

## Carmen Galeas

### Director of Radio Paz (“Peace Radio”), Choluteca, Honduras

Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

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*Radio Paz is located in the southern region of Honduras, about 180 kilometers from Tegucigalpa. This community radio station was launched in the 1970s, and despite technical obstacles and inexperienced personnel, it continues in its efforts to make a place for itself. At the same time, Radio Paz constitutes a medium for the development of the communities in this region.*

*Carmen Galeas, journalist, is the head of this station. The first part of our interview consisted in her recounting of the station's history:*

*“Radio Paz was born in the year 1968, and in 1969 it hit the airwaves for the first time. It was an initiative of the church on behalf of the community, and it was started with a social mission. Right at that time there was a need to help the campesinos, in that time when we decided to share the Word with the community the problem was not only sharing the Word but also teaching them to read and write. There weren't any roads from the cities penetrating into the interior of the country, and we encountered a series of difficulties because the people could neither read nor write, the children were suffering from many sicknesses and dying, the mothers were dying from giving birth in situations of poverty. This area is one of the poorest in the southern region, economically speaking—because I have discovered riches in their cultural, moral, and artistic values. But they're still a very difficult case, because it's necessary to invest in them in order to bring them recognition.*

*“At this time, what was decided was to start a radio station, which if it was not going to be an immediate solution was going to help the different communities. And we started to work with the delegates of the Word who were organizing the communities, and after that the housewives who were organizing the women even in a time when women's rights weren't talked about. Nevertheless a campesina woman began to organize the women, because if the men were doing it why not the women, and in fact the organizations of campesinas, of lay women, started in the southern region.*

*“This caused a stir and started education by radio; it caused a stir at a national level because this was the time of the military governments, and they viewed radio as a danger, because the southern region was developing, it was achieving a great ability for critical thinking, a great capacity for discernment, for defending its land, its initiatives, and its rights, and the the government didn't like that; at that time from the perspective of those in the government, the more ignorant a person was, the better.*

*“Because of these activities that it was developing, the radio was shut down. In Choluteca the radio was development, and if this [shutdown] wouldn't have happened we would have more people who knew how to read and write, and fewer living in extreme poverty—more people with*

capacity, with knowledge. In spite of this, the campesino leagues appeared. They received trainings in education centers, they fought for and defended their land, and they accompanied a lot of people in order to initiate the exodus to which they were called in that time of famine, which was that they left their villages and moved to richer regions where the land lay idle, and to other regions that were under the power of the most powerful people in the country.

"This caused the radio to be looked upon poorly in 1975, and the radio was shut down once again because of the deaths of various priests in the "Flight of the Orcones [people from Olancho]" from the Department of Olancho in eastern Honduras; at the same time they shut down Radio Progreso, in the Department of Yoro, in the north of this Central American country.

"They silenced the radio for more than 20 years, and it came back in 1992. It's been a challenge to take up the old policies again, because we're in a different environment and another context, another situation, and it's been difficult for various reasons. The region is extremely poor, and to sustain the radio station has been difficult; we haven't had economic support that could support the radio, but rather the people themselves have been supporting us little by little, and this has meant a slower process.

- **Mass Broadcasts**

- What's Radio Paz's reach?

It's regional, this is one of the strengths that the radio station has, it happened before the privatization of CONATEL, which was HONDUTEL. Lamentably, the equipment is rather poor, but it has a coverage that reaches even to the countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua.

- **Development Education**

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

Yes, because for example by way of the radio what we try to do is to find important points to help, to find out what they're doing, what they have done, and what could be done at the level of the municipalities for the development of the region. Recently, with the situation of famine that this region is living with every year, we've put on public forums in which the authorities and the common people come together in order to find solutions to the problem. And we've been able to organize several committees that seek, without political motivations, to find a way out [of this problem], in order to make a proposal at the government level of what to do.

These forums are put on in order to generate opinions in the people in a critical sense, to open up these topics that perhaps at one time in this region were taboo. We aspire to the radio being—and we know that we haven't fulfilled this task 100%, and the day the radio station achieves this it won't have a reason for existing anymore, because it will move on to supporting the things that the people are doing, and when this happens the people are going to take over the radio and they're going to take power. In the meantime, we need to keep on working in order that the people become aware.

The radio station is a point of reference for the people: they come to our facilities to tell us about their political problems with land, more than anything we receive women who are having economic and educational problems, among others. We're not able to resolve the problems of the people, but we do orient ourselves with the greatest responsibility possible through this medium.

