

COMMUNITY TELEVISION SCOPING STUDY

INTERVIEWS WITH **BROADCASTERS**

Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

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Carlos Felipe Castillo Segura

Communications media owner in Danlí, El Paraíso, Honduras

Mr. Castillo, the third-generation owner of Radio Danlí and Astro Visión (channel 9), is proud to say that both of these media are contributing to community development in Danlí.

▪ **Local Broadcasts**

- In your experience, does local cable television have benefits for the development of the population that's receiving this service?

In rural areas television has appeared more than anything in the form of what's called closed-circuit or cable television. In our case, we started thirteen years ago, and this really gave a boost to the region. The advantage is that the population knows more about the reality of their own community, and this contributes to the encouragement of communications to promote development, which in the past you didn't see.

Right now Astro Vision produces thirteen programs, and this generates a mobilization of human resources in that it produces new sources of employment, trains the journalists and technicians, and supports projects such as the Network of Children's Communicators.

A source of communications media in this region becomes a social space in which community development activities can be carried out.

- How influential is local television and radio? What percentage of the population would you estimate is tuning in to these stations?

It started with cable television, but these days we're an open-frequency station, which is channel nine in the VHF frequency, and that gives us a greater range. The transmitter is located on Casa Blanca peak, at an altitude of 1,700 meters, and that permits us to cover a great deal of the Eastern region of the country.

We cover one hundred percent of the *departamento*¹ of El Paraíso, part of Francisco Morazán, Choluteca, Valle, El Ocotal, and Jalapa, which is in the northern part of Nicaragua.

In the case of Radio Danlí, it's undergone some reengineering; it's a 31-year-old radio station, and in the last four years it's gained a greater range because it's also broadcast now from Casa Blanca peak. Before it was an AM station, and now it's also an FM station and it's a very powerful radio broadcaster.

¹ *Departamento*, or department, is the political and geographical division of regions in the country (such as States in the USA), and there are 18 departments in Honduras.

Furthermore, we've got the frequency 94.5 "People," which is a youth radio station and has the same range as the other since it's broadcast from the same peak. We've done a statistical calculation of the number of people that our signal reaches, and it's approximately one and a half million people, including the small part of northern Nicaragua that we reach, which has perhaps two hundred thousand people.

- Is community television a possible way of promoting community development? What would have to be changed in order to make it function effectively in this way?

All communications media contribute to community development, but television has a greater impact than radio because it's both visual and audio, but the current situation is that the radio is the leader because of the places where there's access to radio but not to television.

Our channel is dispersed through cable systems in various *departamentos*, and the people can learn about local issues [in this way]. What would have to change? What's happening is that Honduras is a country of inequality and poverty, and in order to be able to undertake projects that would bring signals to communities which have been postponed for a long time, the government would have to give them priority.

▪ **Regulation**

- Are community radio or television stations permitted in Honduras?

Yes, definitely, as long as they're in line with the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL), they're complying with regulations, have the proper permits, and pay the annual fees for the right to use a frequency. Of course when radio stations and towers are being installed you always have to make sure that forest reserves aren't being harmed and that people's property isn't being affected.

▪ **Finance and Technology**

- Tell me about the obstacles that you've run into in developing radio and television in this region.

One of the greatest local obstacles is that of electricity. Although we have special equipment for regulating energy, we still have some lamentable problems. Our country is a poor one and so is our electricity system.

There are a lot of costs from equipment being ruined due to the irregularity of the electric energy, and this affects the industry, and at times it's very expensive to have electrical plants and when there's not energy, we lose ten or twelve hours of transmission, and that's expensive because it means we fail to fulfill our obligations to our advertisers.

On a smaller scale, finding reporters is a problem, because in the small cities we're lacking in this human resource. What we can do is search for new talents and continue to develop established ones.

- What are the annual operations costs for a radio station or a television station?

It's hard to give a specific figure right now, but in both types of media we consume about the same amount of energy. With radio there are different shifts, and at night it's run automatically, but in radio we have lower costs.

