

# Gamos Community Television Study

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Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

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## Summary of Findings in Honduras

*“Journalists and social communicators are the fundamental factor in achieving the changes of behaviour that can contribute to the development of this country. If this concept is not clearly understood, there’s little that can be done.”*

— Ana Elsy Mendoza, coordinator, UNDP Program for Training Journalists

Although the media in Honduras is dominated by commercial interests, a variety of television and radio stations and programs dedicated to promoting development and education do exist in Honduras. Radio has traditionally been stronger in this area; it still reaches a greater percentage of the population, and some in Honduras think it’s still a better medium for development than television.

However, recent years have seen significant increases in access to television and the number of television stations in Honduras, and some broadcasters and programs have been quite successful at providing educational and development-promoting programming. Religious organizations have made significant contributions in this area, as have NGOs and independent, local television stations.

But even the most popular of these broadcasters face significant challenges in the form of lack of funding and lack of interest from investors, lack of access in rural areas to television, unreliable power systems or lack of power altogether, and lack of a strong legal mandate for educational programming.

## Overview of Communications Media in Honduras

### *Television*

The number of television stations and viewers in Honduras has grown rapidly in recent years. Just a decade ago there were less than 10 television channels in Honduras, but today there are close to 50, and more keep appearing.<sup>1</sup> According to CONATEL (the National Telecommunications Commission) there are a total of 237 television broadcasters in the 18 departamentos of Honduras, with the department of Puerto Cortés, in the north, leading with 43 broadcasters.

In Honduras there are open-signal broadcasters at the national, regional, and local levels, and there are also more than 300 cable stations, most of which cover only a single municipality. Many of these cable companies are going a step beyond merely offering cable service to creating their own local channels.

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<sup>1</sup> Calderón, Manuel Torres. “¿Se puede hacer incidencia social a través de los medios de comunicación?” Conexihon.com (16-30 June 2004)

In terms of viewers, in the year 2000 there were 97 television sets per 1,000 people—11 more than in 1990, and 79 more than in 1980.<sup>2</sup> Since a decade ago, when only 14-15% of the population had access to television, the number of TV antennas in Honduras has tripled.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Radio*

According to CONATEL in February of 2004 Honduras had 255 AM radio stations, 432 FM stations, and 8 short-wave stations. Of these, about 67 have news programs and about 50 are religious (either Catholic or Evangelical).<sup>4</sup> Radio reaches nearly every area of Honduras; even in remote, unelectrified areas, most families have a battery-powered radio.

#### *Internet*

The importance of this communications medium is growing rapidly in Honduras. Three years ago there were 25,000 Internet users in Honduras; today that number has doubled. The Internet has contributed to development in Honduras by facilitating coordination between development organizations, speeding up communication, and reducing the cost of publication by creating a space for online publications.

#### *Print*

Honduras has four national newspapers, which together are estimated to have a daily readership of 400 to 600 thousand people. Some cities also have their own weekly, biweekly, or monthly newspapers. The magazine market in Honduras is also growing.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Law of CONATEL**

*“I’ll share something: communication is not exclusively for the journalists, it’s a right of all the people, and therefore the people have the right to communication be it via telephone, celular, Internet, radio, television, or others.”*

*—Carmen Galeas, director of Radio Paz, Choluteca*

All telecommunications in Honduras are regulated by CONATEL (The National Telecommunications Commission), as described in the Framework Law for the Telecommunications Sector (1997). According to the law, “it is the obligation of an operator of a public telecommunications service to provide telecommunications services to underserved rural areas and marginalized urban areas in Honduras.” The law goes on to state that the use of telecommunications is a “fundamental right of the human being,” and that it “not only constitutes an economic activity, but also an important social function.”

The law also states that radio and television broadcasters may be required to “transmit messages of the presidents of the three Powers of the State [the three government branches], and in response to cases of national emergency or cases of national, cultural, or civic interest.”

Moreover, it commits the Honduran government to “creating mechanisms” for bringing telecommunications to rural and marginalized areas (with the hope that these will later be taken over by private interests).

