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TRIP REPORT:
PRELIMINARY WORK WITH FEMAP
ON ADOLESCENT FILM

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Dates of In-Country Work:
June 11-15, 1985

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Population Information Program
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Executive Summary

The Johns Hopkins University/Population Communication Services media consultant, Miriam Bucher, visited Mexico from June 11-15, 1985. The purpose of the visit was to: 1) develop a story treatment for a film addressed to adolescents, in conjunction with FEMAP personnel; 2) assist in the selection of a Mexican film crew; and 3) initiate planning for film production in July, August and September, 1985.

Mrs. Bucher has 45 years of experience in film-making (health and development focus) around the world, including numerous Asian countries and close to a dozen Latin American countries.

Miriam Bucher accompanied Patrick L. Coleman, Regional Program Coordinator, and Alice I. Payne, Assistant Program Coordinator, of the Johns Hopkins University/Population Communication Services (JHU/PCS), on a planning visit to Mexico. The ultimate result is expected to be the production of an educational/motivational film adolescents, in conjunction with La Federación Mexicana de Asociaciones Privadas de Planificación Familiar (FEMAP).

Beginning June 11, 1985, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and continuing through June 13 and 14 in Mexico City (Bucher returned to home base June 15), the program included:

- 1) intensive conferences with executives and staff of FEMAP;
- 2) establishing guidelines for the film;
- 3) the preparation of an outline scenario and technical elements for inclusion in a proposal to seek bids for the film;
- 4) investigatory interviews with potential film production companies;
- 5) preparation of a tentative production schedule and pinpointing activities for July, August and September.

It is recommended that:

- 1) JHU/PCS assist Mr. Saldívar, FEMAP Director of Communications, in every phase of the film production process in order that he may feel confident at the project's completion in the basics of film design and production;
- 2) JHU/PCS and FEMAP consider costs, quality and experience factors when awarding the production bid; and
- 3) FEMAP give artistic license to Mr. Saldívar in the production of the film.

Introduction

The Johns Hopkins University/Population Communication Services (JHU/PCS) media consultant, Miriam Bucher, visited Mexico from June 11-15, 1985. The scope of work included: 1) to develop a story treatment for a film addressed to adolescents, in conjunction with FEMAP personnel; 2) to assist in the selection of Mexican film crew; and 3) to initiate planning for film production in July, August and September, 1985.

Federación Mexicana de Asociaciones Privadas de Planificación Familiar

The first substantive activity in the program began immediately upon arrival in country with a meeting at the headquarters office of FEMAP in Ciudad Juarez when Mrs. Bucher, accompanying Patrick L. Coleman and Alice I. Payne of JHU/PCS, met with Guadalupe de la Vega, President of FEMAP, Dr. Ernesto Barraza, Executive Director, Dr. Enrique Suarez, Director of Information, Education and Training, and César Saldívar, Director of Communications.

FEMAP had already prepared for the meeting with a thoughtfully constructed series of guidelines setting forth the general characteristics they expected to see embodied in the film. All of the officers present exhibited a healthy recognition of the need for strongly formed and innovative messages for adolescents, and freely conceded their willingness to accept technical guidance in the communication campaign.

It was agreed that the JHU/PCS team should work with César Saldívar in preparing a story-outline for the film and a detailed letter requesting a proposal to bid on the production project, to be sent out to a carefully selected group of professional production companies.

In the role of liaison between FEMAP and the production company, Mr. Saldívar would act as executive producer, and would be in full technical consultation with Mr. Coleman and/or Mrs. Bucher at each step in the production process, including scripting, filming, editing and post-production work. He has an academic grounding in film production, and a fund of viable cinematic ideas.

In the course of developing the story outline there was also useful input from Dr. Barraza. (It is always interesting and reassuring to a film-maker to see the extent to which laymen are enthusiastic participants in the process of

developing a film script. In the case of FEMAP, this seems to bode well for the evolution of a good and useful instrument of cinematic communication.)

The film, it was ultimately decided, will be from 22 to 25 minutes long, and will be made up of three short stories, drawn from various facets of modern urban and suburban life, and making use of certain sociological phenomena which affect Mexican society today.

The introduction to the film, as developed by FEMAP and the JHU/PCS team, will call attention to the universality of the adolescent experience, with common commercialized media signals relentlessly reminding them of their burgeoning sexuality--a trend which recognizes no geographic or societal borders.