In the case of television, it's a very demanding medium in terms of personnel, of higher costs, but my case is an unusual one in that I own two kinds of media, and in the last four years I've seen the growth of the television station and the decrease that the radio has experienced as far as how much income it's bringing in, but radio is still the leader in our region, because there might still be places that television doesn't reach, but radio does.

Lately publicity agencies are showing quite a strong preference for local television. A study was done with a firm called Infomarketing which reflected the growing importance of television. I look at it this way: people see themselves in the television, they see the mayor, the government representatives, health issues, among others, and this has a greater impact, and it's contributed to the growth of local channels.

- What types of technology does your stations use?

Basically, in cable television we work with digital technology. With channel nine, which is an open channel, we work with analog technology, just like with radio. We're analog transmitters, the step to digital has not been taken much in Honduras, but it's difficult because of the costs.

In terms of channels, we're a part of the National Network of Television Stations, and we've joined this network in order to take part in buying foreign programs and in sales at the national level. Right now, the network includes local television stations from Choluteca, Santa Rosa de Copán, Progreso, Puerto Cortés, Comayagua, Ceiba, and Santa Bárbara.

We're not able to change our technologies due to the costs. We wouldn't be able to pay for this kind of technology because the change to digital, satellite technology is very high. Perhaps sometime in the future, for the benefit of listeners and viewers [we'll do it].

Father Jesús Mora

Vicar of Communications, Honduras Catholic Church

Father Jesús Mora oversees the production of Honduran Catholic radio stations, television Channel 48, their website, their magazine FIDES, and their audio-visual productions. They participate with the Catholic Foundation for Social Communications whose mandate from the Pope is: to evangelize and to educate.

▪ Mass Broadcasts

- Do you have any experience in practicing communications for the development of the poorest sectors?

Channel 48 has an evangelistic purpose, and it was created in order to have control over content. Before its creation, there was certain apertura to allowing them to transmit their shows, but they were limited spaces.

The Catholic Channel (Channel 48) initiated through the auspices of Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez. It was officially inaugurated in May, 1999. The initial investment in digital technology was huge, but it was deemed as an important alternative to local commercial television. Channel 48 follows its unique purpose of “forming moral and spiritual values” in Honduras. Although the channel does sell publicity for financial sustainability, the producers also create alternative audiovisual programs with modern standards of creativity and technology.

We have created documentaries, such as an ecological one called “Treasures of La Tigra”² with Arturo Sosa, an environmentalist. We also created a fictional drama series, based on reality, called “Real Cases of the Public Ministry”³. We aired 11 episodes, and another TV channel is currently putting it on air again.

We are always looking for capable, creative professionals, people who have received theoretical training (college level) and have diverse criteria, not just a commercial one.

- Do you believe that mass broadcasting (television, radio, satellite) can be important for development? Why?

I am completely convinced, because “knowledge enters through the senses”. 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. So among the different means of communications, television is most influential. It can either help or hinder the growth of human beings – either motivating good ideas and values or impoverishing their ideals.

- Do you know of any experiences in radio or television that broadcast specifically for the development of the poorest sectors of the country? (Any NGO or government institution that carries out educational or development programs?)

There was a program on national television, called “Campeonísimos” (Super Champions), which was an educational competition that stimulated learning and general knowledge among schools in the country. Another program created with an educational emphasis for children was “Periscopio, (Periscope), which was created and directed by a psychologist.

² *La Tigra* (The Tiger) is a National Park, a cloudy rainforest in the mountains above Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras.

³ The Public Ministry is the Government’s ministry for solving human rights cases, many of which have to do with indigenous rights.

- *Why don't mass broadcasting networks transmit more content oriented towards development? What are the primary obstacles?*

Because other networks are geared towards the easiest solutions, and the commercial ones; they appeal to human passions, sacrificing content for "ratings" – for example, having contests with nearly naked women, in order to have a "program with rating"

- *Currently in Latin America, radio has had a broader range/scope for the development of poor and isolated communities. Do you think television could have this scope?*

Yes, the number of television viewers is growing. However, radio has more presence in the rural regions and will continue being predominant there. The TV format for news shows will never outdo radio news shows.

