

## Sonidos de la Tierra: Making Music, Teaching Empathy

Asunción, Paraguay  
Mary Liz Kehler



**Organization type:**

nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

Project Stage:

Scaling

**Budget:**

\$100,000 - \$250,000

Website:

<http://www.sonidosdelatierra.org.py>



- [At risk youth](#)
- [Behavioral issues](#)
- [Child exploitation](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Education reform](#)
- [Youth development](#)
- [Youth leadership](#)

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

**Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.**

Sonidos de la Tierra teaches youth to make music together and thus how to listen, work together & make their communities more joyful places through music.

#### About Project

##### **Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?**

Paraguay endured 36 years of dictatorship (1953-1989), the longest of any Latin American country in the 20th century. During that time, power & wealth were concentrated in the hands of a few; education was discouraged; economic & social advancement depended on connections & corruption; unsanctioned gatherings of more than 2 persons were prohibited, and fear of denunciation & political persecution sewed deep social distrust. The legacy of these years lives on in the way that many youth (& adults) view their world: a place where getting ahead does not depend on education and hard work, but corruption & connections; where family is the only trustworthy social network; and where cooperation for the common good is a foreign idea. The result: a generation of disengaged, alienated youth.

##### **Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!**

Sonidos is reversing this situation by teaching 16,000 low-income youth in 167 towns & villages across Paraguay to play music in ensembles. In so doing, it helps disaffected youth develop empathy-- ie. the personal qualities, social skills & healthy relationships they need to become responsible, pro-active citizens. It also teaches adults to run the local organizations which support Sonidos programs, thereby building social capital in rural towns & urban slums. Sonidos ensembles are "schools of life." In making music together, youth learn that success depends on hard work, active listening and collaboration with peers. Playing music also gives youth a "voice"- a way to express their feelings & aspirations- and public performances, the chance to "give back" to their communities. In the process, Sonidos youth become better students, reconcile with their families and give up anti-social behavior. As Sonidos shows, kids who play Mozart by day don't break shop windows at night.

#### Impact: How does it Work

##### **Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.**

Juan Ayala, aka "Liqui," was a troublesome kid when he showed up at the Sonidos music school in a working-class area of Carapeguá (pop. 40,000). To avoid trouble, the teacher lent him a flute, thinking less damage would come to it than to a more delicate instrument. Everyone thought Liqui would drop out quickly given all the talk of "cooperation" and "responsibility" at Sonidos. However, the 3rd Annual Seminar for Youth Orchestras gave Liqui the chance to travel to another part of Paraguay, live with other young musicians & study with a professional flutist. In the final concert, he shone. Once home, Liqui practiced hard & urged other kids to join Sonidos. In April 2006, Maestro Szarán chose him to join a Sonidos ensemble touring Europe; at age 14, Liqui was performing in San Mark's Square in Venice. A few years later, Liqui was a soloist in the town orchestra, 1st flute in an orchestra of Sonidos virtuosos and teaching flute in Sonidos programs in 4 towns. Now his name is no longer on his school's list of discipline problems but on a plaque at the entrance, in homage to an illustrious alumnus. But the story doesn't end there: Sonidos also gave the people of Carepegua the incentive to create new social bonds. To get their Sonidos group on a path to sustainability, they made new partners: with a military band, they exchanged bus tickets to town for music lessons; with a fire department, help starting its own band for the loan of its instruments; with a university, performances for scholarships. Meanwhile, Carapegua has helped nearby villages join the Sonidos network.

#### Sustainability

##### **Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?**

Sonidos serves 16,000 youth ages 6-18, many of them for many years, in 16 of Paraguay's 17 departments. There are no other Paraguayan youth programs with Sonidos' depth, scope & national recognition. Internationally, there are other youth music programs, e.g. El Sistema in Venezuela, but they are managed & financed by governments, and many have folded when government priorities changed. In addition, those programs do not build social capital, organizational skills or social entrepreneurship at the community level, as Sonidos does. Sonidos, in contrast, is a network of grassroots organizations, managed & financed by local communities, which often employ Sonidos graduates as teachers. These differences make Sonidos economically and socially sustainable.

#### About You

##### **Organization:**

Sonidos de la Tierra

##### About You

##### **First Name**

Luis

##### **Last Name**

Szaran

##### **Twitter URL**

<http://www.twitter.com/SonidosPY>

##### **Facebook URL**

<http://www.facebook.com/SonidosdeLaTierra>

#### About Your Organization

##### **Organization Name**

Sonidos de la Tierra

##### **Organization Country**

, AS, Asuncion

**Country where this project is creating social impact**

, AS, Asunción

**Your role in Education**

Administrator.

**The type of school(s) your solution is affiliated with**

Other

**How long has your organization been operating?**

More than 5 years

Innovation

**How long has your solution been in operation?**

Operating for more than 5 years

Now that you have thought out your entry, help us pitch it.

**Define your company, program, service, or product in 1-2 short sentences [136 characters]**

Sonidos teaches youth to make music together and how to listen, work together & make their communities more joyful places through music.

