

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

# Evaluation Report

## Executive summary Ecuador

Strengthening the community media sector: Alternative business models and digital innovation in Ecuador

## Background

After a period of government guided by the ideals of 21st century Socialism headed by Rafael Correa, the 2017 presidential elections opened a new political phase in which continuities (economic policy) and discontinuities with the previous decade can be observed. Ecuador has left the recession behind but still has not overcome the economic crisis it was in at the time the project was formulated. Low commodity prices, especially crude oil, on which the State is heavily dependent motivate Ecuador to continue relying on external debt as a fundamental financing mechanism. The reduction of the state apparatus and the contraction of some social policies suggest that social conflicts will increase in the coming years.

The media sector in Ecuador reflects many of the country's structural conditions: scarce professional capacities among journalists and the media, strong media concentration, marked dependence and interference from politics and economics in the media sector, a focus on the urban world and on certain social sectors, and a strong polarization of the country's economic and social development model. The sector is in the midst of a restructuring process: A controversial new legal framework, the Ley Orgánica de Comunicación (LOC, 2013), was aimed at overcoming some structural deficits but also developed an institutional framework of regulation and control that introduced self-censorship, censorship and limitations on freedom of expression. The LOC was reformed in February 2019 but the corresponding regulations have yet to be drawn up.

Based on its previous working experience in the country, in 2016 DW Akademie began implementing a cooperation project for the development of community media with the financial support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Due to run until the end of 2019, the project focuses mainly on the strategic areas of professionalization and financial sustainability of the media. The main partner is the Coordinadora de Radios Populares y Educativas del Ecuador, CORAPE, a network of community media, mainly radio stations. The project also involves collaboration with Radialistas Apasionadas y Apasionados, an NGO that works with community radio, and the University FLACSO.

The project is structured around a complex strategy with five lines of intervention. Two lines aim to consolidate the Executive Secretariat of CORAPE, SE-CORAPE as a competence center for training, professionalization and financial sustainability of community media and as an organization implementing a qualification program. A third line of intervention which is being implemented together with Radialistas aims to ensure that community media use digital technologies for the production and elaboration of new participatory media offers. Two additional lines, in this case with FLACSO, are intended to consolidate CORAPE as the representative of the interests of the community media sector and to create spaces for constructive dialogue to facilitate the transformation and democratic shaping of the media

landscape in Ecuador. A final line of the project, resulting from an amendment with the BMZ in 2018, promotes the establishment of a network (wiki community) that allows the presence of indigenous issues and voices on digital platforms (Wikipedia). Through these lines of intervention and the associated inputs and products/services, it is intended (outcome) that the community sector, strengthened in financial terms and in terms of content, offers to the citizens of the rural sectors of Ecuador participatory and balanced programs and contents. At the impact level, the project is expected to allow citizens, especially in rural and indigenous areas, to better exercise their right to freedom of expression and access to information and thus enable them to participate competently and actively in public debates, development processes and social dialogue.

This project of DW Akademie in the period 2016–2019 is the subject of the evaluation. The evaluation has a formative, constructive, summative and prospective character. It is guided by the objective of providing the project implementation agencies and cooperation partners with an independent evaluation and feedback in order to facilitate learning processes. The five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria represent the general evaluation criteria. Methodologically, the evaluation was carried out in a participatory manner, taking into account the Do No Harm approach. This is supported by qualitative methods of data collection (interviews, workshops, focus groups) and by a wide range of analytical methods.

## Conclusions of the project evaluation

**Relevance:** The coherence analysis based on a document review shows that the project harmonizes with the objectives and guidelines of the BMZ and the objectives of the cooperation partner country (national development plans), fits in with the respective strategic fields of DW Akademie and also with the interests and objectives of the most important project implementation agency. Virtually all actors have confirmed this. The high relevance of the project is reinforced by the changes in the framework conditions, the digital change, the growing competition between old and new forms of communication, production and cultural consumption as well as new forms of media and sociocultural articulation.

This clear assessment contrasts with the fact that in the early years the ownership of the project by SE-CORAPE and the other partners was not direct. Multiple elements and factors converged in this fact: the design of the process of identification and formulation of the proposal, the general political context, an implementation architecture in which the modalities and roles of cooperation were not clear to the project partners, or the fact that in many cases the institutional capacities or interests of some partners were overburdened or insufficiently taken into account. This has been the case with Radialistas and FLACSO. After the first year of the project, focused mainly on accommodating the urgency created by the opening of a public tender for radio frequencies, the project was based above all on the

cooperation between DW Akademie and the Executive Secretary and Board of CORAPE. The eventual establishment of a subsidy contract with SE-CORAPE was a key element in achieving a greater ownership of the project on their part. Therefore the Relevance criterion is assessed as “comprehensively fulfilled.”

**Effectiveness:** The analysis of the project’s Theory of Change reveals difficulties in the representation and conceptualization of a project that wants to take the long and complex path between the support of three cooperation partners and the qualification and improvement of the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and access to information of a mostly indigenous rural population. The central role given to the logical framework, which has also become an operational planning instrument, does not always allow the necessary flexible and adaptive implementation of a complex project in a frequently changing environment.