- *What would television broadcasting need to have this level of outreach?*

Basically, financial resources [for broadcasters interested in this kind of outreach]. Large commercial broadcasters have no interest in this kind of programming. They only want programs that will draw consumers.

Do you consider that the current digital technologies (such as digital video, satellite transmissions, internet) could help facilitate television broadcasts in taking that step towards "communications for development" in the coming years?

▪ **Local Broadcasts**

- *In Honduras, are community based radio and television broadcasts allowed?*

Yes, as long as you have a permit for operation. The laws are somewhat excluding, because a permit for operation is very expensive. Besides from that, a decoder 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.

- *Do you know of any NGOs or government institutions that are making use of these means (local cable TV) to promote local development?*

No, it should be the objective of the government to make use of these means, to have a public channel. We are actually fulfilling this role for the government, because we transmit 8 hours (7:00 am – 3:00 pm) of 7th, 8th and 9th grade education through a program called "Telebásica" (Basic television). The show is transmitted by satellite signal from Mexico, which we then tape and organize, and provide added value through a study circle with youth, a "school for parents", and classes from the Honduran curriculum (social studies and civic education).

Initially this program was run through INICE, but later the Ministry of Education signed an agreement with Channel 48 to transmit the program. The Ministry of Education has an operating unit here at our station.

- *Do you have any idea of the percentage of the local population that tunes in?*

Probably between 10 – 20%

- **Technology**

What type of technology do you have and what is the range of transmission?

We have all digital technology. The channel currently has 28 antennas in the “Central Corridor” (the central region of the country from North to South, including major cities, San Pedro Sula, Comayagua, Tegucigalpa, and Choluteca). The channel would eventually like to have national coverage.

Rolando Sarmiento

Director of “National Radio”, Honduras

▪ Mass Broadcasts

The director of National Radio laments, among other things, that most of those in control of the communications media leave out cultural programming, believing it to be unprofitable.

In the case of the privately-owned communications media, specifically, I think they are limited by the fact that they are 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 that can't sell doesn't pay, but since at National Radio we have a guaranteed budget provided by the government, we enjoy the ability to offer all kinds of programming.

Nevertheless, there are religious radio and television stations, for example those of the catholic and evangelical churches, that take on much of this responsibility, even going beyond addressing the topic of religion. But there are also some of the privately owned media at the local, regional, and national levels that provide some cultural programming, so in this sense the criticisms that we could make aren't absolute.

What I do think and feel qualified to say is that I think that the media ought to contribute more purely social communication—towards informing, guiding, educating, enlightening, *and* entertaining—instead of entertaining only, or informing only, or only providing those deforming types of so-called “youth programming” that promote consumerism and excessive or immoral habits that are destructive, for example, towards women. If someone [on TV] wears revealing clothing, for example, it can promote lasciviousness and with that the possibility of aggression or the possibility that someone might go down the wrong path and make indecent propositions; or as you put it well earlier, these programs can provoke the use of language that is incorrect, and vulgar; and moreover they provoke a distortion of reality such that people think they are out of style unless they drink to excess, use drugs, or adopt attitudes that are incorrect or are not fitting in our present time.

There isn't a government-run national television station in Honduras. There is a national radio station. But if there's anything you could call community television, it's channel 48, run by the Catholic Church, and other local and regional channels that, in spite of the fact that they need to sell airtime to advertisers in order to pay the bills and their employees and just to survive, nonetheless operate with a vision of service to the community. And it's precisely this fight for balance that we're seeing in the media right now, the fight to find a balance [in terms of how programming content is selected] between the commercial necessity to attract an audience that will be attractive to advertisers and the advice of those concerned more directly with the content of the programs. We believe that there's already proof, in a country as advanced as the United States, that scandal and gore aren't the only means of attracting people's attention. For example, take all the businesses that will pay a lot to put their ads, even very small ones, in newspapers like the New York Times, that have founded their reputations not on sensationalism but on credibility.