But while in theory Honduran law strongly supports accessibility to and promotion of social and educational messages by the communications media, in practice it’s done little to further these ideals. The law does not

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<sup>2</sup> International Telecommunications Union, cited by the World Resources Institute at <http://earthtrends.wri.org>

<sup>3</sup> interview with Eliu Martínez, journalist, Sultana Radio and Channel 28, Santa Rosa de Copán

<sup>4</sup> Calderón

<sup>5</sup> Internet and radio statistics cited from Calderón

specify a number of hours that media must dedicate to educational programming, nor does it establish incentives for broadcasting educational programming or penalties for failing to do so. Not one of the people interviewed for this study mentioned an instance in which the government had undertaken a project to bring telecommunications to rural areas.

### **Commercialism**

Profit is the dominating principle in the Honduran media. According to most sources, the majority of both television and radio broadcasters in Honduras, at least large-scale broadcasters, are primarily interested in making money, and hardly any view educational or pro-development programming as a viable way to do so.

*“As such, the mass media have greater interests which don’t exactly have to do with the development of the nation... for the communications media, personal interest outweighs collective interest, and that’s the crucial point that keeps the mass media from taking this step to use communications to promote development.”*

*—Ana Elsy Mendoza, coordinator, UNDP Program for Training Journalists*

Even for stations interested in broadcasting educational and pro-development material, advertising revenues are a serious obstacle: most advertisers are sceptical of the number of people they think will pay attention to an educational program, and thus are unlikely to buy airtime around such a program or underwrite it. Thus if a station wants to run an educational program, it must either convince advertisers the show will have an audience or swallow a decrease in revenues.

*“I think they are limited by the fact that they’re commercial enterprises—they sell advertisements, and the content of these advertisements is determined by what the surveys say the population wants to hear. And so from this emerges the principal that cultural programming...doesn’t pay.”*

*—Rolando Sarmiento, director of HRN (Honduras National Radio)*

And some popular media formats simply may not be fitting outlets for educational content—a program about learning math, for example, would be out of place on a radio station dedicated to sports or a television channel dedicated to showing movies.

### **Political Influence**

Many media owners are politicians or businessmen with ties to other important commercial interests. For example, the family of Jaime Rosenthal, a perennial presidential candidate, owns the *Diario Tiempo* (one of Honduras’ four national newspapers), Channel 11 television, and Cable Color, one of Honduras’ most powerful cable and Internet providers; the family of ex-president Carlos Flores Facussé owns *La Tribuna*, another of the leading newspapers. Both families are members of the Association of Media Owners, a powerful pressure group.<sup>6</sup>

Some charge that these media owners stay away from educational and pro-development programming precisely because it’s in their interest to maintain the status quo.

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<sup>6</sup> Calderón

*“The rather concerning thing happening with television and with radio is that the majority of the owners of the media are politicians or politically biased, and they’ve gained power over a large quantity of frequencies.”*

*—Ramón Durán, professor of journalism at the National University (UNAH)*

*“Right now a superficial form of journalism predominates, since in various sectors, especially the people with power and the communications media, there’s not a clear interest in modifying or trying to change the status quo.”*

*—Ana Elsy Mendoza, coordinator, UNDP Program for Training Journalists*

*“There’s a separation between development and the analysis of democracy, and for this reason we’re not contributing to the effort of making democracy translate into well-being, and that’s a problem.”*

*—Julieta Castellanos, sociologist*

## **Television for Development and Empowerment**

Nevertheless, in a variety of instances television is being used with a fair degree of success to promote education and development in Honduras.

### *Development/Informal education*

Several television channels in Honduras create and/or broadcast programs with content aimed to educate people about health, politics, the environment, domestic relations, personal development, etc. Catholic TV Channel 48, for example, broadcasts learn-to-paint shows and environmental documentaries; Channel 9 Teledanlí (a regional channel in the department of El Paraíso) produces political panel-discussion shows and has run documentaries produced by foreign embassies.

### *Formal education*

Catholic TV (Channel 48) and the Honduran Ministry of Education work together to run *Telebásica*, a distance learning program, based on educational television broadcasts, through which Hondurans can earn a diploma for 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade education. *Telebásica* programs are also used by teachers in understaffed schools as a way to increase their efficiency.

