

Gamos Community Television Case Study

The Solidarity Channel: Channel 48 Tegucigalpa, Honduras

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.

Gamos Ltd, Crown House, 231 Kings Rd, Reading RG1 4LS UK

Partner L Figueroa de Pacheco, ARCA, Apdo. Postal U-9407 Tegucigalpa, Honduras



CHANNEL 48: A vision for a different kind of television

Channel 48, "The Solidarity Channel", is a relatively new television station which offers alternative programming to commercial national television stations. Channel 48 was founded by the Catholic Foundation for Educational and Social Communication, a nonprofit Honduran organization presided by the Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez. Channel 48 is one of the four projects sponsored by the Foundation. The others are Catholic Radio, FIDES (a weekly print publication), and their web page: www.fundacioncatolica.org.



Cardinal Rodríguez

The Roman Catholic Church has been a powerful institution in Honduras since colonial times although the constitution guarantees religious freedom and the separation of church and state. During the last century the church has remained an important social actor, and the vast majority of Honduras' population (80.76% in 2002) has remained Roman Catholic. This influence is notable: Catholic schools receive government subsidies, and even today religious instruction is part of the public school curriculum.

Cardinal Rodríguez had long recognized the need to use the various mass broadcasting means to further promote Catholic values and the Catholic gospel, and although the national television stations were willing to allow him limited access for producing several Catholic shows, the Cardinal, who was archbishop at the time, was interested in creating a channel where they would have the freedom to control content and programming according to the Church's own mission statement.

The Catholic Channel was officially inaugurated on May 1st, 1999, and since then it has served "as a real factor for communion and progress, with programs which promote human formation and which favor an ethical-moral orientation, founded on a Christian code of values," said Rodríguez.

The objectives of Channel 48:

- to create and operate Catholic communications for the promotion, development and execution of educational projects which promote humanity and the evangelization of culture;

- to promote integrated community development in the area of influence where educational projects are carried out, within a spirit of cooperation and Christian solidarity; and
- to offer the community an educational, cultural and evangelistic opportunity through mass means of social communication.

Their mission statement:

“to be leaders in educating and evangelizing the Honduran population, promoting a culture of faith, hope, and charity based on our capacity for transformation manifested in solidarity, the rescue of moral values, and the love of our neighbor. Furthermore, our mission is to foster education, as well as the spiritual, moral, and ethical values of the Honduran population, through our social communications means, with the most technologically advanced equipment and the most qualified human resources.”

The Catholic Channel is under the general management of Father Jesús Mora, Vicar of Communications for the Catholic Church, who also oversees the other communications projects of the Foundation for Educational and Social Communications mentioned above.



*Father Jesús Mora,
Vicar of Communications*

Programming that makes sense

Channel 48’s content is divided among three areas: evangelization (religious programming), educational television, and cultural content. The content is defined by the Catholic Foundation, and is based on finding or producing programming that honors moral and “solidarity” values within society, directly contrasting with programming offered by Honduran commercial television. A sample day of programming is included in Appendix 1.

Servio Tulio Mateo has been working as station producer for three and a half years. Servio studied film and television abroad, and upon his return to Honduras, became interested in working with the station because of the various types of projects it carries out, including a broader vision of what mass broadcasting can contribute and achieve.



Although some of its programming is “imported” from outside the country, Channel 48 actually produces a significant amount of original programming (over half of its daily programming), as well as commercials and social awareness “spots”.

When asked how they decide their programming and content, personnel at Channel 48 described a process which includes periodic meetings between the general manager, Father Jesús Mora; the head of production, Servio Tulio Mateo; and the head of the department of marketing. First, these three analyze the content the proposed show would include, and if they consider that it’s consistent with their mission statement and objectives they

give a “go ahead”. Next, they review the technical and financial feasibility and determine if they can take the project on. Finally, they take the project to the marketing department, where they decide if the project is marketable, and if there are clients who can sponsor the program. If there aren’t any, the channel may still decide to take it on and finance it through its own means.

Similarly, the shows purchased from outside of the country are all shows that have been deemed by Channel 48 to be beneficial to its television audience.

Some examples of programs produced locally to promote national development include the following:

- A mid-morning show called “Public Service” produced by the government as a way to keep government ministries accountable to the population in the use of tax funding for public service.
- During political election periods, Channel 48 produces special programs in which political candidates are given the opportunity to explain their points of view and their political proposals.
- Ecological documentaries such as “*Honduras Indomita*” (“Indomitable Honduras”), a documentary on research conducted in La Tigra, a cloud forest in the mountains above Tegucigalpa.

One of the projects Channel 48 is currently considering is an educational “soap opera” series for youth. However, due to the high production costs of such a project and the difficulty of getting financing, it hasn’t been able to initiate the production phase.



On the set of “Implications2”, a daily youth entertainment talk show

Every quality show that Channel 48 produces increases its credibility, its standing as a serious institution, and the confidence of its clients—a diverse list including banks, government institutions, commercial businesses, and international agencies such as the UNDP.

