

Sustainable initiatives

An Information and Communication Technology case study

REVISTAZO, Honduras



Introduction

This case study has been generated as part of a research programme into Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sustainability factors. Funded by the [Department of International Development \(DFID\)](#), the research programme identified activities that sought to benefit the poor and had an ICT component. In particular it considered programmes where ICTs had enhanced ongoing development activities, the ICT activity could be replicated without sizeable investment, and there was a measure of sustainability. Sustainability was taken to be more than financial cost recovery. Drawing from lessons learned in other development sectors, sustainability involves a combination of factors including among others, clear objectives, institutional frameworks, local capacity and development benefits. While perhaps not fulfilling all the features of a strong sustainable activity, the following case was felt to hold points of interest for the wider global development community.

Description of Case Study

Revistazo.com is a virtual monthly magazine that began in December 2001 by ASJ (*Asociación para un Sociedad más Justa* – Association for a More Just Society) in order to address the general frustration created in trying to get articles published in the traditional media. This was due in part to the fact that all the major media (newspaper, radio, television) are owned by one of the 10 wealthiest families in Honduras. Since ASJ's articles seek to uncover corruption or address social injustice, it was nearly impossible to get the information out through these sources. Without a means for publication, ASJ was unable to make a difference on public opinion, use the information for lobbying, or for influencing macro changes. The internet medium was chosen in terms of its relative low cost compared to publishing your own newspaper or owning a radio station.

Since December 2001 Revistazo.com has placed 7 issues on the web each issue with a different theme or topic. These include: the Election of the New Supreme Court, the Election of the new National Human Rights Commissioner, and the First Hundred Days of the new Government. Several articles have generated a public response and users have also been able to vote on-line for candidates, which affected government decisions being made at the time. The number of users varies from month to month depending on the controversial nature of the subject matter. The average number of hits per month is 1500.

At present ASJ is trying to register Revistazo as a corporated publishing company. This would prevent

ASJ from being sued for slander. It is hoped that Revistazo will eventually be able to function as a completely separate office to ASJ, with its own staff and budget, and subsist on income generated by providing publicity space for different businesses and institutions in the region.

ASJ is a Christian Honduran NGO, whose mission is to promote more justice in the country through informing the public on important issues. This is done by investigating, lobbying, and following up on legal cases that involve injustice and/or corruption, and providing education on social justice, especially for Christian churches. This information is then made available to the public.

Key Strategies

Using web based journalism to address concerns about corruption and social injustice in order to promote good governance within Honduras through influencing decision-makers.



September 2002 focus on Water

Development benefits

According to Revistazo they have been successful in getting the main press to pick up highlighted issues, thus raising public awareness.

Reduces the gap between those who have access to information and those that don't. For the Sustainable Development Network of Honduras (SDN—an organisation having an overview of the subject area) this is resulting in democratising information.

Improves civil societies ability to successfully lobby congress through having improved and heightened access to information.

It is an independent media source.

Hindrances

Technical:

Distribution has been hindered by current poor levels of new computers in the country and limited internet access by the lower levels of society.

Socio-economic:

These have included organisation access to funding and low networking/ communication capacity with target groups.

Experience difficulty in obtaining sources of information due to fear within the country of speaking out against corruption and injustice.

What helped it Succeed

Technical:

The use of standard computer equipment and software in website production has enabled service and support to be found locally (in country).

Socio-economic:

The study suggests that leadership skills have been a key part of the overall success of Revistazo.

Being separate from the 10 wealthiest families in the country has enabled them to cover sensitive issues other media companies refuse to.

They deal with timely and controversial issues such as the election of members to the Supreme Court and the election of a human rights commissioner.

Decision makers have easy access to the internet.

Sustainability factors

Objectives

To provide an alternative communication media source to inform the public about issues surrounding corruption and social injustice in order to promote Good Governance within Honduras.

Policy environment

At present there are no internet restrictions as the government 'does not know how to register a ".com" '. Therefore ASJ is currently in the process of registering Revistazo under national registration/incorporation laws.

Despite there being no internet restrictions Revistazo aim to be as truthful as possible in their reporting.

