

# Gamos Community Television Case Study

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## Channel 9: Teledanlí Danlí, Honduras

Interim Document for "Community Television – a scoping Study"

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### The Creation: Channel 9 Teledanlí Is Born

Carlos Felipe Castillo, currently the owner and general manager of Channel 9 Teledanlí, relates how the idea of creating a local channel for the people of the community was born:

According to Castillo, the idea of setting up a local channel in Danlí was first brought up about 12 years ago by his father, Carlos Castillo, who envisioned creating a communications media company complete with its own programs and production facilities. At the time, says Castillo, his father had little idea of all the details of production and everything else that a television project like this involved. Moreover, says Castillo, "At this time there was a national monopoly on television in Honduras."

In 1996 Castillo took over as the channel's director and began revamping its image. Under Castillo the channel bought its first professional-quality equipment—which, since it was not available locally, had to be bought outside the country—and began training employees in its use. "It was a fairly difficult time, because we didn't have the necessary training. Looking back, we realize we've made progress," said Castillo.

After acquiring this equipment, the channel took a further step forward by hiring professional reporters—graduates of the School of Journalism at National University of Honduras—and cameramen who had trained under employees of the country's most important channels.

Later the channel launched a news program from 7:00 to 8:00 each night. It was the first time the channel broadcast news on a regular basis—before, news had consisted only of occasional coverage of national holidays, festivals, and other community events. This banner news program was launched in 1996 and is still broadcast today, because the channel "realized that people liked this news program, and that the population needs to know and be informed about what's going on in their community," said Castillo.

Castillo notes with satisfaction that since he first started as the channel's director, a single employee, Mauricio Mendoza, has performed the roles of cameraman, operator, editor, announcer, and even on-location reporter, and moreover was the first person to appear on local television in Danlí. "From there the channel kept on growing, and today we have approximately 40 contributors and employees," said Castillo.

Mendoza, now in charge of marketing and production for Teledanlí, tells how in the last 12 years the channel's growth and advancement has accelerated to the point where today the channel

has digital technology, continuous programming, and a department-wide range that reaches 7,489.51 square kilometers and 80,000 of the Department of El Paraíso's 150,000 inhabitants.

"I believe this channel has a great deal of potential. Doors have opened at the national and local levels in the television business because people are interested in local television," said Castillo.

## **Programming**

Castillo notes that programming is an important issue, since when the channel started up all it had was the news program. Programming would start about twenty minutes before 7:00 p.m.; a few videos would be shown, then the news, and then the programming would be over for the day. Today programming on Channel 9 Teledanlí starts at 9:00 a.m. and continues until 11:00 p.m. In addition to local productions, Channel 9 includes so-called "canned" programs such as soap operas, cartoons, movies, and documentaries.

"Since we had only the news program, I started to get interested in growing the channel. We began making contacts at different embassies—for example the embassies of China, Germany, and Italy—to bring us documentaries. In that way we began to get a little more content; soon after that we had the idea to do different local programs, and we began to incorporate programs made by the churches, and after that came all the programs that we have today," said Castillo.

Teledanlí's programming ranges from musical shows aimed at the department's youth to political analysis programs including debates on the country's most important issues and special guests speakers. There are also both Catholic and Evangelical religious programs, a live news show in which viewers call in and make legal accusations, and at night Channel 9 finishes up its programming with its banner news program.

The programs produced by the churches have had a good reception from the community. Generally they address issues of daily life, faith, marriage, and similar topics. At the same time, they motivate the community to carry out development projects undertaken by the various Christian denominations.

Channel 9 also supports the Network of Child Communicators (*Red de Comunicadores Infantiles*, a UNICEF project) by giving them a 30-minute time slot each week in which the child communicators present news, reports, interviews, and other events.

"Part of our philosophy in running these radio and television businesses is providing general social services for free. This is very important...At our channel every day we appreciate how people send in photos to give birthday greetings, and that's part of the communication that people can have with the communications media, and part of the way that we're able to be a channel of information, alongside the accusations or praises [that we receive] directed at important people of the zone, which also contribute to the same communication," said Castillo.