Then each of the succeeding stories will take up a phase of adolescent life. Each will have a different setting and a different level of socio-economic existence. It is planned that the stories will be dramatic, but that they will demand of the audiences a high degree of participation and continuing reflection upon their individual lives and problems. This will entail ongoing challenges rather than conventional happy endings. There is some reason to believe that the film will be a genuine innovation for young audiences in Mexico, and it has the promise of applicability in other parts of Latin America.

Armed with copies of the story outline in the form of a brief screen treatment, and letters requesting proposals from producers, the JHU/PCS team (including Mr. Saldívar) then went to Mexico City to survey the field of potential candidates.

They met immediately with Samuel Taylor, AID representative, who had arranged meetings with a selection of producers, and proceeded forthwith to the first of those meetings.

1) Churubusco Studios

This is a vast complex out of which much of Mexico's TV and theatre fare comes. Here they met Ruben Galindo, Jr., Director, (son and putative heir of Ruben Galindo who directs Chapultepec films) a youthful, ambitious, bi-cultural product of the UCLA film school, who has already produced successful theatrical films for the growing Hispanic audience in the United States, and is now making inroads in U.S. cinema outlets for general audiences.

He was interested in the proposal, although not demonstrably experienced in the documentary field, and indicated considerable flexibility of approach. The only obstacle to his response to the proposal seemed to be the question of his availability to work in the specified period.

Churubusco is a thoroughly professional--hence reassuring--set-up. Mr. Galindo was candid in his statements of what he could and could not do locally along technical lines, and clearly would like to continue the contact. He promised to send in his bid before the deadline of July 5.

2) Match

The next stop on the producer hunt brought the team to an organization called Match, a "wide awake" group primarily active in commercials, industrial employee relations and training films, and short TV efforts.

Abelardo Favela Sanchez, Director, and his colleagues showed a variety of samples of the organization's work--some of it conventional and mildly imitative (probably at the customer's request) of the U.S. approach to the same commercial demands--and some of it ingenious and spirited.

It was clear that Mr. Sanchez had not previously essayed a documentary, much less a dramatic documentary, of the highly emotional and relatively delicate nature FEMAP envisions, but he was confident of his ability to perform, and agreed to send his bid to FEMAP quickly.

3) Fuentes y Fomento Intercontinentales

The third meeting was convened with Fuentes y Fomento Intercontinentales representatives who moved very quickly into the spirit and form of the proposed film. Rogelio Villareal and Roberto Valladares, the company heads, are wholly bi-cultural and visibly enthusiastic about the opportunity presented by the FEMAP project. They introduced Eduardo Monteverde, proposed director/cameraman, a serious documentary film-maker (highly technically qualified) with a background in film and socio-cultural and environmental concerns.

On the surface, this group seemed to have the highest potential. Undeniably, Mr. Saldívar was more drawn to Mr. Galindo as representative of the young,

less conventional cinema generation. It is possible that he would enjoy a higher degree of communication with Galindo than with Monteverde, but there is no assurance that such communication would result in a more successful film on all counts. When the bids are received from the aforementioned companies (plus others Mr. Coleman saw after Mrs. Bucher left), the selection will be made on the basis of all considerations, which may alter the equation.

Meanwhile, the JHU/PCS team made final plans for a production schedule calling for a shooting script to be developed by Mr. Saldívar and Mrs. Bucher in Ciudad Juarez beginning July 7; a final company selection to be made and an agreement finalized by July 15; shooting to begin on or about August 4; editing to begin on or about September 1, and an answer print to be exhibited to FEMAP September 27.

It is a tight schedule, but not wholly unrealistic. Mr. Saldívar will monitor the work throughout with the guidance and counsel of Mr. Coleman or Mrs. Bucher or both at all stages.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This entire enterprise seems an unusual and promising example of what foreign aid programs in communication were originally designed to do and rarely succeeded in doing--to seek out individuals and organizations in any given country which appear to have the highest potential for communication success, help them fill in the lacunae in their own experience or training, give them technical help only as needed, and let them carry forward the work on their own terms. By September 27 it should be possible to determine whether confidence in this procedure, in this instance, is justified. Obviously the writer thinks that it will be.

It is recommended that:

- 1) JHU/PCS assist Mr. Saldívar in every phase of the film production process in order that he may feel confident at the project's completion in the basics of film design and production;
- 2) JHU/PCS and FEMAP consider costs, quality and experience factors when awarding the production bid; and

- 3) FEMAP give artistic license to Mr. Saldívar in the production of the film.

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