



A Passion for Radio
Radio Waves and Community
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Chapter 23

Radio Chaguarurco: Now you're not alone

Bruce Girard

I think the famous phrase that described the radio and what we wanted to do with it was 'now you're not alone'. Now there's a communication medium where you can talk, say what you feel, and denounce that person who is giving you a hard time. Now you're not alone. That was the phrase that motivated people.

– Marcela Pesantez.

It was in Latin America that the world's first community radio experiences were initiated fifty years ago when two very distinct movements turned to radio as a way of both increasing their influence and of contributing to community development.

First to appear on the airwaves, in 1947, was the Catholic Church's *Radio Sutatenza*, in Colombia. Founded by Father José Joaquín Salcedo, Sutatenza had two objectives – to broadcast the Christian doctrine to Colombian peasants, and to teach those same peasants skills that would contribute to the community's development. In spite of the humble amateur radio equipment at their disposal, Salcedo's message travelled further and faster over the airwaves than from the pulpit. The *students*, listeners organised into

informal classes, would meet mornings or evenings at neighbourhood houses to listen to the programs and discuss the lessons.¹

Five years later, in Bolivia, the members of a tin miners' union decided to contribute a day's salary each month to a communication fund and *La Voz del Minero* (the Miner's Voice) was born. The mines surrounding the town of Siglo XX, four thousand metres above sea level, had been recently nationalised in the Revolution of 1952. However, as the Latin American socialist writer, Eduardo Galeano, was to say years later, the tin mines of Bolivia were the best argument in the world against nationalisation. Working and living conditions were so bad that the life expectancy of a miner was less than 35 years. Although its doctrine was different, like Radio Sutatenza, the Voz del Minero was born to evangelise. In time the station took on a role that went beyond spreading its militant doctrine and made immeasurable contributions to democratisation and community development.

From these roots of rural Christian charity and militant trade unionism, community radio has come to have a significant presence in Latin America, where private commercial, church, university, trade union and indigenous peoples' radio stations have combined to make the region's radio the most dynamic and diverse in the world.

THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE

Radio Chaguarurco, located in a rural part of Ecuador's southern province of Azuay, is a young station that continues the tradition set by Sutatenza and the Voz del Minero.

The idea of setting up Radio Chaguarurco started with a series of workshops in 1990. These were organised by *campesino* organisations and by the local churches in the counties of Santa Isabel and Pucará, in the province of Azuay in the southern part of Ecuador. The workshops were intended to organise the communities in order to get access to basic services such as drinking water and electricity and to ensure that human rights were being respected. A document written by the station's founders explains how the discussion of the need for basic services started the process that eventually gave birth to a radio station:

As we were getting organised, we started to talk about what we needed; first we mentioned electricity and drinking water, but after that, and above all other needs, we started talking about communication, about being able to share a common reality and being able to analyse it in order to improve it. That was how Radio Chaguarurco started. Some people who didn't live in the countryside asked: *Why do you want a community radio station if there are so many other priorities? It would be much more logical to prioritise projects that cover more basic needs. Isn't a radio station a luxury?* Sure, there are lots of other needs: health, nutrition, education,

¹ Radio Sutatenza eventually became a national network of educational radio stations. Until 1989, when it was bought by Caracol, another national network, and converted into the commercial Cadena de Noticias, it was one of six national networks in Colombia.

better agricultural techniques to improve production, daycare. But more than filling holes and patching things up to temporarily fulfil our needs, it's important to think about the causes of these problems, about the injustice and inequality that bring about misery and marginalisation.

Humberto Berezuela, director of the station adds:

The idea for Chaguarurco grew out of the need to communicate. In the counties where Radio Chaguarurco is located, it's very difficult to receive radio stations from the region. Even though we're in the mountains, we can only receive stations from the coast. That's one problem. Another is that most people don't have access to television, and even fewer to newspapers, which only reach a very few people in the urban centres of the two counties. Telephones are still unavailable in many of the towns, and not at all in the countryside, where most of the people live.

The communities are very scattered. Some communities are 30 minutes from the county centres, where the political structures and the markets are located. Others are an hour's walk with no roads. Others are three hours away. Others are ten hours. Some are as far away as twelve hours. For them it's practically impossible to be in daily, or even weekly, contact with the county centres.

