

Radio Latacunga: Quichua Indian Broadcasting in Ecuador



Community radio announcers record a program in Spanish and Quichua in a cabina popular, one of a network of recording booths located in remote communities. Radio Latacunga intersperses music, stories, riddles, and personal messages with regional, national, and international news, as well as health, agricultural, and other public service programs. The station enables dispersed highland communities to communicate through a mass medium in their own voices.

Photo by Miguel Sayago,
courtesy Inter-American
Foundation

Quichua-speaking Indians, the majority population in the predominantly rural, highland Ecuadorian province of Cotopaxi, are among the nation's most socially disadvantaged and economically depressed citizens. But over the last 30 years, indigenous movements, with the support of nongovernmental and religious organizations, have strengthened community structures that have helped the Indians resist repressive practices and institutions. In the mid-1960s, Salesian clerics introduced radio broadcasting technology for educational purposes. In 1982, the Catholic Diocese of Latacunga and indigenous leaders established a radio station that broadcasts in Quichua and Spanish.

Jorge Guamán, a Quichua Indian who has participated in the radio project from the beginning, remembers thinking, "How can an Indian imagine himself talking on the radio? My first surprise was to hear my own voice. Centuries have passed since an Indian has had the opportunity to express his own ideas with his own voice in his own language on such a scale. In the fairs and at the market we started to practice over the loud-speakers by sending personal messages and announcing upcoming meetings and assemblies. Training courses followed. At first we would memorize the news and the messages. Then we created socio-dramas and talked about problems in the city and in the community – problems women have and problems caused by migration. We talked about everyday needs. In the communities we collected people's stories, riddles, anecdotes, and fables."

Today Radio Latacunga broadcasts to 600 communities and works through a network of Quichua reporters. Its programs provide news of current events, information and advice to meet village needs, and a forum for the opinions and experiences of local citizens. It also has been a strategically important medium of communication during marches and demonstrations by the Quichua.

Guamán adds, "The radio has generated employment in education and communications, but most importantly it has created respect. Indians have begun to use this means of communication and education for maintaining their own culture in their own language. We have mastered this technology. These last 12 years have been a first stage. The indigenous community has worked responsibly and with pride for Radio Latacunga and demonstrated its capability in an area usually inaccessible to us. We can no longer be treated like the fifth wheel on a car.

"Our challenges today are the changes taking place in the world. We have to become better in communications not only at a regional level but in Latin America. The *patria grande* (the large homeland) is Latin America. We need to look ahead to the future and make alliances. We have to make deals that are to our advantage also. Our riches have been despoiled enough in the last 500 years.

"As radio reporters, we need to become actors in history and do something for society. Our listeners, 95 percent of the indigenous population, put a lot of trust in the radio. The fact that there are Indians working in radio is a big responsibility."

— Olivia Cadaval