**Identify what is innovative about your solution in 1-2 short sentences [136 characters]**

Sonidos is largely self-sustaining: participants raise most funds; teachers are former students; Sonidos craftsmen make its instruments.

Social Impact

**What has been the impact of your solution to date?**

Sonidos serves 16,000 Paraguayan youth, including 12,000 in 167 community-run music schools; 2,000 in a gov't-supported program for rural children; and 2,000 in an EU-funded program to enrich public school curricula. Groups which Sonidos helped found in Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia serve an additional 6,000 youth, and Sonidos-inspired groups also operate in Uruguay and India. In qualitative terms, participation in Sonidos programs inspires youth to improve their academic performance and relations with family, teachers and peers; it also allows adults to acquire inter-personal, organizational & entrepreneurial skills needed to run effective grass-roots organizations. These organizations, in turn, influence national & local governments to spend more on youth & educational programs. Sonidos also uses its huge draw at public concerts to sensitize the public on important social & environmental issues, such as the need to document & protect rights of children and to protect water resources.

**What is your projected impact over the next 1-3 years?**

We project that the number of youth & communities participating in Sonidos de la Tierra will grow by 20% per year, reaching about 21,000 youth in 300 communities by 2015. The impact of this progressive scaling up through 2015 & beyond will be to reach a tipping point where socially responsible behavior, not aggression or apathy, is the dominant youth culture; social distrust gives way to community cooperation & working in networks; and national despair over the next generation gives way to the idea that, through music, even the most disadvantaged child can develop the empathy needed to become a valuable member of society. Meanwhile, Sonidos and Sonidos-inspired programs will continue to expand in neighboring countries, with similar impacts.

**What barriers might hinder the success of your project? How do you plan to overcome them?**

Two key challenges are: i) overcoming intolerance and the effects of paternalism among the adult volunteers who work with the community organizations (local philharmonic societies) that run the local music schools associated with Sonidos. Such attitudes undermine the cooperation and initiative needed to start & run effective community organizations; and ii) financing the small central unit which administers the Sonidos program. We address the first challenge through adult workshops on inter-personal relations and entrepreneurial skills, and the second, with new fundraising and income-generating initiatives, such as its First Annual National Raffle, which Sonidos is launching in June 2012, in connection with its 10th anniversary celebration.

**Winning entries present a strong plan for how they will achieve and track growth. Identify your six-month milestone for growing your impact**

To further develop Sonidos' international reputation as a world-class youth music program.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your six-month milestone

**Task 1**

Prepare the Sonidos virtuosos who will perform at the opening ceremony of the Rio+20 Summit - June 2012.

**Task 2**

Organize the annual European tour of "Sounds of the World" orchestra, with youth from 20 countries, to promote tolerance.

**Task 3**

Expand 2 emblematic programs: Multiethnic Orchestra of the Chaco & Orchestra of instruments made of recycled materials.

**Now think bigger! Identify your 12-month impact milestone**

Expand Sonidos de la Tierra by 20% adding 2,400 youth and 25 community organizations to the Sonidos network

Expand Sonidos de la Tierra by 20%, adding 2,400 youth and 55 community organizations to the Sonidos network.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your 12-month milestone

**Task 1**

Equip adult volunteers in new towns joining Sonidos with the necessary skills to create & run effective community music schools.

**Task 2**

Launch 1st annual national raffle on behalf of Sonidos, increasing number of local corporate sponsors & individual supporters.

**Task 3**

Increase the capacity of Sonidos' music seminars & festivals to accommodate, teach & motivate young musicians.

**Founding Story: We want to hear about your "Aha!" moment. Share the story of where and when the founder(s) saw this solution's potential to change the world [125 words]**

Some 10 years ago, after becoming the Director of Paraguay's major symphony orchestra, I was looking for more in life than my normal activities could provide. I wanted to help my country overcome the legacies of its long dictatorship, and to do so doing what I knew best: music. A national survey had just revealed that the life goal of the overwhelming majority of Paraguayan youth was to get rich, no matter how that might be achieved. That alarming finding inspired me to start thinking of ways to harness the power of music to ensure that Paraguay's youth would grow up to be good citizens. About the same time, a chance meeting with AVINA founder Stephan Schmidheiny opened my eyes to the power working in networks. Finally, having once been a low-income, rural child myself, who was unexpectedly "discovered" and given the chance to develop his musical talent, I wanted to give such life-changing opportunities to other disadvantaged youth. Out of all of this, Sonidos was born.

**Sustainability**

**Tell us about your partnerships**

Our most important partnership is with the community organizations that support Sonidos music schools at the local level, as noted elsewhere. In addition, Sonidos has partnerships with the national & local governments of Paraguay, international organizations, foundations, corporations, religious groups and other NGOs. Among these are: the European Union, Skoll Foundation, AVINA Foundation, Peery Foundation, TIGO (int'l cellphone co), HSBC, Itaú Bank (Brazil), