

COMMUNITY TELEVISION SCOPING STUDY

INTERVIEWS WITH **SOCIAL ANALYSTS**

Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for international development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

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Dr. Juan Ramón Durán,
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▪ **Local Broadcasts**

- Do you have any experience in using communications to promote development? What have you achieved and what obstacles have you encountered?

Indeed, from 1984 to 1992, I had the opportunity to direct a program for training people in rural areas how to use radio. This project was sponsored by the School of Journalism and by the Nauman Foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, and it basically consisted of teaching month-long courses in different radio stations in different *departamentos* [the next-biggest size of administrative region in Honduras after the country as a whole], and at the end of a month establishing a radio news program of half an hour or an hour, at first it would be a half hour and later an hour, and we were able to develop intense activity in the different cities of the country, such as Danli, Juticalpa, Catacamas, Yoro, Santa Bárbara, Santa Rosa de Copán, Ocotepeque, Comayagua, Siguatepeque, El Progreso, Tocoa, and Trujillo, and we developed it to a point where we had a network of 29 radio news providers.

It was an interesting experience since the community in the *departamentos* was used to their radio stations having news programs, but these consisted of reading from the newspapers of the principal cities of Honduras, and when the rural communicators began collecting and broadcasting information from the local communities on the radio, the communities began to identify with themselves. Afterwards it was taken a step further, and the newspaper *El Pais* ["The Nation"], which communicated the same information as our radio programs, was published. We also hoped to start a news program that would be broadcast through local cable television, and training was started along these lines, but then I retired.

I think it was a valuable experience, since in the first place it contributed to the basic development work of promoting health, education, culture, and the protection of the environment, because these were the kinds of news that the news programs broadcast, and secondly it contributed to the growth of democracy by creating space for debate in these cities in the interior of the country.

▪ **Regulation**

- Are there any laws or regulations in Honduras that restrict the installation of new technologies in communities?

I understand that in this country all signals that are in the radio-electrical spectrum are regulated by the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL). Regardless of whether it be commercial, cultural, or educational, I don't think you need a permit, authorization, or license from CONATEL to do a project, but if you're going to do a project with a whole channel, than you would of necessity have to apply to

CONATEL for the appropriate license; if the project implies the installation of a television channel or a significant use of networks, yes, I believe that the law of CONATEL would apply here.

If the project is going to work with an existing television channel, these already have their authorizations, you could say that the same as what was done with the radio stations could be done with the television by making an effort to unite the owners of local and community television stations to look at the possibility of starting a joint project to establish television news programs or other programs, not necessarily programs promoting health, culture, or education, or debate programs, but these would be viable.

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.

▪ **Development Education**

- Do you know of any current NGO or government projects that are using communications media to promote community development?

I don't know of any in which development is being promoted through radio, but I do know that COMUNICA has a project to compile the memories in communities in order to make a record of the life and heartbeat of the communities; the United Nations Development Program has a project in which experts train communicators in rural areas and in the nation's large cities in communication, transparency, and other important areas; the Honduran Radio Education Institute (IHER), with its study-at-home program could be considered to be a project of this nature; and I understand that the Center for Popular Communication (CENCOP) has made a few initiatives.

- How might community television help this sort of initiative of education to promote development? Could this be achieved?

I believe this was indeed achieved with the radio, and it could just as well be done with television; the only thing is that television is more expensive since it requires more expensive equipment. In the case of radio in that time it cost 500 lempiras and didn't require a very big team, but in the case of television you need a filming team, an editing team, and professional voices, and obviously radio is easier in that for television you need a film set and a studio for producing as the programs. It's more complicated, but clearly it's necessary because the habits both of those Hondurans who live in the interior of the country and those who live in the capital from being inclined to the radio to being more inclined to the television and even to the Internet.

I would say that what would have to be done would be a multimedia effort in which television was combined with a Web page and email-based news, and this could be the future for contributing to the development of rural communication.

