

## **The popular media as a tool for struggle**

### **Panamá**

#### **Olmedo Carrasquilla**

Olmedo Carrasquilla, from the Ecological and Collective Voices and Radio Temblor organization, shares the experience in the last eight years, he has done a job of struggle and support in the territories of the sister nation Panamá, a struggle that arises from the need to go weaving several processes of resistance before the various forms of extermination and appropriation of indigenous and peasant populations that are fighting for the defense of mother earth.

#### **Olmedo expressed:**

Our media, is an independent, alternative, popular media, born in 2008 through the collective Ecological Voices and Temblor Radio is also the product in these processes of popular struggle of Panama's environmentalist and rural movements and then emerges the need at this time to accompany the socio-environmental conflicts and build a mass media that could circulate the voice of organizations, communities, indigenous peoples, peasants and women's sector, which could report what is happening in their areas .

All this was accompanied by a proposal platform, over the situation that was living and what currently is experienced. From that date, we have nurtured on this experience of social organizations, even with citizens, independent people but with a critical sense and, of course, communities in resistance too. Whether they are farmers, indigenous, African descent, or from other sectors of social forces like unions, the women's sector, academia and student sector, that one way or another, they also have their way of communication, using other kind of tools, which also included the construction of a more popular, more collective and more sovereign proposal.

Therefore, from that time, we have been working independently here in Panamá, and what we have seen is that the same scenario that Panamá is living, the same thing happens in Colombia, in Mexico and in Argentina. That's where arises the idea of crossing the border in order to contribute collaborating and showing solidarity with the peoples' social struggles of the continent. Right now, we have the task of disseminating information.

#### **How do we do this work?**

It is a collective work of women and men, where there are professionals, non-professionals, and people from different sectors. In our organization and environment, we are doing investigative press, through what is called Panama's socio-environmental observatory. That has helped a lot to interpret and disseminate what is happening in other parts of the continent. We also have been reporting through the radio, audiovisual media, interviews, audio reports where there are social partners who are contributing and, of course, denouncing the situation that they are living in each country.

We have also included the video gender, video reporting, video reports of demonstrations, protest. Furthermore, projects against the savage capitalist development that we have seen, where we have been following what is the solidarity economy, agroecology. About this topic, we have been sharing with other journalists and international media as a way to circulate what is happening in the communities, that is, what the mainstream media do not report. In addition to these three kinds of communication, technology has come to disclose what is going through online social networks, and what you know and blogs, it has been a purely supportive, collaborative work.

### **The importance of this work**

The importance resides first on democratizing the word in the media, which is very essential for the human rights of peoples, as well as the right of communication. They also have the right to the means, the right to the frequency, the right to the means of production and that is something very beautiful. We have noticed that the youth and children in rural communities has been appropriating these tools. This is a way that they can also report what is going on in communities and the other is something very important: break the media siege, there is a persecution, there is a criminalization of social protest, there is a fence of traditional or conventional means. They always obey the ruling governments or companies, they don't want to disclose what they are doing to the peoples with their idiosyncrasies, their traditions, their audio visual, cultural, ecological, food sovereignty. One issue that we are always doing this struggle is called cyber activism, that is, destroying this blockade media of the mass media who want to blind what really the people makes in defense of their interests for a social change.

With regard to communication, Costa Rica and Panamá are the countries where we have a hard struggle for frequencies, in this case specifically for what is the community radios that have in their mind a well culture, folk, entertaining, humanist content. One of the points we have been drawing in spaces is to denounce governments and their policies that limits access to legal instruments, such as frequencies. In this case, to obtain a frequency here in Panamá, even for a commercial medium or commercial frequency, not any person or institution, NGO or foundation can get it because it represents large amounts of money to be granted. Moreover, you must have political influence within the government to be given. Therefore, clearly a people who want to make communication through community radio is impossible. Thus, it's making a struggle to be recognize firstly the alternative media and the media who are aspiring to community frequencies. Then it is a matter that does not come now, for decades is being done a debate in all academic and social areas, in popular organizations, where frequencies also represent part of the peoples' right to communication. That's a part of what is the struggle here in Panamá with the theme of frequency.

There are very important themes we have covered and promoted. Some of them are: The case of Ngäbe-Bugle Indians against mining has helped to spread and emphasize the role

and work of the popular journalists who were covering these situations that were happening In Panamá.

### **Historical struggles**

The case of the Panamá Canal has represented a struggle of people against what has been the site of US military bases. They fight against aggressions and violations of human rights that, at different times, has suffered the people of Panamá.

We must recognize that Panamá is a world trade's geopolitical strategic point and that's why we denounce that the Panama Canal plays a role in the great economic monopolies of the world. However, this does not translate into benefits of Panama's social programs and here we see for example that Panama is among the countries with poor distribution of wealth. Therefore, it should be noted that throughout history the people have spilt blood, and has strongly fought for their sovereignty. This is what made the people rise up against the aggressions and violations that the US military was doing.

***Secretaryship***

***Jubileo Sur/Américas***