Communication began to be seen as a necessity by the Church and *campesino* organisations in the area that had already been working together on various development projects. They recognised the potential of radio to work alongside other development initiatives, and decided to establish a station.

The idea caught on quickly and within a few months the possibility of a community radio station became one of the main topics of discussion at the ongoing workshops. According to Nelson Campoverde, a member of Chaguarurco's board, people in rural areas were used to being excluded from the media. Once they started talking about having their own radio station, they became excited by the possibility of having a communication medium that would provide an ongoing means to talk about the necessities of their communities and about the problems in getting basic services provided by local authorities. "This is something that used to be difficult because commercial media wouldn't let us on the air because, as you know, sometimes they just don't let people from the countryside on the air."

Everyone agreed that the idea of a radio station was a good one, but the problem was, who would make it a reality? A frequency and government permission would be required. Equipment would have to be bought. Who would own the station? Where would the station be located? Which communities would it serve?

The local Church parishes and the peasant organisation, Proyecto Norte, quickly emerged as the two main drivers of the project. They had already collaborated on previous development projects and had both participated in the discussions about establishing the radio from the outset. With help from Diego Delgado, the area's representative in Congress, they started making plans for the station.

4 / A Passion for Radio

The first problem they faced was obtaining a broadcast licence. In 1992, Ecuadorian law did not recognise community radio.² Getting a commercial licence involved a complex and long process that, even after years of waiting, was as likely as not to fail unless one had better political contacts and more influence than the people of Santa Isabel and Pucará did. Fortunately, Diego Delgado remembered that there had been a station in Santa Isabel a few years previous. The man it had belonged to had died and the station had been off the air for many years. However, the licence was still valid and the former owner's son, Rodrigo Palacios, was willing to sell it. Buying a station still requires government permission, which involves a process almost as long and complicated as being assigned a new frequency, but it doesn't require the same political influence.

With the process of legalising the ownership of the frequency underway, the founders next turned their attention to deciding where the station would be located.

PUCARÁ AND SANTA ISABEL

With a population of 3,000 people, Santa Isabel is the centre of the county of the same name. For many reasons, it seemed the logical place to locate the station: it is the largest town in the region and an important supply centre for the surrounding communities and countryside. Apart from the Church and the parish community centre, the central plaza is ringed by banks, doctors' offices and shops with shelf space shared by plastic kitchen utensils, hardware, rum, fertilisers, television sets, and blue jeans. Not only because of its market, but also because it is less than two hours from the provincial capital of Cuenca, on the main road linking most of the communities to the capital, and because it has telephone service, Santa Isabel is an important communication centre for the region. At 1,500 metres above sea level, the climate is moderate year round – warm in the day and cool at night – perfect for growing tomatoes, onions and even sugar cane, products that are marketed throughout Ecuador.

The village of Pucará, centre of the county of Pucará, is only 40 kilometres from Santa Isabel. However, the non-stop bus takes two hours to climb to more than 3,100 metres above sea level. The unpaved road winds alongside steep cliffs and rises quickly. In the rainy season, the road can be closed for days at a time. There are no telephones in Pucará and when the road is closed, the town is incommunicado.

With a population of less than 1,000, Pucará is at the end of the road. Its single street is a tear-shaped loop, with a brightly painted Church in the middle and a perimeter of breath-taking mountains and valleys. The majestic view camouflages a harsher reality. With an average annual temperature of only 12 degrees and nights that drop to near zero,

² Community radio was not recognised in Ecuador until 1996. Most community radio stations are licensed as commercial or cultural stations. In 1996, the government approved a law that made provisions for community radio stations. However, it placed severe restrictions on them including prohibiting commercial activity, limiting transmission power to 500 watts and requiring approval from the army for reasons of "national security". CORAPE, the national association representing community radio, brought a constitutional challenge to the law. It won some concessions, but the prohibition on commercial activity remains and it will be difficult for any station to survive without this potential source of revenue. As one aspiring community broadcaster said, "We're not for profit, but we're not for bankruptcy, either."

Pucará's climate won't support the tomatoes and onions that are the main cash crops in the Santa Isabel area. Subsistence agriculture is the rule, beans and potatoes the staples, and precariousness a way of life.

Pucará did have one important advantage. While Santa Isabel was larger and a more important economic and communications centre, Pucará's altitude and more central location meant that from a technical perspective it was a better place to locate the transmitter.