## **Production and Technology**

Alex Zamora, one of Channel 9's young producers, says the channel uses special computer programs, including programs for creating three-dimensional animations, in the production process.

"We've learned, thanks to the training sessions we've received. That's the most important thing, because this is quite a serious area of television production—it has to be undertaken with a sense of personality and responsibility," said Zamora.

Zamora says that the "curtains" (visuals used to signal segues between various segments of a program) used by Channel 9 are three-dimensional images created with such programs as 3D Max, After Effects, Pinnacle, and PhotoShop.

Channel 9 also has digital technology that it can use for its video and audio productions. Nevertheless, the daily work of the banner news program is done with analog equipment, which requires time for editing. The culmination of this work is then broadcast as the banner news program "9 News."

Vini Pereira, another of the channel's talented producers, notes that television as a medium has great potential when compared with radio—whereas radio is limited to presenting voices only, he says, television presents both voice and image. Although radio has a broader reach, today television is reaching a previously unimaginable number of the region's viewers.

Channel 9's uses some digital equipment, including computers, cameras, microphones, and editing islands; it also has a set on which it films locally-produced programs.

"Television's purpose is to educate people, and that's been forgotten. Today there's a lot of competition in terms of who has the best programs, the newest videos, the best news show, but the reason that the communications media were created in the first place is getting left behind," said Periera.

### **Costs of Operation**

Channel 9 Teledanlí's costs include personnel, equipment, energy bills, payments to CONATEL (the National Telecommunications Commission), equipment maintenance, cassettes, and other costs and payments. These costs are high when compared with the costs of running a radio station.

"We work with what's called linear media technology; we use super-VHS systems and VHS format, and we're close to taking a step forward by starting to use digital technology in 2005. I think we're going to have to experience a significant increase in the channel's costs in order to have better technology, offer better service, and become more professional," said Periera.

Beyond these costs is the cost of computers and all the editing equipment necessary. "I remember that our first 'switcher' was an electrical connector that we invented and that we used to switch between two VHS cassettes, that's how it started," he said.

Channel 9 has been working with a digital computer system for about a year, and the channel's producers say this has made editing easier. At the same time Teledanlí plans on further innovations next year with new technology in order to improve the quality of the television it offers to its viewers.



## **A National Network of Television Broadcasters**

Castillo says that the National Network of Television Broadcasters (*Red Nacional de Televisoras*), created a year and a half ago, is a network of regional television channels from different parts of the country that together offer national coverage. The network's mission is to offer a wide communications network to advertisers and at the same time satisfy the demand of the viewers in each region for entertainment and information. Its vision is to become the nation's largest communications network.

The idea is to divvy up the advertising revenues and also to become the principal source of news for the viewers in each region. So far the network has raised the national-level profile of local media and of its 14 or so local-channel members. The network will soon launch its web page; in order to make sure that channels don't lose their individual identities, every member channel will have direct access, says Castillo.

## **Influence in the Community**

Besides offering the community a diversity of programming, each year Channel 9 carries out educational campaigns in which it gives scholarships to children of limited resources. The channel contributes essential items such as uniforms, shoes, and school supplies in order to give children access to education. Next year Channel 9 Teledanlí hopes to increase its contribution by also offering medical and psychological assistance to children.

Mauricio Mendoza comments that this contribution is one of the most important services the channel offers, because as well as helping those in need, it's a way of contributing to the future of Honduras. "We think it's necessary to follow up with these children, and if possible to keep helping them until they become professionals, university graduates," said Mendoza.

As well as carrying out this important work, Channel 9 Teledanlí always participates in solidarity campaigns organized by different organizations and institutions in the department.

## **For Generations to Come**

Channel 9 Teledanlí has a video library in which important moments and events in the channel's history over the last 12 years. Interviews with important people, campaigns, festivals, reports, documentaries, and news bulletins, among other things, make up this legacy for coming generations, as well as forming a historical contribution for Honduras.