In any case, Channel 48 believes that with the kind of programming it carries, the entire society wins—poor and rich alike. The benefits of television are enormous and well studied: the population learns through a medium that has much greater impact. Television is ultimately a vehicle for transmitting information, and since Channel 48 has a very specific mission, it has a very clear content profile.

Furthermore, since there is no educational or public television station in Honduras, Channel 48 has been playing this role to some extent by broadcasting an educational program transmitted by satellite from Mexico called “Telebásica” (“Basic Television”). The aim of this program, which has the support of the Ministry of Education (more on this below), is to cover the first three years of secondary school. Although Channel 48 has only been transmitting the program during the past two years, it plans to produce a few additional programs specific to Honduras’ educational curriculum.

Telebásica: expanding basic education

One of the ways Channel 48 is currently providing an invaluable public service to the neediest sectors of society is through the educational program called “Telebásica” (“Basic Television”). One of the development goals in the Central American region is “Basic Education”—raising the level of compulsory formal schooling from 6th grade (elementary), to 9th grade (secondary) schooling. This is especially crucial in remote rural regions or in underprivileged urban sectors, where the access to a secondary school is limited by lack of funding for transportation or for public school teachers’ salaries.

Telebásica is, thus, an alternative education program, and is a complete curriculum for 7th, 8th, and 9th grade, including audio-visual and printed materials with a community focus.

Telebásica is based on the Mexican program “Telesecundaria”, which has been providing formal education via satellite transmission for 25 years.¹ The main purpose of Telebásica is to improve school performance rates and lower desertion rates. Although Channel 48 cannot be viewed outside of the “Central Corridor” in Honduras, Telebásica also covers rural schools by providing them with television and VHS sets, videos taped at the channel’s studio, written materials, and training for the teachers who serve as guides. Currently the Telebásica program is being used in 65 schools with 170 study groups in the 7th – 9th grades.

The success of this self-learning, interactive methodology, which combines the use of the media, texts, teachers, and communities, has made the program very popular, and there is high demand for it from many educational centers around the country. The program is especially geared towards rural, isolated areas, where there are very few options for education, and includes creative exercises such as holding local science and technology fairs based on community resources. The program is completely certified by the Ministry of Education, and after passing annual evaluations, participating students can go on to complete secondary schooling.

On the technical end, Channel 48 receives the satellite signal directly from EDUSAT based in Mexico and then proceeds to edit and produce the videos. These videos are broadcast by the channel on a daily schedule and are reproduced in VHS format as well for rural schools outside of the range of the station’s antennas. Channel 48 signed an agreement with the Honduran Ministry of Education to provide support to this initiative, and provides physical space at the station for the Ministry’s Telebásica administrative offices.

Telebásica is planning to locally produce programs on two more subject areas to complement the basic curriculum: Technological and Artistic Expression and Honduran Social Studies. Although this educational program is actually quite expensive, costing up to \$380 per student up-front, the government believes the costs are compensated for in the long run because it can make use of the same materials for six generations of

¹ For more information on Telesecundaria, view the following link:
<http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/lwf/doc/portfolio/abstract8.htm>

students. The program is funded by the Ministry of Education and the Interamerican Development Bank.

Making use of digital technology

When Channel 48 was founded, Cardinal Rodriguez insisted on investing in the highest-end digital technology the channel could afford at the time. Thus, the initial investment was above the amount most commercial channels start out with. (It was unclear from the interviews whether the initial investment came from the funds of the Honduran Catholic Church or whether they received international donations as seed funds.)



Channel 48's equipment is all Sony DVcam, which is a professional format used for taping and broadcasting. According to producer Servio Tulio Mateo, DVcam is the most widely used format in the market today.

An internal technical department with seven staff members provides simple maintenance and repair for Channel 48's equipment. When it has further needs for technical assistance, it has access to an independent business which helps provide technical solutions for equipment and broadcasting.

With respect to editing, the channel has both linear and non-linear equipment, but tends to rely more on the linear system since non-linear editing software, such as AVID, is more complex to use and requires more training for the editors. It is also much more expensive, running up to \$6,000 per system.

Currently broadcasting is done by two means: The first is through air signal broadcast by 28 antennas placed throughout the "Central Corridor" of Honduras—the main route between the two main cities, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. The second means is through major cable companies throughout the country that purchase and transmit Channel 48's programming.

Channel 48 works under the legal framework of CONATEL. All of its programs are legally purchased and broadcast under the established national regulations.

Sustainability: a continuing dilemma

When Channel 48 was founded, the managers decided to balance their need to "sell" publicity with their desire to produce alternative programming. Hence, although they make use of some commercial publicity in order to promote the station's sustainability, they can't rely exclusively on this since their programs' ratings are not at a commercial level.

Their current dilemma is that they don't want to rely on competitive rating as a means of financial sustainability, as this would put them right back where other commercial broadcasters are. They want to maintain the freedom to produce programs which fulfill

their mission statement, but they don't necessarily have the funding to maintain such programs. So the question arises, What to do?