The various analyses lead to the conclusion that the objective of developing SE-CORAPE’s capacities (project line A: “competence center”) has been partially achieved. This is mainly due to the fact that the project improved the quality of the radio programs that SE-CORAPE makes available to its members, as well as its ability to support them and provide them with services. This performance is not so much due to the use of an external team of trainers/consultants in the network, as originally proposed in the project, but to the strengthening of SE-CORAPE’s own technical team.

It is this same institutional channel—SE-CORAPE => affiliated community radio rather than via Radialistas—that project line C (use of digital technologies for the production and elaboration of new participatory media offers) made use of. This line has also been partially achieved. With regard to the training processes, it should be noted that training measures (“workshops”) were carried out which went well beyond the originally planned scope and met the emerging needs of the CORAPE member radio stations.

The assessment of the project lines carried out with FLACSO is complex. Some of the activities planned for the first few years were carried out, others not. With regard to the strategy proposed in this context, a large part of the proposed solutions (spaces for dialogue) were aimed at results at national level, so largely outside the project framework. It is evident, however, that today SE-CORAPE is effectively established as a body representing the interests of the community media affiliated with it and that intense political advocacy has taken place, to which the project has made some direct and indirect contributions.

The initial momentum of project line F (“Wiki project”) has given way to a phase of “replication” i.e. of institutional consolidation and implementation of an intellectual impulse, and a series of activities that were well received by all the actors consulted. The Effectiveness criterion is evaluated as “partially fulfilled.”

**Efficiency:** The evaluation process did not include nor analyze information on the financing and financial management of the project (budget analysis, cost analysis). Despite the limitations of the evaluation, it is clear that the provision of SE-CORAPE’s local funding, the employment of local staff and the networking of radio experts have resulted in a positive production and allocation efficiency. On the other hand, various aspects have led to lower production and allocation efficiency. These include: the work rhythms in the creation and availability of products and services; the time and effort required to manage the project; the problems observed in the design of the project and its intervention logic; a project management based on insufficient information bases; disruptions in the development and weighting of intervention lines; and implementation dynamics based on trial and error. In the further course of the project, implementation partners can expect an intensive working pace, but this should help to improve production and allocation efficiency. The Efficiency criterion is assessed as “partially fulfilled”.

**Impact:** The analysis of the project’s proposed Theory of Change made it clear that in terms of its plausibility and availability – but not in terms of its extent and scope – it could be implemented in general and evidenced some positive effects. In this way, the uncertainty caused by the legal framework was able to be mitigated and the continuity of the work of the radio stations and their interaction with the communities and their audiences ensured.

At the level of SE-CORAPE, there are a number of observed changes that can be attributed to the project or to which the project has made a significant contribution. The project has strengthened the instrumental (program reform, National Training and Education Plan, Documentation Centre) and institutional (technical team, two training staff, Wiki team) capacities of SE-CORAPE to interact and provide communication products and services (advice and training) to its members. SE-CORAPE has consolidated its institutional position in the media sector, increased its membership and established new alliances, in particular with indigenous organizations in the Amazon region, and positioned itself in new areas of civil society, such as “Ecuador decide”, which call for greater citizen participation.

With regard to the community radio stations organized around CORAPE, the project has contributed to the enrichment of the programming in some of the radio stations, and has accompanied and promoted the digital shift. This has enabled them, among other things, to adapt to new audiences, increase their digital presence and renew their affinity and proximity to listeners. All this has consolidated and reinforced the role of community radio as “participatory spaces”, i.e. interactive spaces for communication, encounter, access to and dissemination of information.

The project has created the basis for community radio outlets to address the dimensions of their economic viability and sustainability. It is very likely that by the end of 2019 at least 8 community radio stations will take financial diversification measures

that contribute to their viability and financial sustainability. The project's monitoring and evaluation system and this evaluation do not provide clear information to demonstrate the link between the changes observed above and the improvement in the exercise of the rights (impact) that the project aims to achieve. The two short case studies carried out in the evaluation have shown that these changes are taking place and that, in the totality of the experiences developed at local level, it is possible to assume impacts on the population in terms of greater and better exercise of rights. However, the project is currently unable to demonstrate this. The documentation and systematization of these experiences is a pending and urgent task of the project, which should take place by the end of 2019. In conclusion the Impact criterion is evaluated as "partially fulfilled."

**Sustainability:** The project's focus on capacity building, various project achievements and the institutional strengths of SE-CORAPE contribute to the sustainability of the project's processes and its impact. There are working bases that support the continuity of the project line for training activities and that enable the sustainability and media viability of community radio to be strengthened. SE-CORAPE is able to maintain the financial flow and the main work processes. However,





ending the project at the end of 2019 would create a large gap that would have an impact on performance. In this sense, the central recommendation is that the project should reinforce and consolidate these processes in a further phase. The Sustainability criterion is assessed as "overall fulfilled."

## DW Akademie

is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development. As a strategic partner of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), DW Akademie carries out media development projects that strengthen the human right to freedom of opinion and promote free access to information. DW Akademie also works on projects funded by the German Foreign Office and the European Union—in approximately 50 developing and emerging countries.

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*The objective of the external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results. It does not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of DW Akademie. Nevertheless, all findings were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.*