However, the question of where to put the station, in addition to technical and financial considerations, also had a political dimension. The community where the station was located would be more likely to have its concerns broadcast, its members interviewed, and to benefit most from the existence of the station. Decentralisation was one of the objectives of the project and in the end it was clear that the community where the station was located was going to benefit, possibly at the expense of the other.

The solution was to put the transmitter in Pucará, the administrative centre in Santa Isabel, and studios in both communities linked via microwave. When Chaguarurco's director, Humberto Berezuela, talks about the radio, he says it is actually two stations sharing a single frequency and a single identity:

Local information is gathered at both stations. News programmes are in *duplex*, with two anchors, one in Pucará and one in Santa Isabel. Interviews, in certain cases, are also in duplex, with the interviewer in one community and the person being interviewed in the other. Some music programs are produced only in Pucará and others only in Santa Isabel, but many programs are in duplex.

At the time of writing, a third studio is under construction in the village of Shagly, which, with a population of 250, is the nearest community for 2,500 rural residents. Plans are to continue decentralising by establishing new studios in other communities.

While the stations are located in towns, the townspeople are not the main audience. Of the estimated 65,000 people in the area, only 20% of them live in the dozen or so communities (most of which are smaller than Pucará). The other 80% live and work on small plots of land in the countryside. While the station's listening area is primarily mountainous, it also includes part of the coastal lowlands, where banana and cocoa are produced for export crops and mining is an important activity. Most listeners dedicate themselves to agriculture. In lower altitudes they supply products to the national market. At higher altitudes, where conditions are more difficult, subsistence farming is more the norm. Many people, particularly those from higher altitudes, spend parts of the year as migrant workers in the coastal harvests or in the mines.

THE CHAGUARURCO FOUNDATION

The issue of ownership of the station was as important as that of location. From the beginning it was agreed that the radio station would not be owned by the local priest,

6 / A Passion for Radio

or the parish, or any single person. It was to be owned by the grassroots organisations in the region, by the people. In September 1992 the “*Chaguarurco*” *Foundation for Rural Development* was established with representatives from *campesino* organisations in the two counties, from the Catholic parishes, and from the workers and volunteers of the radio station. Nelson Campoverde is a member of the foundation’s board and an activist with the *campesino* organisation, Proyecto Norte, in Santa Isabel:

The radio is under the care and supervision of a foundation created with a specific objective: that the radio not have a single owner so that tomorrow or later on the owner doesn’t decide not to give space to the people from the countryside. With that mission, the Chaguarurco Foundation was formed so that there will be representatives and no single owner. So, we’re all owners.

The Chaguarurco Foundation’s board meets every three months, with extraordinary meetings when necessary. The board receives reports from the director and makes all the important programming and budget decisions.

By the time the foundation was set up, the dream of the radio station had been circulating for almost two years. Everyone thought that the day they would have their community radio station was just around the corner. Nobody foresaw that they would have to wait another two and a half years. Nelson Campoverde explains why it took so long:

After the formation of the foundation we had to see how we were going to make it work. We needed money to buy the equipment. We had to get the frequency. We also had to train the personnel. With the aid of technicians from CORAPE³ in Quito, we organised training for community reporters, which is what we call them now. This took a long time. To get the money, which is scarce in Santa Isabel and Pucará, was a long and difficult process.

In the end, the radio finally went on the air and started serving the community. We’re happy with the work that it does for the community and with the efforts and the energy that all of us put into the project. If we hadn’t stuck it out, the radio wouldn’t be here. It took time but we moved forward step by step and now, here we are.

As Campoverde says, money is not easy to come by in the region, and the project was going to be an expensive one. Because of the area’s geographic characteristics, the radio station required an AM transmitter, which was substantially more expensive than FM would have been. The 5 kilowatt Nautel transmitter, including its antenna and installation, was going to cost US\$80,000, an amount much higher than the community could put together on its own. Once the foundation was established, it started the slow process of getting the money together from local and international sources. However, Berezueta emphasises that while they needed money, they were not prepared to sacrifice the station’s independence:

³ CORAPE (Coordinadora de Radio Popular y Educativa del Ecuador) represents community radio on the national level. CORAPE provides training, technical support, research and a daily news program for its 26 members.

