

# COMMUNITY TELEVISION SCOPING STUDY

## INTERVIEWS WITH **NGO'S**

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Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

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### **Raquel Isaula**

**Coordinator of the Sustainable Development Network (RDS), (NGO which provides internet services and hosting to most development organizations in the country.)**

#### ▪ **Local Broadcasts**

*- Do you think that digital technologies (for example, digital video, satellite transmissions, and Internet) could help to enable television to become a means of communication for promoting development in the coming years?*

Yes, because right now closed-circuit television is everywhere and there are some really good programs. There are organizations producing educational programs; in Santa Barbara, for example, the Higuera Cultural Center has developed a lot of educational programs, and many of these organizations with which I'm familiar are trying to contribute in this way. I think that radio and television at the rural and community levels are being more receptive to the idea of cultural programming and programs promoting development than the national networks, which are very commercialized.

#### ▪ **Regulation**

*- Are there any legal impediments to efforts which, like the Network, might try to contribute to development by giving people in rural and remote areas more access to technology and training?*

As far as installing information centers, there aren't any legal impediments. For the use of a few services there are—for example Hondutel (Honduras public phone company) has a monopoly on telephone services and that's a really big obstacle, but in 2005 that monopoly is going to be broken up—there's some confusion as far as laws seeming to contradict each other, one example of that is what counts as telephone service when it is voice service being provided through the Internet, and when the Hondutel monopoly is broken up that service is going to be able to be used to 100 percent of its potential.

*- Let's start by defining what inspired the network. ¿What is the RDS?*

The Sustainable Development Network was first created in Río de Janeiro in 1992 when the United Nations announced its dedication to help developing countries prepare themselves with information in this process of globalization in which we're living today.

The network was initiated in Honduras on August 15, 1994, and this year is our tenth anniversary. We started out with three main components: information content, providing connections, and increasing capacity. At that time we were the first email providers in Honduras; we weren't the first Internet providers because we were housed in the United Nations building and with all the bureaucracy involved we weren't able to do that. We had the Internet two years later and in 1996 we started to provide Internet access, but our principal objective, our principal goal is to facilitate the exchange of communications and information

among the institutions that work in the area of sustainable development in order to help them make decisions.

## ▪ **Development Education**

*- Right now, how many organizations, institutions or specialists, and researchers are affiliated with the network on a national level?*

We provide email for about 300 organizations, and also for a great number of consultants and individual users. As far as direct Internet connections we have more than 10,000 users. As far as rural areas we're also providing consulting for administrators of community information centers; we're providing consulting of this kind in over 100 communities.

*- Given that, due to new technology, the cost of Internet access is constantly decreasing, allowing for places near and far away from each other to communicate all kinds of information, from your point of view how does the Web contribute to the development and progress of rural areas, to the progress of people who live in the remote areas of our country, or who in some other form are disconnected from the reality of their country, or of the Central American region, or of the world?*

To facilitate this process by mean of the Internet, which is the tool we work with, communities that are rural, I mean really rural, such as Opalaca, that are way back in the middle of the mountains and don't have electricity, and instead use solar power, when these communities get [information] services the most important thing for us is teaching them how to use the technology, and more than anything teaching them how to use information. Not everyone has access to these technologies, and that's a tremendous limiting factor, but all of the information centers, since they're community centers, are able to extend the benefits of these technologies to a great number of people, more than we had believed they would, since even in families where the parents don't know how to read or write, they're sending their kids to send emails and do other things with the technology that are serving as bridges between people who have emigrated from the rural areas and their relatives [who have stayed].