▪ Development Education

Our programming begins at 5 a.m. with a program known as “Daybreak in the Country,” which starts out with a bit of music that the *campesinos* (peasant farmers) like as enticement [to listen to the rest of the program, which aims to] educate them, raise their awareness, and increase their capacity for their own work, and also to promote environmental conservation. “Daybreak in the Country” is followed by the program “School for Everyone,” which presents a series of lessons and which is produced by a foundation in Costa Rica and which has been broadcast for over twenty years.

Next is the news magazine “Good Morning Honduras,” which presents well-known music as well as advice of all kinds for women living in rural Honduras, for children and youths attending school, and for men and women who live in the city. In this manner we’re able to increase the capacity of these people for understanding the world we live in.

Then, after some news updates, we broadcast classes such as “Let’s Learn Math” which are meant to reinforce the ability of schoolchildren to understand aspects of the basic curriculum that students often have trouble understanding. (Six of these half-hour-long programs are broadcast each day, three in the morning and three in the afternoon.) There are also some programs produced by the ministries of the Republic in which they also contribute to informing and educating the population in their particular area of specialization. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock produces “Agricultural Honduras”—the name says it all. Similarly, in the program “Chatting with the Doctor,” our station’s journalists invite medical doctors of various specializations to inform the public about the effects of diseases and the importance of preserving one’s health, and in “Musical Vignettes from Honduras,” the music and the great singers and authors of Honduras are featured.

In the program “Smiling at Life,” topics of daily life are addressed with a sunny and enthusiastic attitude and discussed by guest speakers in order to promote a positive mentality among Hondurans. Another program, called “The Women Have the Floor,” has nothing to do with..., but rather the program has been broadcast for many years because here we’ve understood that women are a basic part of national society and that in a society like ours women have always played an important role in raising children, and in the economy of our country, and in education, because women are not only capable of taking care of household duties but also of being manual laborers, farmers, educators, and professionals in all fields, in which they’ve been distinguishing themselves for many years in this country.

In the same way we have news programs, one in the morning and another in the early afternoon, in which everything having to do with the activities of the government and also those actions of the private sector which have implications for national development and for the well-being of Hondurans. We have, for example, the “Honduras Health,” a program in which doctors and health specialists from the Ministry of Health appear; “Working Honduras,” a program of the Ministry of Labor about issues concerning work, labor rights, and good relations between workers and employers; in the same way a recent program of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce addresses the consumption, quality, and prices of products, and especially promotes production, the generation of wealth, and work—which is very important in a country like ours with so many young people who can’t find something to do with themselves—and encourages those who have capital to invest it so that they can produce and at the same time provide employment to others.

Even the Ministry of Defense, practically since the creation of this radio station in the 1970s, has its own program, “With the People,” in which representatives of the military talk with their own and with listeners from the general population about their activities. In the afternoon there’s a program from *Educatodos* (“Education for Everyone,” an informal-education project) in which classes are given so that children, youths, and adults who aren’t able to go school can finish their education, and right now this program offers classes up to and even beyond the seventh grade, and I understand that today over one hundred thousand Hondurans have received their primary-school degrees through this program, and many of them have gone on to high school and even to college, and so we believe this is a wonderful contribution to the people of Honduras on the part of Honduras National Radio in partnership with the organization *Educatodos* (“Education for Everyone”).

One program that really calls attention to itself in terms of social communication with the whole mass of the population which in a semi-rural country like ours is, out of necessity, emigrating from the countryside to the big cities, is the program “Site of Encounter,” in which the men and women immigrating to Tegucigalpa or living in other cities in Honduras are featured. The program provides an interactive space in which listeners can call in on the telephone, mail in notes and cards, and send in announcements, press releases, and news bulletins in order to communicate them to the very large national audience that eagerly awaits each broadcast of this program.