Practically all the equipment was new. What we got when we bought the old station wasn't even good enough to put in a museum. The transmitter, antenna and installation was paid for with a donation from the Spanish aid agency, Intermon. Caritas and Manos Unidas also helped. So did some Spanish volunteers who held bingo and other events in Spain to buy some tape recorders, a microphone, a computer and other equipment for the station. The Church in [the provincial capital] Cuenca donated a pickup truck.

Everything we received was for equipment and installations. That's what we got from international aid. After that the radio operated on its own. We never asked for anything for administration or personnel. The idea of the project is to be autonomous, not to have salaries or operational costs paid by an international organisation. The idea was that the radio had to pay its own way. And that's what we're doing.

GETTING READY: TRAINING THE COMMUNITY

In the meantime, the process of legalising the purchase of the frequency crept slowly ahead and a group of volunteers began training people from the community to work with the station. According to Berezuela, training posed a special problem because almost nobody working on the project had ever worked in radio so they had to train themselves first in order to be able to train the others.

They had to train people to run the stations – technical training, journalism, announcing, *everything*. A couple of Spanish volunteers who were helping had a little experience in community radio stations in Madrid, but nobody else had ever done radio. They read whatever books they could find and travelled to other stations to see how they did it. Experienced radio people were invited to speak and to give courses. In the end, a manual and a trainers' package were produced based on what had been learned. Then the newly trained trainers went out to start training the community volunteers.

Serious training started in December 1993. The idea was that each community would look for a person that they considered to be an appropriate correspondent. In addition, there was a general invitation to anyone who was interested in participating in the courses. Marcela Pesantez was one of the trainers:

Four of us worked in the training and we divided up the work. Every Saturday, two would go to one community and two to another. This lasted a long time, from December 1993 until October 1994. By that time we had lots of groups of volunteer correspondents trained. People were excited about the radio and lots of them would walk four, five or even six hours to get to the place where the courses were held... People would leave their houses at four in the morning to arrive at nine or ten and join the group. This was particularly so when we held courses in Ponce Enríquez, where there had been lots of conflict and lots of people who had been abused by authorities. Some people had been killed. People believed that the radio would help them put an end to the abuses.

In November 1994, the staff was selected from amongst those who had been trained. In December the new staff members underwent a month of intensive training. The ongoing training and discussions about the radio and how it would help the community kept the project moving forward and kept the organisations and individuals involved. However, it had taken five years for the station to move from dream to reality, and the wait had a cost. “In the beginning everyone thought that there was going to be a radio right away,” explains Berezuela. “But the dream seemed to get more distant as time went by. Some *compañeros* got discouraged and left. It was one thing for the organisations to undertake an irrigation project to grow potatoes, but nobody had ever set up a radio station before.”

Finally, the station went on the air. Marcela Pesantez was there on the first day:

On January 1, 1995 we went on the air. It was the most beautiful thing. Beautiful. With lots of people listening. We were crazy. Greeting all the people. Thanking the ones who had been with us since the beginning, those who had taken courses with us, the correspondents. Making calls to Cuenca to see if the signal reached the city. We made calls to Machala to see if they were listening. There were some people who knew we were going to be on the air and they called us. It was crazy. We played lots of music and every few minutes going on the air, “This is Radio Chaguarurco! We’re on the air! Listen to us, at 1550 kilohertz! Tell your neighbours to listen!” It was beautiful.

After a while, we started to calm down. But it took at least three days until we were calm enough to start doing the real work of the radio station.

Now you’re not alone

It quickly became apparent that the *real* work of the radio station involved a lot more than simply producing radio programmes. After years of waiting, people’s expectations were high. They were not going to be satisfied with a station that sounded like all the rest. They wanted to hear their own experiences and concerns told in their own voices and in their own language. “I think the famous phrase that described the radio and what we wanted to do with it was *now you’re not alone*,” explains Marcela Pesantez. “Now there’s a communication medium where you can talk, say what you feel, and denounce that person who is giving you a hard time. Now you’re not alone. That was the phrase that motivated people.”

