

Gamos Community Television Case Study

Plan International's Child Media Project Santa Barbara and San Luis, Honduras

Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

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"The Child has the right to express his or her own views, obtain information, and make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers."

—United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children,
Article 13 as quoted on Plan International's website

In the Department of Santa Barbara, Honduras, children involved in Plan International's Child Media program are planning, recording, and broadcasting their own community-oriented radio and television shows. While spreading important messages about HIV-AIDS and children's rights, the children develop valuable skills and self-confidence.

Context

The Department of Santa Barbara is located in west-central Honduras; its seat, the city of Santa Barbara, is located just west of Lake Yojoa and south of San Pedro Sula. Like much of Honduras, Santa Barbara is a very mountainous region dedicated mainly to small-scale agriculture. In recent years the region has suffered from the drops in the world-market price of coffee, one of its principal crops.



Video practice in El Porvenir

The town of San Luis is located in the Department of Santa Barbara, about an hour from the city of Santa Barbara. According to mayor Fredy Rápalo, the municipality of San Luis, which includes San Luis and 44 surrounding villages, is among the 80 poorest municipalities in Honduras, and has an illiteracy rate of 63 percent—two and a half times Honduras' overall illiteracy rate. Most of the children involved in Plan's Child Media project in the town of San Luis live in El Porvenir, a poor community on the edge of town which has not yet been reached by municipal electric lines. Plan's field worker for Santa Barbara, Fátima Pineda, says about 50 percent of the children in the Child Media project live in poverty, while most of the other half live at a modest but not impoverished level.

Plan International, a community development organization that works in countries around the world, has worked in the Department of Santa Barbara for over twenty years. Although Plan raises funds primarily through child sponsorship, in recent times its focus has shifted (as has that of many other child-sponsorship organizations) towards programs that benefit whole communities.

Program

Plan International's radio and television projects in the department of Santa Barbara, and specifically in the town of San Luis, spring from three closely related Plan programs: Escuelas de Calidad ("Quality Schools"), ChildPro, and Child Media.

Escuelas de Calidad is a program aimed at improving public schools, one school at a time, by donating computers and other equipment and training teachers in participatory teaching methods (as opposed to the lecture-based teaching and learning “by rote” common in many Honduran schools). In San Luis, Doctor Robert Modest Alvarado grade school, an “Escuela de Calidad,” is intimately involved with the television and radio projects—most of the children involved in the media project attend this school, several teachers and administrators are involved with the group, and the group meets in the school’s facilities and stores their equipment there.

ChildPro is a Plan initiative that helps children to organize themselves, and feel empowered over their social conditions.



A ChildPro meeting in El Porvenir

Child Media is a ChildPro sub-program that teaches children how to use radio, television, theater, visual art, and other creative means to communicate ideas that are important to them, express and defend their rights, and teach others in the community. Plan currently supports Child Media or other child-run radio projects in 20 different countries.

Plan started a Child Media program in San Luis in 2001. At that time, just five students from the school were chosen to participate in a week-long training session in basic video and audio recording. The students were trained by professionals from Radio Netherlands at a conference center in the town of Siguatepeque.

Since then the ChildPro group in which these children participate has grown to include around 45 children, ranging in age from 7 to 17. The original five children have passed on their knowledge to their companions, who have gone on to teach others, to the point where now most of the children know how to use the video camera or the tape recorder or both.

Although in the past Plan required that a certain quota of the participants be Plan-sponsored children, today anyone can participate. Currently around 60 percent of the participants are sponsored.

The children script, record, and broadcast two separate radio programs and two separate television shows each week. In San Luis, their radio show *El jardín de los derechos de los niños* (“The Garden of Children’s Rights”) is broadcast from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. every Friday evening on Radio Luz y Vida (“Light and Life Radio”), a religious station run by an Evangelical Christian mission in San Luis. A television show of the same name is broadcast Wednesdays and Fridays on Channel 12 Cristovisión, a local Catholic television station in San Luis.

The children in San Luis also collaborate with a Child Media group from El Ocote, another community in the Department of Santa Barbara, to produce a series of half-hour radio and television programs entitled *Niñez en Acción* (“Childhood in Action”) that are broadcast by a regional radio and television station based in the city of Santa Barbara.