Of equal national interest, especially in terms of popular culture, folklore, and tradition is the program “Stories and Legends of Honduras,” which has been broadcast for over 25 years by Jorge Montenegro, a well-known radio personality, journalist, and writer who has edited several books and now is working in the area of using the internet to communicate with audiences around the world. It’s one of those programs that, if it’s not broadcast for some reason one day (even though it is broadcast every day), people are calling in to demand it back, because since it’s a program about traditional stories and customs, it’s a good resource for students of language, literature, or linguistics; they can copy programs and discuss them in class. And so this program also contributes a lot towards culture and education.

Furthermore, we have a few agreements with other radio stations. For example, we broadcast a program produced by Radio France International, based in Paris, which addresses current issues through interviews with erudite scientists, intellectuals, scholars of literature and world art, and especially with those who are Spanish-speaking or of Hispanic American origin. As part of the same effort to position our programming within the context of today’s globalized world, we have a program from Voice of America, “Half an Hour with the World,” which, rather than presenting news from the perspective of the United States government, rather presents in an objective manner news concerning the goings-on in the U.S. capital but also in every other part of the world. We also broadcast a bit of popular, classic, Honduran music that serves to lift the spirits—after a day of hard work it’s nice to listen to a bit of music to lighten the mood or to listen to some of the great composers. So that’s our normal programming for Monday through Friday.

So at our station we do dedicate some time to entertainment, but the majority of our programming, and the fundamental basis of our station, is dedicated to informing, guiding, and enlightening the people of Honduras. But we’ve also realized that a lot of people in the international community who live in Honduras, such as diplomats and others working in the various embassies and consulates, tune in to our station quite a bit, and so in many cases when we invite them to appear on our programs they’re happy to agree.

▪ **Finances**

National Radio Honduras’s budget is part of the budget of the secretary of Culture, Art, and Sports, and thus a part of the income and expenditures of the state, and is no greater than seven million lempiras per year (a little under \$400,000), which means that, like other government institutions, we’re limited in what we can spend in terms of maintenance, modernization, and expanding our coverage. Of course our signals cover a good deal of the country, but if we had the budget for it we’d be improving every day in terms of our technology, but we’d also have the capacity to hire scriptwriters and programming directors so that we could offer more innovative programs. For a cultural program—for example, a program about Honduran legends—you would need a writer or several writers and scriptwriters working every day writing page upon page, and then a department for editing and filming, and assuming that these scripts would be dramatized, you would also need actors. And thus we don’t have the capacity to do all this.

And in order to do more with the little that we do have, we have to try to do all kinds of things at once, trying to do one thing one moment and then dropping it to do something in the office the next moment. If we had more, we would do better things, but what we can do is necessarily in accordance with the current limitations of the state, which isn’t able to give as much as the ideal budget would be.

- When asked about the possibilities of initiating a project for developing a national television station in Honduras, Mr. Sarmiento said that such a project has in fact been considered, but due to a lack of financial resources it hasn't been possible for such a project to be realized.

In the same vein, none of this rules out the possibility that the private media could improve their programming in order to increase their contribution to the development of this country by educating their viewers, if instead of sponsoring idiotic material, they talked more about art, culture, the development of the nation, forest fire preservation, the sustainable use of natural resources, or talking seriously about the education of our children or the abuse that many women suffer, or about crime, or about other values that really ought to be promoted.

Rogelio Aguilar

Executive Producer of Radio Reloj (“Clock Radio”), and a founder of the Rural Communicators’ Cooperative.

***Mr. Aguilar has a great deal of experience working with community media. He’s currently the producer of Radio Reloj (“Clock Radio”), one of the most-listened-to stations nationally.*

▪ Mass Broadcasts

Is communication important for the development of our poorest sectors? Why?

Well let’s not lose sight of the fact that the communications media fulfill two functions: a social function and a commercial function. Right now there ought to exist some mechanism by which we could establish a balance between the informative and the commercial aspects of the media. That would be ideal, because if right now you analyze the content of a given program you’ll see that you’re coming across more advertising than informative content. In some countries they establish a balance of around fifty percent information and fifty percent advertisements, but here [in Honduras] they just saturate you with ads, because here the media is interested primarily in the economic side of things. That’s why I say that although the media are businesses, they are supposed to fulfill both those functions, and if the informative part begins to be left out a little and the economic aspect of the media is what mostly gets focused on, we believe that there ought to be some mechanism to regulate that.