▪ **Finance**

- What obstacles were there to carrying out this project?

We really didn't have any big obstacles. The project started out at first working with radio stations and we succeeded in creating the National Radio Station Association of Honduras (ANARH) in 1986, through a course sponsored by National University and the Nauman Foundation. At first the radio stations contributed space for free for the news programs, and later they sought to legalize the relationship with an agreement in which they established the distribution of their advertising income. There were agreements in which the rural communicators who produced the news programs would give some 20 percent to the

radio station and keep 80 percent; with radio stations it was 40 percent for the radio station and 60 percent for the rural communicators; and in other places 50 percent for each.

If we have to talk about obstacles, perhaps one was that some of the radio stations demanded that they be paid 60 percent of the advertising income and the rest would go to fund the writing of the news shows.

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.

In the case of the Rural Communicators' Cooperative, the news programs achieved self-sustainability, and what's more, some of them still exist. 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. The project is self-sustainable in the communities; the difficult thing was financing the national meetings because the cost was clearly very high, but also people didn't have the will to cover their own costs or attend these meetings. The Cooperative still exists, perhaps not with the same power as before, when the Nauman Foundation was directing the focus towards improvement in the standard of living and in cultural, social, and labor issues, and that was achieved.

Julieta Castellanos

Sociologist

▪ **Mass Broadcasts**

- Could communications in rural areas be an alternative way of starting to put into effect a program of community television in Honduras' poorest communities, in response to what you're suggesting about corruption in the media?

I think that as far as the theme of corruption and the press, there are naturally two sources: those civil servants who in general resist the transparent reporting of what's going on—and the press is constantly afflicted by this kind of civil servant, it's a relationship that never disappears and that may be there to a lesser extent in some governments and to a greater extent in others, but it's always going to be there—and also the corrupt collaboration of the press with those sectors that need to boost their image or keep their problems quiet.

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.

▪ **Local Broadcasts**

- Do you know of any instance in which some NGO or government media is working with communications for community development?

There are some isolated instances, but you have to ask, development of what? I know that there are NGOs that have radio programs, web pages, work bases, personnel out in the countryside, that have productive projects from other points of view. The Dutch [for example] are working in the entire southern region of Intibucá. So yes, there are important instances of productive, information-based projects.

There are other organizations that have communications, what happens is that there are so many deficiencies in their range, because it's really hard to reach one hundred percent, and these local processes such as Lempira South, which is an important project, or FUNDERH, which has had projects of communications and development, Ciprodeh, in the area of politics, all of these help and contribute, but this process is quite slow, at times imperceptible, and there's not a way to organize these experiences. The churches, especially the Catholic Church. And especially the environmentalists, because more than action it's communication, it's a form of communication [that they're participating in].

There are online newspapers, which is good but also more elitist; I think there are programs on local cable stations but what's necessary is a more coordinated or at least more organized effort, a more continuous, permanent effort, and I think this would be a real opportunity for the communities.

▪ **Development Education**

- Do you think that the communications media are currently fulfilling their responsibility to bring about development in the communities of Honduras?

I think that there are areas in which the communications media are performing a clear, precise function. [For example] in matters of health, when there's an epidemic of dengue, the television informs people of it. There are some deficiencies here, but there are other issues that stand out as clearly. And I think that if we talk about environmental issues that there's coverage there as well. Especially when there are conflicts and mobilizations, there's coverage, but sometimes the reporting does not necessarily have the

balance it ought to, tending more to present the problem as an alarming, hopeless situation. It seems to me that in some cases there's a lack of balance, of addressing the other side of an issue, and this distorts our perspective.

I feel that we're accustomed to this type of reporting that presents a problem with alarming, worrying information, and if this isn't followed up by coverage of the solutions that are being presented, it leads to a feeling that the country is without options.

I also think that it would be necessary to at the same time construct and present possibilities for getting out [of this problematic situation]; to me this would seem important.