Plan hopes to launch two more Child Media groups in other communities in the Department of Santa Barbara in 2005.

Goals

Plan International's initial goal for the child-produced radio and television programs in Santa Barbara was to promote the rights of children. However, as the program has progressed, Plan's vision has expanded to one of wider community involvement. Today the program clearly pursues two parallel goals.

First, the Child Media program aims to contribute to the community's development through messages that promote social values and educate listeners about issues such as how to deal with HIV-AIDS.

Second, it aims to give the children themselves more power over their own learning and their day-to-day lives. The participatory learning style promoted in the "Escuela de Calidad" that most of the children attend, the self-governed structure of their ChildPro/Child Media group, and their power to decide the content of their television and radio programs all contribute toward this end.

Raúl Marroquín, the director of Plan International's regional office in the Department of Santa Barbara, notes that putting children in charge of their own programming makes this programming more effective. Too often, he says, educational and children's programming is like "a dad buying a shirt for his daughter but not asking what color she wants."

Costs and Equipment

At the outset of the program, in 2001, Plan bought a large, professional-quality video camera and several large audio-cassette recorders. The Santa Barbara employees did not know how much these had cost because the purchase was handled by Plan's Tegucigalpa office. This equipment proved to be too heavy and unwieldy for small children to use, so the Santa Barbara office purchased small digital video cameras (one for the San Luis group and one for the El Ocote group, at about L8,500, or US\$460, each) and a number of smaller audio-cassette recorders at L800/US\$43 each. In San Luis, the children have also occasionally used a video camera owned by Channel 12 Cristovisión.

The audio-cassette recorders are used to record interviews that are later inserted along with live-broadcast radio content. The small digital video cameras are used to film background shots and interviews in the children's home communities, and the large video camera is used to tape panel discussions held at Plan International's offices in Santa Barbara. Plan International lacks any sort of editing equipment for either audio or video, so production and editing are completely *artesanal* ("done by hand").



One of the original large cassette recorders

Plan has also paid several times for TV and radio professionals to do training sessions with the Child Media participants; a week-long session including both radio and TV trainings costs about L12,000 (US\$650). The children have been trained by professionals from Radio Netherlands, and more recently by Carlos Chinchilla, a cameraman for a television station in the town of Entrada de Copán.

In San Luis, both the radio station and the television station that broadcast the Child Media programs donate airspace for free. But in Santa Barbara, Plan pays a total of L9,000 (US\$486) per month for its half-hour-a-week television and radio slots (the same company owns both media). However, in 2005 this company plans to raise the price to L13,00-15,000 (US\$700-810).

Plan has paid for the construction of a radio-broadcasting room at Doctor Modest Robert Alvarado school in San Luis, but since the municipal electric lines don't reach the neighborhood where the school is located, the room is currently unusable.

Precedents/Similar Programs

Raul Marroquín, director of Plan's program in Santa Barbara, said that UNICEF's Network of Child Communicators (Red de Comunicadores Infantiles) ran a program in the region at an earlier time. He said that recently the Centro Cultural Hibueras, cultural center in the town of Santa Barbara has started a program with children in communication. As far as he knew, the children participating in that program had received training but had not yet produced any programs for broadcast.

Accomplishments

□ Mass Broadcasts

The *Niñez en Acción* television show is broadcast on Channel 25 Santa Barbara Vision, which is transmitted via cable and open signal. César Handal, the station's owner, says up to 100,000 people watch Channel 25. Handal also runs Radio Ondas de Ulua (1550 AM and 97.5 FM), the station that broadcasts the radio version of *Niñez en Acción*. He estimates this station reaches between 1.5 million and 2 million people—roughly a quarter to a third of Honduras' population. Handal doesn't know for certain how many people tune in to *Niñez en Acción* on TV or on the radio, he estimates the number to be 30% to 40% of the total viewer population.

Both the radio and the TV shows are broadcast on Fridays, with the radio shows running 3:30 – 4:00 p.m. and the TV show 4:00 – 4:30 p.m. Handal notes that the Friday afternoon spot is one of the most contested spots, as it usually draws one of the greatest audiences—thus it is a significant accomplishment that Plan has been able to secure this slot for its children's programs.