Do you know of any projects that are carrying out this work of communication for development?

Well here in this country there’s a radio station that you’re aware of, Honduras National Radio, but it doesn’t really fulfill this role either. It ought to be the radio station of the State and it ought to involve some ways for communities to participate, but it has not been very efficient in terms of using the electronic media, and this results in there not being any cultural programming on the radio at a given moment, since the private media is not interested in such programming. If you take, for example, a radio station that begins broadcasting at 5:30 a.m. and listen to it for the entire day until it goes off the air at night and you analyze the content and the type of programs broadcast, you’re going to see that radio stations are mostly interested in sports, news, and music, and it shouldn’t be this way because there ought to be a balance. If you look at the radio stations we have in this country we’re talking about seven or eight hours a day of news, and of news that’s presented without format and without a journalistic mindset. The exceptions are the radio stations that are especially dedicated to news and that transmit this news in five different languages. But in our case it’s difficult, news is broadcast for three hours in a row, and this really is anti-radio, it shouldn’t be like this. A professional news program would be an hour long and well-structured, that’s how the international broadcasters do it, because they are broadcasting for the whole world, and broadcasting in English, Spanish, French, and in other languages. These days the radio here has somehow lost a lot of its own spirit.

Do you think that community television could or should contribute to the education of the poorest communities in Honduras?

Definitely, to the extent that right now, positive educational messages are being spread, and in this way the improvement of the people is being attempted. For example the community radio stations in this country, this cooperative project that originally we were calling COMICORULH, these radio stations weren’t part of the Cooperative, they were private radio stations and the Cooperative searched for a way in which the owners of these radio stations could work together and some of them worked together very well, and some others didn’t like it so much and dropped out because they wanted money. So you can understand that that’s why I say that an investment of this type has to be with someone who has the capacity to do it and who is going to say, “OK, we’re going to back this kind of project,” but here in Honduras just like in any part of the world the media are businesses, and they have two functions, both social and economic.

For example if you talk with the owner of a radio station—let's talk about radio because in the interior of the country if we're talking about television we're talking of an investment in the millions, but on the other hand the local radio stations in one way or another fulfill the role of informing the population and the people say that they have a lot of confidence in these stations—but if for example you go to the owner of a radio station and ask him for a time slot in which you'd like to put a cultural or educational program, the first thing he'll tell you is that this time slot is worth such an amount and if he's willing to back this kind of programming he can give you the airtime, but you have to remember that this airtime incurs expenditures such as telephone and electric bills, and that therefore your program is going to have to be underwritten by someone. And that's where the problem is, because not many people want to finance this kind of program.

Do you think that the media, such as radio and TV, are fulfilling their responsibility towards the development of the country?

Yes they contribute, because the educational process is being contributed to from the moment that information is spread, from the moment that a piece of news is broadcast, from the moment that something is said—all this is going to have an educational effect. Now we would have to consider what percent of that effect is for the good and what percent of it is harmful, but all the media have contributed and are contributing. But we would have to consider the percentage, because here we question for example the manner in which some of the media work, but certainly, you have to look at the positive part that the media play in the development of the country because it wouldn't make sense not to, but you'd have to establish inside of what parameters or to what extent it's good or bad, but all of the media are contributing to the comprehensive development of the country, but I'll say again that this education is not formal—not like being in a classroom and have detailed lessons explained to you—but rather informal. And so the media do fulfill an educational role in an informal manner, they are doing that.

▪ **Local Broadcasts**

Do you think that community or locally-based projects are more effective than national networks, which have to be fighting all the time in order to attract big advertisers?