*- Is this helping a little to bring up the very low level of education that many rural communities have, seeing how, as you noted, even very young schoolchildren are easily learning how to use this resource, and the affects of that are extending even to the illiterate—in the ten years since the creation of the Network have made a lot of progress, or is there still a lot to be done?*

There's an enormous amount still to be done. Barely 100 municipalities are connected with the network, out of a total of 298 municipalities. But we don't work with bringing in the technology itself, because that sort of project is too expensive for us, those are projects for the government to take care of. Our work is training people to use this technology, to give them advice, and also to [teach them how to use and find] information for making decisions—information that often can't be found through traditional media often can be found on the Internet, or in other words, the Internet can be an alternative source of information for these communities.

*- How much access does the population, especially the population in remote areas, have to resources like the Internet and to the services offered by the Network?*

I don't have a figure for the number of users, but there is a that Pedro Mejia did with the United Nations concerning [Internet] access in Honduras, he's got those figures and right now I don't feel confident to give an estimate.

## ▪ **Finance**

*- Do you think that budget limitations and the limited amount of resources in terms of equipment is one of the most important factors that is keeping these types of technological tools from being used more widely to promote development?*

Well, for organizations like ours which don't have the resources for this, yes it's a limiting factor, but there are big government projects. COSIP is going to reach 2,000 communities, I believe it's approved 200 more information centers, which is to say I believe it's going to reach every municipality in the country. At first it was directed at the very poorest communities, and now it's expanding with funds from the Inter-American Development Bank, so they have the funds now to work in 200 more communities, as I understand it these projects are being realized as community projects. The biggest job that we have here [at the Sustainable Development Network] is giving the population the capacity to use this technology.

*- What's the average operating cost of an organization like the Sustainable Development Network?*

The Network on average needs a budget of \$20,000 a month, but as far as the operating costs of a community information center, I really don't remember the exact data right at the moment, but we do have those figures.

## Janet Blanco

### Director, COMUNICA (NGO that specializes in educational communications)

#### ▪ Mass Broadcasts

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

Radio has always been more present, and reaches the community level a lot more. Catholic radio was created for this purpose (such as Radio Progreso run by the Jesuits, and Radio Peace in Choluteca). Certainly mass broadcasting is important; greater technological advances means that the role of radio can be substituted, depending on the available infrastructure. Television is much more attractive with the use of color and images.

*- 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?)*

The Center for Women's Rights (CDM) has a radio show called "Time to Talk", that airs on Radio America (a prominent national radio station). They have a regular schedule and a defined focus and outline. There are some environmentalist NGOs that have aired one or two shows on television, responding to funding they have received, because it is extremely expensive. The National Radio station (public radio) may possibly have some programs created by various government ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Catholic Channel, which has some initiatives in transmitting educational/development oriented shows, needs to strengthen their programming concerning certain public debates with another group of people.

*- Why don't mass broadcasting networks transmit more content oriented towards development? What are the primary obstacles? What would television broadcasting need to have a broader level of community outreach?*

The owners of mass broadcasting have an exclusive commercial interest. The government has tried to legislate a percentage of air time reserved for public interest /community service, but it hasn't been enforced. So the primary obstacle is not the lack of willingness or a recognition of [the value of] the media, or even of human resources (although qualified technical people are needed), but rather that the TV stations yield a percentage of their air time because otherwise, it's way too expensive. For example, 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 approx. \$875 each time the spot is run. So, in the first place, the broadcasting owners would have to review their pricing guidelines for public education spots.

Also, a community outreach would require having more people from the "grassroots" communities working with the network.

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.

*- 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?*

TV could become more accessible, especially if they run on a generator (due to lack of electricity in rural regions). But with regards to the quality of TV programming – I don't know if there is sufficient capacity to develop quality programming which can affect community development.

Competition would become more open, but it would be difficult to enter with a position that favors development (vs. commercial interests), so this is a big challenge.

- **Local Broadcasts**

*- In Honduras, are community based radio and television broadcasts allowed? Are there any experiences that you know of?*

In Santa Barbara (dept. in western Honduras), the owner of the local cable station is a well known person in his community, who has established relationships with all the local organizations. He could open [air] space and provide programming that would reflect the local reality, that the local people request. They have already aired "extra" shows, such as a video we made of the artisan women in the region, as well as "spots" against corruption, with cases from Santa Barbara, Comayagua, and Tela.