As well as broadcasting *Niñez en Acción*, Radio Ondas de Ulua dedicates close to five of its fifteen broadcast-hours each day to educational programming: every morning the station broadcasts a one-and-a-half-hour program dedicated to teaching mathematics, and *EducaTodos* ("Education for Everyone"), a distance-learning program through which listeners can obtain a high-school diploma equivalent, is broadcast for three hours every afternoon.

□ Local Broadcasts

In addition to the half-hour programs broadcast in Santa Barbara, the Child Media participants in San Luis broadcast an hour-long radio show and an hour-long television show each week in their hometown.

The radio version of *El jardín de los derechos de los niños* ("The Garden of Children's Rights") is broadcast on Radio Luz y Vida ("Light and Life Radio") 3250 AM, a Christian station run by an

evangelical mission in San Luis. Numerous letters received every week from listeners are evidence that *El jardín de los derechos* is reaching a wide audience, or at least a dedicated one. Ubaldo Zaldivar López, a DJ and radio personality for Radio Luz y Vida, says he doesn't have exact statistics on how many people the station reaches. However, he said, the station's programs reach listeners as far away as El Salvador and Guatemala by shortwave.

The television version is broadcast on Wednesdays and Fridays on Channel 12 Cristovisión, a local television channel dedicated to educational, cultural, and religious content and run by the Catholic parish in San Luis. Cristovisión was launched only a year and a half ago, and according to its treasurer, Maritza Fernández, it is under-equipped and in debt. Nevertheless, she said that Cristovisión's signal comes through clearly throughout the municipality, and that Cristovisión gives the Child Media participants their time slot for free.

The children's television show is local in content as well as range: the children are frequently invited to film religious, cultural, and sporting events in the community. Later they broadcast clips from these events as news on their television show.

□ **Road Shows**

Though the Child Media participants in Santa Barbara do not produce road shows as such, their television and radio programs do expose different communities to one another since the Plan television programs broadcast on Channel 25, based in the town of Santa Barbara, often include news clips or background shots filmed in San Luis and El Ocote and are viewed in towns throughout the region.

□ **Video for Empowerment**

As Plan's director for Santa Barbara, Raúl Marroquín, emphasized with his shirt metaphor, one of Child Media's fundamental goals is to empower children to investigate issues important to them, voice their concerns, and assert their rights. In San Luis these goals are being achieved admirably.

Self-Confidence

The unusual self-confidence of these children is immediately evident upon meeting them: They look visitors in the eye and shake their hands firmly, and when asked about their experiences they reply in confident tones and complete sentences with little stuttering or hesitation and shoot back questions of their own. "Now they're not passive...they're more proactive than passive," says Marroquín.

And Rónmel Rodríguez, the director of Doctor Robert Modest Alvarado school, comments, "They're not shy children; they take on any responsibility."

Both the children and their adult leaders attribute this confidence to lots of time spent in front of a camera, behind a microphone, and on stage. Several of the children mentioned how at first they preferred filming and recording because they felt very nervous about interviewing and announcing—but now, after encouragement from their peers and lots of practice, they feel very confident appearing on TV or radio.

The fact that several of the children have become somewhat of local celebrities also contributes to their confidence. Radio listeners in the countryside have sent in letters asking for pictures of the children, and others send in greetings for specific children. Eric, one of the original five members of the group,

said that on his first day of junior high school a schoolmate who recognized him from television asked for his autograph.

Content

Although the content of the children's radio and television shows is shaped by their adult mentors and by Plan International's goals for the program, the children have the last word on what goes into each program. They've also learned how to come up with ideas in the first place—part of the training they've received from Carlos Chinchilla, the television producer from Entrada de Copán, was in brainstorming methods.

Technical Ability

Although certainly not professionals, the children's ability to use the camera is impressive, especially given the fact that they live in an area lacking electricity. Chinchilla said the children were impressively adept at filming background shots and interviews. And when filming an interview with the author of this case study, the girl handling the camera had the presence of mind to reposition her subjects to be at a better angle in relation to the sun.