The popular radio show *Educados* (“Education for Everyone”), broadcast on Honduras National Radio (HRN) and other stations, provides a similar service, helping people to earn diplomas for completing a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade education.

### *Local news*

Local news programs increase people’s awareness of events and issues in their communities, and this prepares them to better contribute to their communities’ development. Local radio news programs have been very popular, and it seems that local news programs would be equally well received.

Several local television channels in Honduras are producing well-received news programs. For example, “9 News” has been the foundation of Channel 9 Teledanlí’s programming from the start. And several episodes of the program *Niñez en Acción* (“Childhood in Action”) produced by children in Plan International’s Child Media program in Santa Barbara have focused on projects and issues in their community.

### *Participation/Empowerment*

One of the most powerful examples of video for empowerment in Honduras is that of Plan International's Child Media project. In this program, children in communities around Honduras learn to use technology such as video cameras and tape recorders, practice interviewing and public speaking skills, and produce television and radio shows for public broadcast. Participating in this program empowers children by giving them technical and verbal skills and the self confidence that comes along with these, and by giving them a public voice and an active role in the community.

UNICEF runs a similar program in Honduras, the Network of Child Communicators (*Red de Comunicadores Infantiles*).

René Pauck, a journalist, said a participatory video project she had worked with involving women in rural areas had succeeded in stimulating reflection and awareness in the women's communities through a strategy in which audiences watched their own videotaped reactions as well as the primary videos the women had produced.

And whenever television (or radio) is locally produced instead of being piped in from elsewhere, the community benefits from an increase of educated professionals—the local people who must be trained to produce the programming.

*“This has generated influential personalities in the communities, since some people who received training started becoming more important in the social scale in their communities; some of them have even aspired to be congressional representatives, aldermen, and other offices of great responsibility.”*

*—Ramón Durán, professor of journalism at the National University (UNAH) and founding member of the Rural Communicators' Cooperative (radio)*

### *Links to Other Projects*

As well as providing educational and development-promoting content, some television stations provide publicity for campaigns or educational opportunities, or directly sponsor them. For example, every year Channel 9 Teledanlí gives educational scholarships to poor children.

### **Local Broadcasts vs. Mass Broadcasts**

Although a few projects have succeeded in producing educational, cultural, and pro-development programming on a mass-broadcast scale (most notably, Catholic television and Honduras National Radio), local and regional broadcasting thus far has been more fertile ground. Both the lower cost and the built-in draw for audiences of seeing their own community reflected in the media give local broadcasts an advantage.

### *Cost*

The equipment required to set up a station with mass-broadcasting power is extremely expensive, and organization looking to set up educational or pro-development television stations are rarely of the type that have access to large budgets. Purchasing airspace on a commercial mass-broadcast channel is equally prohibitive.

*“We have tried to place 30-second spots on TV for health prevention campaigns (AIDS and Dengue Fever), but haven’t been able to manage it because of costs. It would cost approximately \$875 each time the spot is run.”*

*—Janet Blanco, Director, COMUNICA (NGO specializing in educational communications)*

The more localized the channel, the more accessible equipment and airspace become. Plan International’s Child Media project in the department of Santa Barbara, for example, pays a regional broadcaster about the same price for 2.5 hours a month of radio airspace and 2.5 hours of television as Janet Blanco said she would have to pay for a 30-second spot on a national station. And smaller, local stations give Child Media airspace for free.

Furthermore, local broadcasts need less equipment, and the equipment they do need is at least slightly more affordable. A Catholic television station that broadcasts Child Media programs locally in the municipality of San Luis does not even have a stationary fan to cool off their offices—but they get their signal out to televisions throughout the community.

### *Interest*

Local channels and locally produced shows have the inherent draw, which mass media lack, of familiar faces and relevant issues. This point is especially important since educational and development organizations rarely have the budgets for slick, commercial-style productions: on a mass-broadcast scale, these productions may simply strike audiences as shabby and unattractive compared to the competition, but several experiences in Honduras have shown that on the local level the excitement of seeing a child or neighbour, or a favourite bakery or an oft-frequented park, or to hear one’s letters read on television, usually outweighs the unpleasantness of low-budget production.