*- In your experience, does local cable television provide benefits for the development of the population that receives this service? Please give specific examples of these benefits.*

Yes, they are more open to new programming, and their costs are minimal compared to mass broadcasting. However, their spaces for programming are limited, and hence the offer is fairly limited.

*- How effective is local cable broadcast? Do you have any idea of the percentage of the local population that tunes in? Is there a demand from the local population for this type of local programming?*

There is a lack in follow-up and impact monitoring. We have heard that the video we made was seen and that people liked it, but have no idea of the percentage.

*- Is community television a possibility for promoting the development of a community? What would have to change to make it effective?*

The main problem is coverage – they're not seen everywhere – whereas national stations have national coverage. The comparative advantage of cable is that it gives people the option of viewing other channels.

In order to change, the interested parties would have to do some lobbying with the owners and negotiate the role that the station could play. The owners obviously need to have some monetary gain, but they may be willing to add to this with a contribution to their community. It depends on their degree of commitment to the development of their region.

## **Use of Participatory or Educational Video**

*- Do you know of any experiences, either with NGOs or government institutions, that have made use of video for the empowerment or development of communities?*

Plan en Honduras (NGO) has a program with youth called “little communicators” that uses radio, camera and video equipment to produce different shows. ALER, a Latin American Association for Radio, based in Costa Rica works with a network of radios.

*- Do you know if the video was made in a participatory way? What was learned and what obstacles were encountered?*

In my experience participatory video doesn't work very well. The reason is still unclear – but an assessment would have to be conducted and new proposals made for making it work better.

*- Do you know of any educational projects or initiatives for development in which community television could provide substantial support if it were available? What would it contribute?*

Yes, for example, the educational unit of the Ministry of Health could have a preventive health program for youth with video and script production.

## **Lilian Castillo**

### **Coordinator for Child Participation Programs, *Plan en Honduras* (Foster Parent's Plan International, an NGO that works in community development /children's programs)**

*Lilian Castillo is a social worker who coordinates a program called "Child Media", which helps children use communications media to broadcast their rights and responsibilities. The first part of our interview consisted in her explanation of the program:*

*"The program initiated five years ago in the department of La Paz. We began working with 30 – 40 children between the ages of 10 – 18. We had a trained professional come from Radio Netherlands based in Costa Rica, to conduct the training with the children. The training is now written out in 7 child-friendly manuals, and the program has extended to 8 departments of Honduras. The trainer from Radio Netherlands also trained community people, usually teachers, to be "tutors". The tutors' role is to facilitate the children's productions, he/she reviews the children's work with the scripts, and helps the children practice.*

*Once the children were trained they were began producing their programs. We use both local radio and local cable stations when available, but we have more experience with radio. We negotiate with radio stations so they provide a free hour each week for the children's programs. Through this program the children have been able to demonstrate their possibilities.*

*Some examples include the Villa de San Antonio in Comayagua. A local school teacher is the owner of the cable station, so it is an ideal situation. He works as the tutor/guide for the group, which is called "Los Espías" (The Spies). They produce a live news show which includes pre-taped programs. Another example is in Copán, where the children create pre-taped programs using the TV's recording studio, which is then transmitted on the local cable channel."*

*Plan currently has 3-4 recording booths in each regional office, and the taped programs are exchanged among all the stations, so there is quite a variety of programs. The children also ask viewers to write to them, and encourage children to send their opinions by offering a prize.*

#### ▪ **Mass Broadcasts**

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

Yes, because an informed and educated public is the basis for development

*- 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?)*

UNICEF and to a lesser extent, Save the Children, have made TV spots for development

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

There aren't any sponsors that will provide the financial means for sustainability. Broadcasters are basically moved by money.