Connections

Through their shows, the children are getting a chance to meet with important people in the community. Mayor Rápalo says he's been interviewed by the children on three separate occasions; other guest experts and panelists have included health experts, psychologists, and the manager of COHDEFOR (the national forestry service). The group has been designated as the municipality's liaison with UNICEF.

□ **Regulation**

According to both Marroquín and Handal, a national law in Honduras requires that television and radio broadcasters set aside a certain amount of space for community service or educational programming. However, neither is familiar with the law's details.

□ **Development Education**

Nearly all of the content of the Child Media television and radio programs has to do with educating individuals and communities about how they can continue to develop and improve. In the course of the live radio program that the author of this study observed, the children read a short story about generosity from a series of virtue-promoting booklets published in a national newspaper and offered tips on how to avoid HIV (abstain, have as few partners as possible, always use a condom).

AIDS is a growing problem in Honduras—it's 1.6% infection rate is the fourth-highest in Latin America. A doctor who works in the HIV-AIDS unit at Santa Barbara's municipal hospital says though they see about 25-35 cases a year, probably many more cases go unreported due to ignorance or prejudice. She hasn't seen or listened to the Child Media programs, but she is aware of them and thinks they complement the hospital's own efforts to educate the community about HIV-AIDS. A parent of one Child Media participant commented that for families living in rural areas, the children's programs may be the only source of information about AIDS.

Other schools in the community who have seen the children on television or heard them on the radio have invited them to visit and give presentations about issues such as HIV-AIDS and children's rights.

Challenges:

□ Regulation

Although there is apparently a law requiring the media to set aside a certain amount of time for educational programming, Handal says its wording makes it more of a suggestion than a requirement. This weak wording makes it hard to enforce, and most radio and television stations simply ignore it.

Handal says he actually thinks it's good that the media are not more forcefully obligated to give away educational time slots—if they were, he says, there would be twenty or thirty NGOs fighting for the same space. Charging a symbolic fee keeps the competition down without impeding organizations truly interested in broadcasting educational programming.

□ Finance and Technology

Plan's goal is that the Child Media programs will become financially self-sufficient. However, up to the present the main way of doing that has involved finding media willing to donate free airspace rather than finding a way to make the shows themselves profitable. The San Luis group raises funds for small items such as replacement batteries and blank cassettes by selling *tamales*, holding raffles, organizing soccer tournaments and excursions, etc.

But the large amount of money needed buy airspace with the Santa Barbara broadcasters must come out of Plan's budget, and the significant price increase proposed for next year by Radio Ondas de Uloa/Channel 25 Santa Barbara Vision makes it even less likely that children's groups will be able to raise sufficient funds to pay for this airspace themselves any time soon. Marroquín says he'll try to negotiate a lower price with the Santa Barbara stations, but according to Handal even the raised 2005 price is three to five times less than what a commercial organization would pay for the same slot—and with close to a third of his radio station's programming being produced by nonprofits and paid for at nonprofit prices, he can't afford to go any lower for Plan.

The only reason he can afford to offer as much community or educational programming as he does at the price he does, he said, is because the remaining commercial time slots "subsidize" these programs, as does another strictly commercial radio station owned by his company.

□ Reaching the Poorest of the Poor

Radio has a wide audience in Honduras even in rural areas that lack electricity—even the poorest *campesino* families often own a battery powered radio. Television is a different story. Several parents Child Media participants in San Luis say they're unable to watch their children's television programs because they live in areas without electricity and do not have televisions. In a country like Honduras, in which many areas lack electricity and many families lack the resources to buy an expensive item like a television, the ability of television programs to reach the very poorest of the poor is limited.

Summary of Findings

The most important benefits of the Child Media project in San Luis and Santa Barbara appears to be the self-confidence and skills that the participants themselves acquire. However, their programs also broadcast messages that are important for the communities to hear and encourage community unity by broadcasting community events and the thoughts and opinions of local people.

The most significant challenges the project faces are financial: while some local broadcasters are willing to donate airspace for free, larger-scale broadcasters are unwilling or unable to do so, and the children's programs by their nature are not likely to be profitable. Thus the project's continuation is at the mercy of media owners on one end and Plan International's budget on the other.



A live broadcast at Radio Luz y Vida