*“Look, I’ll tell you something: our experience has taught us that in the majority of rural villages the audience would rather listen to a local journalist than listen to the large chain stations.”*

*—Rogelio Aguilar, executive producer of Radio Reloj (“Clock Radio”) and a founder of the Rural Communicators’ Cooperative.*

Locally produced television also has the advantage of being able to address the specific manifestations of social problems in the community, rather than being consigned to generalized comments that people have probably heard before.

*“I think that there’s more awareness in the local media because they’ve always lived there, and collectively they share in the public and private spaces of the society, and so they care about it and try to improve it, and they understand the importance of the media in making new proposals for the development of the community...The advantage is that the population knows more about the reality of their own community.”*

*—Carlos Felipe Castillo, owner of Channel 9 Teledanli*

### **Television vs. Radio**

Over and over we came across the debate of whether television or radio was the more effective medium for promoting education and development in Honduras. In terms of both cost and reachable audience, radio still has a distinct advantage. But television is rapidly gaining, and there are a number of examples of successful programs.

### *Image vs. Sound*

Some of the people interviewed for this study said that the absence of images makes radio a better cultivator of imagination and critical thinking and allows listeners to move about and take care of other duties while learning at the same time. But others said television's ability to transmit both sound and images made it the more impactful medium.

*"Studies have demonstrated that when you hear something, you can remember 70% of what you heard within a day, but only 10% 30 days later; whereas when you see something, you can remember 70% a day later, and 50-60% 30 days later."*

*—Father Jesús Mora, Vicar of Communications, Catholic Church of Honduras*

### *Cost*

The high cost of setting up a television station, and the necessity for equipment not needed for radio (sets and lighting, for example) could be prohibitive in areas with few resources—the exact same areas where communications for development is most vital. The Honduran government, for example, has considered setting up a national television channel along the same lines as HRN (the national radio channel), but has decided such a project is more expensive than it can afford for the time-being.

*"The radio station I work with has two operators, two newscasters/announcers, and a computer. It costs about US\$1,350 a month with a total of eight people on staff. TV needs a lot more personnel."*

*—Eliu Martínez, Sultana Radio and Channel 28, Santa Rosa de Copán*

High costs also discourage established television stations from adding educational or pro-development programming to their lineups, due to its dubious profitability.

### *Range/Accessibility*

Although the influence and accessibility of television has grown rapidly in the last decade, thanks especially to local closed-circuit cable systems, radio still reaches more of the population. On the broadcasting end, radio, especially AM radio, by its nature has a farther-travelling signal than television.

On the receiving end, many of the most undeveloped areas in Honduras lack access to electricity, and their inhabitants could not in any case afford to buy televisions; radios are more accessibly priced and can be run off of a few batteries, whereas operating a TV in an unelectrified area requires a battery costing nearly \$100. According to Martínez, "A radio can cost from US\$4.00 – 5.00, whereas a black and white TV set can cost US\$ 55.00, and a color TV can cost from \$160 – 500, a price which a poor family can't afford."

Nevertheless, the number of people with access to television is growing, as is the number of educational and development-oriented television channels and programs.

## **The Challenge of Sustainability**

### *Legal backing*

The Law of CONATEL's support for educational and pro-development uses of media is more philosophical than substantive. The law does not offer any special benefits for educational or community oriented channels, nor does it require commercial broadcasters to run a certain amount of educational programming. Educational media are thus forced to compete in the same game as commercial media, but with the deck stacked against them due investor's and advertiser's lack of interest in funding such programs.

*"I believe there needs to be a coercive aspect from the side of the government, which would create a public policy that legislates and assigns priority to clear educational and cultural agendas. Unfortunately, our government is actually thinking of closing the Ministry of Culture, instead of broadening impact."*

*—Janet Blanco, Director, COMUNICA (NGO that specializes in educational communications)*

### *Costs*

Every one of the educational, pro-development, and community radio and television broadcasters we came across complained about not having sufficient funds to pay for the equipment or airspace they would like.

