised and informally shared between departments.

The workshop would provide a good opportunity to teach screen-printing skills --a process barely begun in the last workshop-- and, with the help of a full-time artist, to reproduce as many materials as possible.

- 3 - Review the draft of the DINNEFA "Participatory Techniques Manual".

There is an enormous need for some sort of uniform, systematic guidelines to accompany whatever materials are produced. A

simple, loose-leaf, in-house manual would serve to reinforce the training of new staff, as well as help to demonstrate to supervisors and others what is being done and why.

I feel that the production of a coherent manual could well be the central focus of the workshop, logically incorporating all of the other objectives.

4 - Evaluate the implementation of the methodology in 1982.

Before incorporating any activity or material into a manual format, it will be necessary to evaluate when it was used, why, and with what results. In this context we will be able to systematically review and document the work of the previous year, and identify and correct any particular problems that may exist. One difficulty that I would hope to address in this manner is the setting of clear, realizable objectives for each educational activity. From what I was able to observe on this visit, there is still a tendency to utilize materials that do not correspond to the stated objectives, or even, at times, to confuse open-ended and didactic materials.

5 - "Sensitize" administrative personnel.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of administrative and supervisory support has been a major stumbling-block for the program. During my visit Rina and I worked on the design of a two-day module, to be incorporated into the December workshop plan, which is intended to overcome some of the major resistances. We would like to continue that process in January. The development of a manual would be another communications tool to be used as part of the same long-term strategy.

6 - Review the draft of the "Participatory Sex Education Curriculum".

Although this was established as a very low priority objective by the DINNFA group, it is, nevertheless, important to make sure that the curriculum is methodologically sound and to correct any theoretical or technical flaws that might exist. There is also the expectation that Marcia will be able to help the group to determine to what degree nutrition concerns can be integrated with DINNFA's work in sex education.

Although I feel that these initial objectives are fundamentally realistic and complementary, obviously a considerable amount of pre-planning will be necessary in order to redraft and mold them into a more workable form. In order to do this, I recommend that Marcia and I have at least two days for planning prior to the workshop, in addition to an extra day to

make the final arrangements with Rina and our one or two other counterparts. (Rina is thinking that the supervisor of the Desarrollo Humano division could co-facilitate, while Evelina "Billy" del Cid could be responsible for handling the day-to-day logistical support.)

It has also been suggested that Marcia might want to stay on in Panama for a few days following the workshop in order to tie up various loose ends. Among these, by re-opening channels of communication with Dr. Parillón, she might be instrumental in the process of integrating the National Commission of Nutrition Education ("Comisión Nacional de Educación Nutricional"). Marcia might also want to attend a Regional Seminar on Breastfeeding scheduled for the second half of January.