Institutional arrangements

The Revistazo project includes a board of directors; a director/chief editor; an investigative journalist/editor; and a part-time webmaster who replaces a one-year USA volunteer.

ASJ/Revisatzo claim that there is no real role for target groups apart from using the information generated to affect public policy. The user groups back up this view.

The users interviewed were unaware of any client/user representation in the project.

SDN do not believe that there is any co-ordination between stakeholders.

Target groups

According to ASJ/Revistazo each edition has a different target group depending on its theme. Though each target group tends to be ones that have decision-making power. Each edition also tries to include views taken from women's groups.

The various users interviewed were unclear about whether Revistazo had any specific target group.

Constraints to user group involvement include limited access to the internet by the lower classes. To address this Revistazo uses the local press to make announcements regarding new issues.

All 3 interviewed groups believed the web-page is generally user-friendly.

Technology

For Revistazo includes:

One high capacity computer (Pentium 4, 1.5 Mhz, 40GB, 512 ram, 17" monitor); two lower capacity computers for word processing and simple design; and a digital camera as well.

Computer software includes Dreamweaver, Adobe Photoshop, Coreldraw. They have used other programs from the internet to up/download information.

Both Users and SDN class the ICT technology used as appropriate

Common ICT problems include update delays due to slow local server (Cablecolor), and slow download time for users due to a large number of old computers within Honduras.

Revistazo's formal technical support is problematic.

Finance

Initial funding was from a surplus in ASJs budget. The board recently produced a one-year, US\$70,000 proposal that has so far been unsuccessful. It is currently being re-written. At present Revistazo operates under a US\$1500 emergency fund



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supported through individual USA personal friends.

There is currently no mechanism in place for them to become self-supporting or financially sustainable.

The project process

Each magazine issue is based around ASJ activities. It is produced through traditional reporting, as well as interviews, sound files, graphics and interactive elements.

Users tend to have heard of the site through national radio or direct contact with Revistazo.

Monthly and Quarterly reports are produced for the Board.

Key linkages

Revistazo appears not to be forming effective linkages, although does recognise a few potential sectors. According to ASJ each issue has the potential to mobilize different sectors of society.

Anecdote

Normally when Supreme Court judges are picked, government or congress members "pick their own people". However, Revistazo published an issue in which highlighted the fact that one of the candidates had a terrible corruption track record. This candidate was ultimately not elected to the Supreme Court and was very angry about it. Also, the public got a chance to say what they thought about the candidates, and they could vote on how many women they thought should form part of the Supreme Court. The number of women ultimately selected was within the range of the votes cast on the internet.

Points of Interest

Initially set up by a local NGO, as opposed to an International NGO, to improve public access to corruption and social injustice information.

It is being accessed by and affecting decision makers.

It is managing to operate within a culture of fear, despite limited access to new sources of information. This could prove problematic in future, and impact objectivity.

Despite seemingly being successful and focusing on a current donor area of interest in human rights and good governance, they are having difficulties accessing funding.

Users believe that key linkages should be made with any organization that provides information and can help provide linkages between government institutions, civil society, social organizations, journalists, academics and people involved in Human rights.

Intermediaries

The Intermediaries can influence the information as they have full control over the content. This is because the same two people are involved in both the collection of information and its presentation on the website. Both are graduates from the School of Journalism with many years experience.

With regards to Revistazo's journalistic capability one user commented on how difficult it is to remain objective on the issues investigated. However, all three users have found the site valuable to their work and quite sound.

Capacity

The technical ability of staff seems adequate at present. There is no funding available for any training.

According to the Users, Honduras as a whole has limited web programming capacity.

Capacity is currently limited with regards to communicating with local groups. This is in part due to low capacity for dealing with user information requests, and in part a perceived fear among the public on giving information regarding corruption or social injustice.

Stakeholders Consulted

This case study information has been gathered through the assistance of REVISTAZO staff, who facilitated interviews with a range of stakeholders. The team talked with a lawyer who claims to have found the website valuable and well balanced, particularly when standing as the country's Human Rights commissioner. A local NGO, SDN, which links organisations that work on sustainable human development through the internet, noted that Revistazo has opened up the space for the analysis of national issues. Also a political commentator and an academic.

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