To produce the kind of radio that the community wanted required a different kind of relationship with the members of the community than an ordinary station might have, and a different kind of radio producer. Only four of the eight fulltime staff and 20 volunteers at Radio Chaguarurco have ever formally studied journalism, the others learned their skills in Chaguarurco’s own courses, but all of them work as journalists and programme producers in addition to sharing the secretarial, sales, technical and administrative tasks. Five of the fulltime staff are based at the station in Santa Isabel and

the other three in Pucará. Nelson Campoverde thinks that their dedication to the community is what differentiates them from other radio producers:

It should be noted that the “workers” in the station are in fact practically volunteers. Their salaries aren’t even the minimum that the law requires. They’re volunteers who work in the radio with small salaries. As the radio’s income rises, their salaries increase bit by bit. Very few of them are professionals. It’s important to note that most of the personnel were trained here in the radio while doing radio and that they work here because it’s their way of contributing to their own community.

Humberto Berezuela is one of the trained journalists. A native of Pucará, he studied journalism and teaching at the university in Cuenca. After he graduated he stayed in Cuenca for a couple years, freelancing for the daily newspaper, *El Mercurio*. One day, a delegation from Santa Isabel visited him. “They had seen my name in *El Mercurio*, Berezuela is a name from Pucará, and they came to ask me if I was interested in working in my own community. So I went to work with the radio station... It revolutionised the way I think about and practice journalism. At Chaguarurco, I’m able to combine my training as a journalist and as an educator, and to be a *communicator*.” Humberto was hired to direct the operations of the satellite studio in Pucará and is now overall director of Chaguarurco, based in Santa Isabel.

Marcela Pesantez also studied communications in Cuenca. When she finished, she went back to her home town of Santa Isabel, not sure of what she would do, but wanting to help her own people break out of their precarious condition. When she heard about the project to start the radio station, she immediately volunteered to help. The fact that she had never studied radio did not stop her from immersing herself in the medium and becoming one of the project’s trainers. “I think it was good that none of us knew anything about radio. It meant that we didn’t have any preconceptions about how it had to be done and that meant that we could do it in a different way.”

In addition to the paid staff, there are some 20 volunteer producers. Half a dozen of them are community correspondents from surrounding villages. They gather the news in their areas and periodically travel to the station with their stories and tapes. The station supplies them with tape recorders and rechargeable batteries, and proceeds from an annual raffle are used to pay their bus fare.

Others, such as Graciela “Chela” Morina, produce music programs. Six days a week Chela goes to the station in Santa Isabel to do a one-hour programme featuring Ecuadorian music. Like the other volunteers, she brings her own specialty to the station. She developed an interest in national music at a time when it wasn’t available on the radio. Asked how she manages to do a daily programme with the station’s limited selection of CDs, cassette tapes and vinyl albums, she points to the bag under her arm stuffed with records and tapes, and describes how the radio programme has “collectivised” her personal music collection.

Other volunteers produce the weekly programme *El Mercado* (The Market). The programme is hosted simultaneously in Pucará and Santa Isabel and looks at prices and

trends in the area's markets. It has played an important role in controlling prices and speculation.

Marcela Pesantez says that there is a constant turnover among the volunteers and that for this reason the station continues to offer regular radio courses to new volunteers:

We kept offering training to new people, but after a while we lost some of the volunteers. The group from Ponce Enríquez was left out. We thought the signal would reach the community but it didn't. It was a shame. There was a good group there... Later, little by little, some of the correspondents lost interest. Radio is lots of fun but when you don't have a salary or a stable job, no matter how much you like radio, you have to think about finances. You grow up and you want to get married and have kids and all that stuff. So, little by little people started leaving.

PARTICIPATION AND PROGRAMMING

Like other radio stations, Radio Chaguarurco's programming incorporates news, interviews, music and cultural programmes. There are, however, a number of important characteristics that distinguish Chaguarurco from other stations. The most important of these is the priority the radio station gives to local voices, language and culture. Unlike radio stations in the city, with announcers who try to hide any regionalisms in their accents or their language, Chaguarurco's announcers celebrate their own way of speaking.

Another important distinction is the way the station actively seeks out the participation of people from the countryside, inviting them to visit the radio station, to tell their stories, to sing, or just to greet their friends and family members over the air.

The station never forgets its important role as a communication channel at the service of the communities, the telephone for those who don't have telephones. Pilar Gutierrez works with Pucará Community Health Project:

There are places where it is very difficult to access because they have no roads. The people who live there listen to the station for any information about visitors they might have so they can be ready for them. This is the case of our community health project. We have a medical team that periodically visits these communities. Before the radio they would travel to a community and lose hours or even days waiting for the news of their arrival to get out to the people in the countryside and for the people to travel to where they were waiting to attend to their health problems. Now the radio announces the visits and the community is ready and waiting for them on the announced day and time. This means the medical team can visit more communities and provide a more efficient and better service for everyone.