*"A permit for operation is very expensive. Aside from that, a decodifier and antenna can cost \$600, and a transmitter, \$15,000. There are many cable companies working illegally. The government is actually interested in the commercial value of television, as well"*

*—Father Jesús Mora, Vicar of Communications, Catholic Church of Honduras*

This lack of funds inhibits their ability to produce effective programs—which in turn completes the downward circle by discouraging potential investors and advertisers.

### *Technology*

The technology required for television broadcasting is expensive and can be hard to find in Honduras. Furthermore, some said irregularities in municipal electric grids had damaged their equipment.

## **Strategies for Sustainability**

### *Subsidies/freebies*

The simplest—and most tenous—strategy for sustainability is that of relying on outside funding. In the absence of commercial interest or government funding, donations from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or foreign governments, or donations of free airspace by television broadcasters, are one of the few sources of funding to which development-related communications media can turn. Such donors play a valuable role in getting projects on their feet, but if these projects don't develop strategies for sustainability while donor money is still coming in, they are likely to fail when the grant runs out.



For example, when funding from a German foundation ran out for the Rural Communicators' Cooperative, an association of local radio broadcasters, the organization's influence severely decreased.

*"The big problem is that when international cooperation plays too big of a role, projects aren't required to meet certain goals, and they become extremely dependant, and that causes them to fall apart when the international aid comes to an end."*

*—Ramón Durán, professor of journalism at the National University (UNAH);  
founding member of the Rural Communicators' Cooperative*

Depending entirely on an outside donor can also jeopardize the integrity of a channel or program's content—no one wants to bite the hand that feeds them. For example, some have accused those in charge of Honduras National Radio of being yes-men for whoever happens to occupy the presidential office.

#### *Secondary businesses*

Some media in Honduras are achieving sustainability by running profitable businesses alongside their pro-development channels or programs. Catholic television (Channel 48), for example, runs a profitable video filming and editing business alongside its religious and educational television channel. The profits from this business make up for the channel's shortfalls and keep the channel from being dependant on—and susceptible to the influences of—advertisers. Radio *Ondas de Ulua*, a regional radio station in Santa Barbara that broadcasts programs produced by Plan International's Child Media program as well as several hours daily of *Educados*, is subsidized by a purely commercial music radio station owned by the same company.

#### *Collective organization*

Some local, community-oriented media in Honduras have increased both revenue and quality of service by dealing collectively with advertisers and by sharing programming. For example the National Network of Television Broadcasters (*Red Nacional de Televisoras*), a group of 14 local and regional broadcasters in Honduras, has been able to collectively negotiate advertising arrangements and purchase foreign programming that the stations never would have had access to individually. The arrangement increases the stations' abilities to attract investment while preserving their freedom to produce and broadcast locally relevant programs.

## **Conclusions**

- In Honduras, radio continues to have distinct advantages over television: radio stations are much cheaper to set up than television stations, and radios are much cheaper than television sets, and radio waves can penetrate to remote communities that television can't reach.
- However, the number of both television stations and viewers is growing rapidly, and thus the potential of television for promoting development in Honduras is also increasing.
- While some mass broadcasters, most notably the Catholic Church's Channel 48, have succeeded in providing educational and pro-development programming, more frequent instances of this type of

programming at the local-broadcast level indicate that local broadcasting is both a more economically feasible and more effective medium for promoting development in Honduras.

- Local television stations in Honduras offer programming directly related to the specific challenges of the community. Moreover, they involve the public not only as passive viewers but as active participants—as panellists on discussion programs, as interviewers and interviewees on news programs, as participants in public campaigns organized by the channels, and so on.
- Funding is a large, if not insurmountable, challenge for educational and pro-development television stations and programs. Start-up funds are sometimes available from foreign NGOs, not indefinite subsidies. The Honduran government does not offer discounts or subsidies to educational channels, nor does it require commercial stations to set aside a certain amount of time for educational programming. And most commercial broadcasters are either not interested in educational programming or charge high airspace fees for educational programming due to the perceived loss in advertising revenues it causes.
- Some educational media are overcoming these obstacles by running profitable side-businesses or by negotiating with advertisers collectively.
- Attracting the audience's interest also remains a challenge. Honduran advertisers' aversion to educational programming may be partly based on unfounded bias, but it is probably also based partly on a true assessment of the public's interest in this kind of programming. Broadcasters interviewed for this study estimate that relatively low percentages of their potential audiences watched their educational shows—the owner of Santa Barbara Vision, for example, estimates that 30% to 40% of his audience might be interested in watching the Child Media program he broadcasts; Father Jesús Mora of Catholic TV Channel 48 estimates that 10 – 20% of the population tunes in to *Telebásica*, an educational program that the channel broadcasts for eight hours every day.
- Again, local channels again appear to have the advantage. Interviewees from Channel 9 Teledanlí and from Cristovisión (“ChristVision”), a local Catholic television broadcaster in the town San Luis, Santa Barbara, for example, both said their channels had responsive, dedicated audiences.
- The future possibilities for community television in Honduras could be greatly enhanced if NGOs, grassroots organizations, and local government authorities were mobilized to take advantage of the opportunities presented for communication and education of critical community issues. This might possibly require a decisive effort to expand incipient experiences in order to include a broader range of interests and audiences, along with improved and appropriate technology made available to local communities.