- *From your point of view as a journalist, how do you see community television? Do you believe that it could contribute substantially to the development of Honduras?*

This is a very beautiful dream. When I came here, I thought about this type of project; the problem that we have in this region is energy, television doesn't reach to every community. And I believe that television ought to go alongside radio and it ought to strengthen it, because more and more we're reducing the rights of the poor to only having a right to the radio since that's more accessible to them, we're pigeonholing them and denying them the right to the use of the media, and they have this right. 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.

I know of some interesting experiences with the Quechua in Ecuador in which they are using the Internet perhaps better than I could, and they have their community television and radio stations, and it's done a good job of strengthening [their communities]. There are very few community radio stations or educational radio stations in Honduras; the great majority of stations are commercial, and these are the ones that survive. Here in Choluteca I see five new radio stations start up every day because they've seen "the golden hen," but if you put the media at the service of the people in such a way that they would fulfill their social function it would be different, because when we're more than amusement, things are more difficult.

- *What does Radio Paz's current programming consist of?*

We started to work with and get to know our team, and to ask them what initiatives they had, what we could do. And we started out with the project "Club of Friends" (*Club de Amigos*) which is made up of men and women in the countryside and the city who value the radio station and who contribute a minimal membership fee of five lempiras (US\$0.30). This club grew in strength and the people began to get together, and the income from this wasn't that much, but since they were people of the communities they were waiting for the radio station to be launched, and the reporters in the community would report any malfunction or would contribute ideas for upcoming programs.

After that, we began to strengthen a very beautiful project, which was to strengthen artistic values in the region, and we came across a project called "Cord Collectives" (*Conjuntos de Cuerda*) which works with eminently social issues such as poverty reduction, women's and children's rights, the environment, peace, and justice, among others. They organize festivals around these themes; up to the present they've organized 11. By means of music they tell the story of their community, what's happening, what they live.

The region is threatened by the mining industry; the people are very alarmed [about it]. We've trained around 32 Cord Collectives, and they are preparing songs about this topic. When they complete the training, they go to their communities, discuss the topic with the community, with the church, with the teacher, in order that these people give ideas in order to contribute to the necessities of the community, but also to present in their songs solutions to these problems.

Our station also counts on the Network of Child Communicators (*Red de Comunicadores Infantiles*), which are boys and girls from different communities that were affected by Hurricane Mitch. They were organized in the first place in order to defend their rights in regions where there was a lot of violation of the rights of boys and girls, mistreatment in schools and by parents.

- **Finance and Technology**

*-What are the operating costs of this radio station?*

At this time we're in a process of taking [our first] steps. The radio station didn't look for aid, and we started to sustain ourselves with the little money that we had and with the help of the bishopric, but they don't have any external help—to the point where they've told us that they can't support us anymore. It's known that this is a goof project, but it can't keep on going. And something that the community has not looked on happily is that due to energy costs we even have had to reduce hours [that we broadcast], since the energy we use is not hydroelectric but rather is based on liquid fuel.

One transmitter is costing us one thousand dollars (US\$1,000) per month. How to maintain a community radio station while having to pay for electricity at this rate—and it's the AM signal that consumes it—for us this is extremely expensive, and we're thinking about shutting down some of the hours of transmission, and this creates a problem for us because these are the hours when [the station's programming] is arriving in the communities.

After 1992, the radio station ran into an energy problem. It was closed not for lack of a license but rather because there wasn't electricity in the region, there wasn't money, you couldn't sell advertising space; it was a project that had been born and it was nearly dying of abandonment because it didn't have anyone [working on it] who was familiar with communications, rather [it was born out of and sustained by] the good intentions of the bishop at that time.

It's had difficulties as far as technical equipment, it's obsolete. Later with great effort we were able to change it, but after 11 years it's worn out, and this means that the people love the radio but they also lament that the signal is diminishing because of the system we have. I also think that we ought to work a lot in the area of human resources in order to pull people out of underdevelopment; we need to have people behind the microphone who have initiative, ability, who are going to help others to develop themselves. But this is also going to be a process.

*- How will the radio station look in ten years, as far as being a medium for community development in the southern region?*

I think that in terms of development the radio has a very important role to play in the region, and I dream of a totally equipped radio station, broadcasting a satellite signal from ALER, from the Vatican, with new equipment, with an high-power FM signal and an AM signal in the countryside because its very mountainous, but with a new transmitter that would be for the whole region, since it's costly it sends out a lot of waves. I dream of a radio station with voltage regulators, because there are very big problems with energy. The little equipment we have has been damaged by fluctuations in the electric current.

I dream that we ought to have mobile units. The radio station [currently] broadcasts from the communities, but via telephone. Nevertheless I believe that for the radio to take on an important role and in order for it to be where the people are, it needs to have a mobile unit and personnel with a lot of ability at the level of the people.