According to Servio Tulio Mateo, the solution is the channel's capacity to produce video material for other businesses and organizations that also need an alternative to commercial video producers. Thus the station has a separate video production team which can be contracted to work for other organizations, especially those working in social areas and in need of assistance in the area of social communications.

Already there are several NGOs taking advantage of the production team's capacity to produce professional quality audiovisual material. This the team members were even the recipients of an award at the ICARO Festival, an important Latin American film festival, where they received first place for a publicity spot created for FUHRIL, a Honduran NGO working with the rehabilitation of handicapped people.

Project Solomon and new challenges for the future

One of the channel's newest challenges is to increase its broadcasting range through satellite signal. The project, headed by Father Luis Guillermo, is called "Project Solomon", and the Foundation is planning on launching it within a month (December, 2004). This ambitious project will the channel to reach several regions of the country where it previously had no access. The broadcasting antennas will be placed at the location of various Catholic radio stations throughout the country, thus increasing Channel 48's map of coverage.

Other challenges for the future include increasing the growth of the channel by strengthening its finances, its internal organization, and its target audience. In order to have more ambitious projects producing the programs its leaders envision, the channel needs to have a stronger presence, both financially and organizationally.

Channel 48's biggest obstacle to increased growth is its limited funding and the constant tension of finding ways to increase finances without becoming an ordinary commercial station. In Servio's words: "We need to convince others that this channel can serve society for a common good."

In Summary

Channel 48 has a clear mission which drives the programming offered by the television station, and is a significant alternative to the programming offered by other national broadcasters. However, in spite of their commitment to steer clear of purely commercial television, they are limited in the kinds of programs they can produce due to lack of finances.

In summary, Channel 48 has three main strengths: First, it's able to be a vehicle of communication for messages that commercial channels often neglect. This includes a strong spirit of solidarity for the needy, a transmission of moral and ethical values, and a promotion of local culture, history, and formal education; which in essence form the basis for a solid community development practice.

Second, it produces much of its own content—something which greatly facilitates its ability to communicate social messages and to respond to its audience. Although the majority of locally produced programs are religious in nature, they occasionally raise the funds to create documentaries and educational fiction series, which are well received. For the record, when we asked which was the most widely viewed program, Father Jesús Mora said without hesitation: “Sunday Mass with the Cardinal”

Finally, its ability to manage outside audiovisual productions allows it to generate income without commercializing its television content. Their audio-visual production capabilities promise to be a growing source of income which could be channeled by local and international NGOs into creating new programs with the potential of benefitting the development of the poorest sectors of society.

APPENDIX 1: Sample Daily Programming

Friday		Type of show	Locally produced by
6:00	Vitaminas para el Corazón /Vitamins for the Heart	Religious:	F. Jesús Mora
6:10	Descubrir/Discover	Religious	F. Oscar Osorio
6:45	La huella de San Pablo/The Footsteps of Saint Paul	Religious	
7:00	Tele Básica/Basic Television	Public Education	(Ministry Education)
10:00	Vitaminas para el Corazón/Vitamins for the heart	Religious	F. Jesús Mora
10:15	Tele Básica/Basic Television	Public Education	(Ministry Education)
10:45	Desde el Santuario/From the Sanctuary	Religious	F. Ovidio Rodriguez
11:00	Pintura Creativa/Creative Painting	Cultural	
12:00	Querubín/Cherubim	Religious	
12:20	Oración del Angelus/Angelus' Prayer	Religious	
12:25	Primera Visión/First Vision	News	
12:30	Tele Básica/Basic Television	Public Education	(Ministry Education)
3:30	Rosario de la Divina Misericordia/Divine Mercy Rosary	Religious	
3:40	Primera Visión/First Vision	News	
3:45	Tele Básica/Basic Television	Public Education	(Ministry Education)
4:15	Implica2/Implications2	Youth Entertainment Talk Show	Mario Ramos
5:00	Primera Visión/First Vision	News	
5:05	Verde Manzana/Green Apple	Children's/educational	
6:00	Oración del Angelus/Angelus' Prayer	Religious	
6:02	Visiones de la Ecología/Ecological Visions	Educational	
6:30	Por amor a la Vida/For the Love of Life	Religious	
7:00	Primera Visión/First Vision	News	
7:05	Padre Alberto/Father Alberto	International Talk Show	Servio Tullio Mateo
8:00	Diálogo en Fé/Faith Dialogue	Religious	
9:00	Desde El Santuario/From the Sanctuary	Religious	
9:15	Milagros de la Eucaristía/Miracles of the Eucharist	Religious	
9:30	Primera Visión/First Vision	News	
9:35	Descubrir/Discovering	Religious	F. Oscar Osorio
10:00	La vida en abundancia/Life in Abundance	Religious	
11:00	Vitaminas para el Corazón/Vitamins for the Heart	Religious	F. Jesús Mora
11:15	Rosario Bíblico/Biblical Rosary	Religious	
12:00	Enlace EWTN/Link with EWTN	(International Catholic TV)	