In her work with the Pucará health project, Pilar Gutierrez travels to the communities and sees first-hand how important the radio's programmes are for the campesinos:

In health matters, for example, lots of people listen to the radio dramas that the station produces and broadcasts everyday. The dramas have characters that the people in the countryside can identify with, like Don Julgencio. The characters chat with each other and tell stories about health and other matters. They talk about how to treat garbage, about vaccinations, about how to preserve the environment, which is an important health issue. They talk about nutrition. When they learn this way, they understand what is being said and they don't forget it.

People, especially in Pucará, listen a lot. They are *very* attentive to the radio. They are faithful to Radio Chaguarurco. They don't listen to, or rarely listen to other radio stations. Besides the radio dramas, they also listen to the news, especially news from Pucará, or that some government representative is going to visit, or that something or other is happening in Cuenca. For example, when a group goes to Cuenca from Pucará to meet with authorities about a local project, they visit the radio station on their way back and ask for an interview so they can tell people what happened.

Humberto Berezuela writes most of the radio dramas and they are acted out by the station's own staff members. The radio dramas provide a valuable way of explaining complex issues in everyday language and in a way that people can easily understand. Themes for the daily dramas are varied, covering health, the environment, politics, culture and human rights.

A recent change to the programming has been the inclusion of news from Latin America and the world that the station gets from ALRED, the radio service of the Latin American Association for Radio Education, and the Púlsar news agency. A satellite dish on the roof of the Pucará station receives ALRED's programs, and news from Púlsar arrives via the Internet. Ramiro Tapia comments:

I think that the station's programming is making progress. For example, this year we started to get information from other countries, countries that many of us didn't know about before. And information from our own people as well, we see that there are people there just like us, *campesinos* like us. We're exchanging information with them. In the same way we receive information here from other countries, we also send news from here to other countries. And this is interesting, to communicate like brothers between different countries, and even different continents.

A *minga* for Chaguarurco

While the station did (and still does) count on the support of international solidarity for major capital expenses, the Chaguarurco Foundation decided that the healthiest way for the station to operate, was to pay its own way. Like many community radio stations, Radio Chaguarurco has a secret when it comes to paying the bills – keep costs low by using the resources freely offered by the communities it serves. The volunteer labour of the programmers is one way the community contributes. In addition, the studios in Pucará and Santa Isabel are in space provided free by the local church parishes, and there is always someone around to offer their carpentry skills or make a pot

of soup in a *minga* (a day of volunteer labour for a community project) when the station needs to renovate a studio or paint the offices. However, volunteer labour and community donations cannot cover all the costs, and Chaguarurco has to generate some US\$2,000 per month to cover its operational costs.

The station's financial situation is healthy. Chaguarurco not only manages to generate enough revenue to cover its fixed costs, it is also able to pit aside a few thousand dollars a year to improve its equipment or cover unforeseen costs. However, as Berezuela says, "We are in a good financial position, but if the transmitter were destroyed by lightning tomorrow, it would be impossible for us to replace it."

Sources of revenue include advertising, community announcements, production services, and remote broadcasts of cultural events.

Advertising accounts for about 20% of the station's revenue. From the beginning it has been a controversial subject. Some people argued that advertising had no place on a community radio station. Others said that the survival and growth of the station was the most important thing and, consequently, all advertisers should be welcome on the station. In the end, Chaguarurco adopted policies that favour the promotion of local goods and services. Ramiro Tapia, a member of the foundation's board, explains:

A fundamental point since Radio Chaguarurco began to work was that it was going to be different from other commercial radio stations. What we want to do is encourage our communities to return to our past, to not forget our past. We have to try to value what is ours. What the other radios put in our ears, and television in our eyes, is the consumption of imported products and products developed with technologies and chemicals. Their message is that we should leave aside what we produce in our own fields. Our radio doesn't give space to advertising for Coca Cola or for alcohol (alcoholism is a serious health problem in the region). But there will always be space for any other type of commercial that doesn't harm people's health.