- **Local Broadcasts**

*- How effective is local cable broadcast? Do you have any idea of the percentage of the local population that tunes in? Is there a demand from the local population for this type of local programming?*

Yes, there is a demand, especially in small towns. For example, in the Villa de San Francisco, the children's media group called "Los Espías" (The Spies), interviewed the First Lady, and this was transmitted on the local cable news show. The children felt very proud of themselves. The same with radio programs done by children. The grandparents anticipate listening to their grandchildren, so there's a captive audience built in. The children talk about all sorts of things, including food recipes, etc.

- **Participatory or Educational Video**

*- Do you know of any video programs made in a participatory way? What was learned and what obstacles were encountered?*

All our work with children and media is done in a participatory way. We've learned to trust in the children, in their abilities, and that the community will get involved if they are given the opportunity to do so. With respect to sustainability, we've seen this as a process, and the children are committed and excited to see their success.

The greatest impact has been with the youth's participation and their parents. At first, it was hard for the parents to believe that their children could do it, but after 5 years of the program they are now completely convinced of their potential. The children have led quite successful campaigns on several themes: on children's rights, on health, on helping other children go to school (raising funds through marathons).

As far as obstacles, the children's school schedules are sometimes difficult to work around with. But we've compromised and done training during school holidays, for example. Another obstacle has been getting adults to believe in the program, especially the local authorities. The mayors sometimes don't provide the support we'd like and the children get discouraged.

## **Finances and Technology**

*- How much does a local cable company charge for air time?*

A local cable station will allow us to have 1-2 hours weekly for \$160/month.



## Nidia Montoya

### Communications Coordinator, Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Capacitación Educativa, INICE (National Institute for Educational Research and Training)

INICE initiated in 1989 through a donation from the Japanese Government to the Honduran Government. Its mandate is to provide teacher training at their “state of the art” facilities. One of their departments is directly involved with communications and media, and our interview was conducted with the intention of investigating the scope of their activities with video and television in Honduras.

The following summarizes the main points of the interview:

- INICE's Communications Department produced educational materials, including printed and audio-visual materials from 1989 – '96. Their emphasis was on training school teachers, so the material produced was either focused on teacher training or on materials they could use in the classroom.
- The problem they ran into was equipment maintenance, since the “state of the art” cameras and editing equipment donated by Japan, reached their limit and maintenance was no longer a possibility. Since the government had no funds to purchase new equipment, they stopped producing their own video materials.
- Since then, they have dedicated their video equipment to taping programs transmitted through satellite from Mexico, especially the program called EDUSAT, a 30 year-old program dedicated to teaching secondary school through television or video. The program is especially suited to the rural areas, where formal secondary schools are scarce.
- In Honduras, the program is called Telebásica, and is used in secondary educational centers where basic education has been extended to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Most of these centers have only 3 teachers per school, so the program is extremely helpful to them. The program initiated in 1998 in 6 pilot centers. It has since been extended to 36 centers to cover all the basic curriculum. The Secretary of Education sponsors this program, and provides each center with a trained teacher, the text or written materials, and a television set.
- Each class lasts 15 minutes on video, and is structured to include: a title, the learning objective, the program, a reading from the written material to cover the basic concepts, a learning guide, and an evaluation.
- Approximately two years ago, the program was transferred to Channel 48, the Catholic television station, through a signed agreement between the Sec. of Education and Channel 48. This has helped extend the program to over 100 schools.
- Currently, INICE is working on getting a donation from the Interamerican Development Bank and JICA, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, to begin production in the Communications department again. They would like to train teachers in the use of video in order to teach Honduran geography and history in a more dynamic way. They would also receive training directly from Japan and Costa Rica to improve their production skills.
- A reference was made to the **Latin American Institute for Educational Communications** based in Mexico, which is worthwhile looking into, as one of the institutes in the region trying to innovate with information and communication technologies (<http://www.ilce.edu.mx/index.htm>)