## Appendix 1

### The Framework Law for the Telecommunications Sector: Relevant Excerpts

**“Contribution in Kind:**

It is the obligation of an operator of a public telecommunications service to offer telecommunications services in underserved rural areas and marginalized urban areas of Honduras, in accordance with regulations issued by CONATEL for the universal provision of services.”

**“Principle of Equitable Service:**

By this principle, telecommunications, constituting as such a fundamental right of the human person, ought to reach and be at the service of all of the inhabitants of Honduras, including those who are found in economically unprofitable places. Telecommunications not only constitute an economic activity, but also an important social function. In order to bring telecommunications to economically unprofitable places or social group, the State will create adequate mechanisms, in such a manner that later these also will be attractive to private investment; for their part, the operators of services are obligated to take on certain specific charges in legal arrangements or in their respective titles of authorization.”

**“Glossary: Operator:**

Natural or legal person authorized to provide telecommunications services to third parties or to itself.”

**“Article 11:**

The operators of private telecommunications services are obligated to dispatch messages from the authorities or third parties, when these telecommunications are located in places where public telecommunications services do not exist and situations of grave emergency arise and it becomes necessary to achieve communication in order to protect human life, maintain public order, guarantee the security and conservation of natural resources, the environment, and public or private goods.”

**“Article 18:**

Private Services are those that serve for the exclusive use of a natural or legal person in order to satisfy its own necessities for communication. As a private service, it is prohibited to extend services to third parties under any circumstance, even without motives of profit; and it is surely prohibited to charge prices of some sort, whether directly or indirectly.

“Those services which serve for the exclusive use of businesses or corporations are also Private Services. In the case of corporations, more than 50% of the total shares must belong to a single person or legal entity; or, the case being, it must demonstrate before CONATEL any other forms of control of the business’ governing entity.”

**“Article 17:**

Public services are those which are intended to satisfy the telecommunications necessities of the general public. In this case, the operating business is that which provides the service; and the users are those who have the benefit of these services in exchange for paying a charge. CONATEL has the power to declare services as public, including those which do not charge a price, but that distribute on a mass level and that pursue some profitable end. As for the character of the public, these services are offered without any discrimination to all who are interested in using them, within the technical possibilities of the operator.”

## Appendix 2

### Number of Radio and Television Broadcasters in Honduras, 2004

DEPARTAMENT	RADIO			TELEVISION
	AM	OC	FM	
ATLANTIDA	20	1	47	34
CHOLUTECA	23		33	17
COLON	11		23	11
COMAYAGUA	23		38	25
COPAN	13		25	19
CORTES	31	1	63	43
EL PARAISO	11		34	12
FRANCISCO MORAZAN	37	4	39	22
GRACIAS A DIOS	1	1	4	3
INTIBUCA	4		7	3
BAY ISLANDS	2		10	5
LA PAZ	6		5	
LEMPIRA	5		9	5
OCOTEPEQUE	9		15	4
OLANCHO	25		34	11
SANTA BARBARA	10	1	24	8
VALLE	8		8	4
YORO	17		14	11

Graph taken from [www.conatel.hn](http://www.conatel.hn)

Appendix 3

Television Broadcasters in Honduras, by Department