Political advertising is another controversial subject. Between 1996 and 1998, Ecuador had two national elections and two referendums. For most of the country's radio stations, elections are a bonanza. More than a dozen parties buy advertising and it is customary for stations to put a surcharge of 20% to 150% on political advertising. As the owner of a commercial station in Cuenca said, only half joking, "these politically unstable times have saved half of us from bankruptcy."

The temptation is strong. During a recent election campaign, one party offered to buy large block of time for partisan programs at a price that would have paid the bills for months. However, Ramiro Tapia says that would not have provided a service to the community.

When there are political campaigns, one of our policies is that the radio has is to give equal possibilities to all political parties. We don't want a situation in which the more powerful parties have more possibilities of promoting themselves on this station.

Whenever we have these debates, the disagreement always comes down to if we don't accept this advertising, what will the radio station live on? Of course, this advertising would provide a lot of revenue. However, we are seeing that we can live without it. We are getting enough advertising to keep the station going.

More important than advertising, accounting for some 40% of the station's revenue, are community announcements. Broadcast at various times throughout the day, content of the announcements ranges from announcing community events, to sending messages to a distant family about the health of a loved one in the hospital (see box 1). Like the restrictions on alcohol and political advertising, the policies that govern community announcements take into account not only the health of the station, but also that of the community. Two of the foundation's board members comment:

They're one of the things that we want to do with the radio station because they offer the possibility to communicate quickly with people in the countryside. Sometimes a sick person goes to the hospital and we have to stay waiting in the house for someone who has been with the sick person to know whether he's dead or alive. But the presence of the station has made it easier. (Nelson Campoverde)

The community announcements are one of the major benefits that the station offers to the communities. For example, if we're in Quito [Ecuador's capital city] and we want to communicate with our family, where there is no telephone, no direct means of communicating with them, the radio helps us. From Quito we call the radio, and the radio immediately transmits our message to our family. Of course, we all know that if we receive a message from a family member who is away, we have to go to the station right away to pay for the message. (Ramiro Tapia)

Box 1: Some typical community announcements

From: the teacher Bisnarda Ochoa in Guasipamba

For: her father.

Message: Try to come on Wednesday because you have to go to the school board to register the name of the school. Wednesday because our father will be in Cerro Negro Wednesday afternoon.

From: Daniel Nieves

For: Fredy Nieves and family

Message: The patient that Daniel was visiting in Santa Isabel is in the same condition and Daniel is now on his way back home. Also, tell Fredy to tell Lucio that Daniel won't be able to work with the engineer this week because he has to go to Pasaje on Sunday September 27. Stay tuned to the radio for more messages.

All the residents of Shaglli are invited to participate in a general *minga* that will take place on Tuesday September 22 to get rocks from the Masucay River and bring them to the village. The material will be used in the construction of the community communication centre and the town council has offered the use of a truck to transport it. Thank you for your collaboration.

Another source of income is the production of programs on health and other issues for local NGOs and government. These programs are not only broadcast on the radio, but they are also distributed on cassette and used in workshops and seminars.

The station also gets some help from a solidarity group in Spain. According to Marcela Pesantez, Francisco “Paco” Aperador, one of the Spanish volunteers who helped get the station on the air, went to Madrid for a few months before the station went on the air:

While he was in Spain he organised a solidarity group for the radio. They were mostly friends of his, interested in Latin America. We joked that they were like a cell of a revolutionary movement. The name took and we still talk about the *Cell*. When he came back to Santa Isabel, he stayed in touch with them and kept them informed about the radio’s progress. They started to meet every few weeks to hear about the project’s progress. When the radio went on the air and we needed a little money to buy something that was missing, a chair for the studio, a desk, a telephone, they would get some money together and send it to Paco. At first they gave their own money. Later they joined with another group in Madrid and started to do bingo, dinners, handicraft sales. There must be some 18 or 20 members of the *Cell*. Almost all of them have come to visit at some point. In the summer my house is practically a hotel!

IS ANYONE LISTENING?