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, but I should also say that this isn't an invariable rule, because there are people who listen to the national chains, but studies indicate that local radio stations are popular because of the local news they broadcast, because people like to know what's going on in their local communities, what's going on within 10 kilometers of them, for example, rather than listening to what's happening in places far away from their communities.

Do you have any experience with communication for promoting development?

Yes I do. The cooperative was born around 1982 out of a concern here in Honduras shared by a group of journalists such as Juan Ramón Durán, who was the originator of this initiative. Specifically it was born out of the coordination of the radio broadcasters of Honduras, there's an association called ANARH (National Association of Honduran Radio Broadcasters), and in that time the broadcasters organized and in 1983 ANARH was functioning under the auspices of a German foundation, the Frederick Nauman Foundation.

Now that ANARH has been organized, the owners of the radio stations saw that there was a need to capacitate all of the journalists who worked for the radio broadcasters and so the process of capacitating continued for the people who were working in radio in the interior of the country. This project was originally underwritten but he Nauman Foundation, and initially was called PCR (the Radio Capacitation Project). After that the same people who were receiving these courses saw the necessity to organize under a formal system of group bylaws, and that's how the

Cooperative of Rural Communicators in Honduras (*Comicorulh*) was born. All of it was a process that had its peak here in this country and afterwards in many Central American countries, for example El Salvador and Guatemala.

The cooperative started out with the creation of various news programs in communities such as Danlí, Siguatepeque, Comayagua, Catacamas, and Juticalpa, among others, and later it extended to Santa Barbara, the southern region, and also to the northern coast to areas such as Tocoa, Saba, and Olanchito. In other words, eventually a very strong working network was created in the west of the country in places such as San Marcos de Ocotopeque and Santa Rosa de Copán, but this whole initiative was born, as I said, out of the concern of a group of journalists, including Juan Ramón Durán, Miguel Mejía, José Antonio Pineda, and myself, for dealing with a few issues concerning rural communication.

Is the cooperative still functioning?

No, the Cooperative has been in a period of decline you could say because we suffered a really unfortunate event—a fire. There was a team from the Cooperative that in that time had a newspaper called “*El País*” (“The Nation”), and the team wasn’t insured and that was a problem, because one night it seems that, be it from the gases from the chemicals that they were working with or the person that was there running the machine made some mistake—they ran the machines at night—or, we don’t know, be it from some attempt at sabotage, there was a fire. And this made a lot of people feel demoralized about all the work that we had done. But in some places there are still [local] news programs operating independently instead of being directed by the Cooperative as such, but the people who are doing this were prepared to do it by their participation in the Cooperative. And there still is a board of directors of the Cooperative, but what’s necessary is to re-inject the Cooperative with energetic people who want to work. And that’s where the organization’s at.

▪ **Finances**

Do you think that there could be a community television station that could contribute to the development of these communities?

No, I think that’s the role of the State, because no one is going to invest in these types of projects since there isn’t any economic aid available for doing so, and that’s the State’s responsibility. In other countries in which the radio stations are run by the government the State supports them with subsidies, it gives them an economic boost. For example, La Dolce Belle and Radio Netherlands are stations with an international reach, but they’re subsidized by governments in advanced countries where there’s enormous technical capacity, and a large economic capacity as well, and in countries like these [broadcasting cultural and community programming] is something the government should take on. So going back to what we said at the start, National Radio Honduras is a state radio station that lately has not been well-managed because the people in charge of it have politicized it. If you’ll remember, [some time ago] Radio Honduras was going along with whatever political stance the president took. These days I really don’t know what it’s like, I haven’t followed Radio Honduras. In its day it was a good idea, but it became politicized, and thus its limited to only transmitting the rhetoric of the president and his functionaries, and in this way they’ve moved a long ways away from the initial concept of promoting culture, values, and education, which are the duties of a radio station.

These days, a business person invests resources with the hope of profiting in return and similarly the State invests in education. The State ought to invest in those types of projects that over the years are going to generate something profitable for the State—the people are going to be educated to the extent that the media undertake a program of enlightening and educating them, and so in this way a State can invest in its people.