## **Who works at Channel 9?**

The employees and contributors that make Channel 9 Teledanlí's daily broadcasts possible include the following:

1. Alex Zamora – Producer
2. Carlos Garmendia Jr. – Cameraman
3. Fernando Martínez – Director of Sports
4. Juan Flores – Reporter
5. Juan Carlos Molina – Operator

6. Jorge Alberto Ramírez – Children’s Program Host
7. Lucy Centeno – Secretary
8. Lenin Barahona – Accountant
9. Mario Chacón – Producer
10. Martha Talavera – Sound
11. Mauricio Mendoza – Sales and Marketing
12. Nery Barrios – Sound
13. Roy Irías – Manager
14. Ramón Zúñiga – Cameraman
15. Ruth Rico – Presenter
16. Rolando Valladares – Reporter
17. Reynaldo Argeñal – Director TN9
18. Vini Pereira – Cameraman
19. Virginia Velásquez – Miscellaneous

### **Some Experiences with Channel 9:**

“I work with marketing, but I’ve been through all the processes of the channel. I’ve worked as a director, presenter, reporter, cameraman, but the channel has been growing and now I’m working with marketing and production, and sometimes I do a few special reports for the channel. For example, I’m currently coordinating Teletón [“Telethon,” an annual campaign to raise funds for children with disabilities that takes place all across Honduras] here in Danlí.”

—*Mauricio Mendonza, Sales and Marketing*

“For the last two years I’ve been a producer for Channel 9, starting out, as they say, with baby steps, with the program “People Music,” a young people’s program broadcast on weekends, and from there I became quite interested in production. We started with analog technology and later we started doing digital production. Producers from the city of Tegucigalpa came to train us, and we continued to accumulate experience in order to be able work with digital, totally computerized productions for the channel, here in the eastern region.”

—*Vini Pereira, Producer*

“This is my first experience in television because here in Danlí there are only two television stations. It’s been an excellent experience. The channel trains us because here in Danlí there are very few journalists who have graduated from the university. Some of us have been in the university, but in other areas; for example in my case I was studying medicine. Nevertheless, we’ve received trainings through organizations of journalists, and to me it’s interesting because here, you do some of everything: at the same time that you’re filming, you’re doing an interview—it’s very different from how they do it in other cities like Tegucigalpa. As a journalist it’s a huge experience, and that makes us feel good; the channel has really evolved in recent years.”

—*Rolando Valladares, Journalist*

“It’s been a very beautiful experience, because besides the fact that I’ve been working for this channel for two years, it’s been improving all the time. What’s more, we’ve become a group of

friends working as a team, and that's important for the growth of the channel. I think that productions, news, and ideas have been arising here in an extraordinary way, and that the journalists really give this channel a good image. I think that without a journalist there's not a leader who can transmit the ideas of a producer. And the result of all this work is what today is Channel 9 Teledanlí.”

—Alex Zamora, Producer

*It was 6 o'clock in the evening when various journalists and producers arrived at the channel in order to broadcast the work that they had done during the day, slightly tired from their arduous informative labor, but happy to present to the community the day's news.*

## Conclusions

- Although radio is an important medium of communication for communities, the contribution that local television makes to the formation and development of the region can't be denied.
- Although it's taken Channel 9 Teledanlí 12 years to acquire the equipment it currently owns, the channel's accelerated growth is a measure of its effectiveness in the region. This growth and effectiveness is due in part to the fact that through local and national recognition, the channel has promoted and acquired more advertising from different advertisers.
- The community supports local channels as a way to identify themselves; furthermore, the population is demanding more and more to be informed about what happens in their community.
- Local channels are looking for ways to group together and help each other by forming national networks that permit them to share advertising revenues and to gain national recognition. This strategy contributes to sustainability, but also at the same time to recognition for the local and regional channels themselves.
- Channel 9 Teledanlí promotes campaigns to support the key sectors of the population. An example of this is the scholarships that the channel awards to children of scarce resources in the region.
- The channel has a video library in which news bulletins, special events, interviews with important people, festivals, and other important material are recorded, and which constitutes an important historical resource for the Department of El Paraíso and for Honduras.