For most community radio stations in Latin America, knowing who is listening and why or why not is difficult. Audience surveys are carried out only in the major cities, and even then their results are often dubious, sacrificing scientific rigour in order to better serve the needs of whoever paid for the survey. For the last three years CORAPE, the national organisation representing and serving Ecuador’s community radio sector, has been trying to change this by conducting reliable surveys in the listening areas of the country’s community radio stations. Between June and November 1996, a team of students from Santa Isabel, under the guidance of a Dutch volunteer, Arthur van den Elzen, designed and conducted a survey of 400 people in the area. The main conclusions include:

- Radio is the most used medium. In the towns 64% also watch television, especially in the evening. In the countryside only 40% of the people have access to television and they tend to watch it less than the townspeople.
- Radio Chaguarurco is number one in terms of audience in both the towns and the countryside. It is, however, most popular in the countryside, among adult listeners, and with people with less education.
- Forty percent of respondents from the villages claim to listen to Radio Chaguarurco “everyday”. In the countryside this rises to almost 50%.
- The most popular programming is music, followed by news programs and community announcements.

The results of the survey showed that the radio station was being well received by its audience but they also showed where improvements could be made by adjusting the schedule, providing better training to the announcers, and putting more agricultural information in the station's programmes.

As important as the numbers are, they only tell one part of the story. Radio Chaguarurco's success is not just a result of being the choice of more people than any other radio station. After only four years on the air, Chaguarurco has worked alongside other development and democratic initiatives to make a number of important changes in community life. An evaluation of the radio station concluded that it has improved communication, helped bring about more democracy and less abuse, made a positive contribution by promoting the sharing of experiences and solutions to problems, and made people more aware of and proud of their own culture. (See Box 2, next page) Two members of the community who have followed the Chaguarurco's growth since before it began were asked what they thought was the station's proudest moment:

I couldn't say that there has been any single moment, I think the best moments happen everyday, whenever we're listening to the signal, in our homes, in our communities. The proudest moment is whenever there is a chance to say, in public, that we think there's a problem with the way a certain authority is acting, or that a given project benefits the people in the centre at the expense of those of us in the countryside. Before we couldn't do anything about these but now the station is open to us. We just have to come here, ask for an interview and say this is what's happening or this is what so and so from whatever institution is doing. And with this knowledge people start figuring out what's happening. Now we aren't slaves to information, we have it. So the best moment isn't just a single moment but everyday. (Nelson Campoverde)

I think that we get a lot of satisfaction from the radio just by knowing that we can hear the voices of other *campesinos* on the radio, something that was impossible before because the *campesino* is always silenced by the powerful and our voices are only rarely heard on the commercial stations. Radio Chaguarurco gives us this possibility. That's the most beautiful thing – to hear our own people express themselves, with our own language, and it's beautiful, isn't it? The other stations criticise us for the way we talk, but we're used to it. (Ramiro Tapia)

Box 2: How the radio station helps the community

Communication is easier now. Before, if someone went to the hospital from a community, those who stayed behind didn't know what had happened until the patient returned, or didn't. Now the radio has a system of announcements and comunicués. Every day, from 6:30 to 7:00 in the morning, at noon from 12:00 to 12:30 and from 6:00 to 6:30 at night we can send all kinds of messages – the situation of patients in the hospital, deaths (before one would learn about the death of a family member months afterwards), lost animals (now when you lose a cow, you announce it on the radio and whoever finds it knows who to return it to), invitations to meetings, etc.... the radio is the telephone for those of us who don't have telephones.

The authorities, institutions and merchants are more democratic. Before it was easy to abuse a campesino, charging higher prices, stealing material that was intended for public works projects in the communities or whatever; it was an everyday practice. Now when there is an abuse, everybody hears about it on the radio. As a result these kinds of injustices have practically disappeared. The radio serves as a sort of guardian in the democratic game.

The radio has served to let us **share experiences and problems.** Before if a community wanted to get electricity, it involved lots of trips to Cuenca to find out what was involved and how to do it. Now people from communities that have gone through the process of getting electricity, or drinking water, or subsidies for agricultural projects, tell about their experiences on the radio and this helps the others see the process and understand what has to be done, who has to be talked to, etc.. In addition, solutions to everyday problems are shared, ideas about farming techniques or latrine building are exchanged...

The radio is contributing to the **valorisation of our culture**, our music, our way of speaking. The songs that had practically disappeared and that were only sung by the oldest people during family gatherings, are once again heard on the radio. The programmes featuring amateur singers have been very important. Every community has one or two people who sing and even compose songs and they are all being heard on the radio. They are the most popular programs and they are generating renewed pride in our culture.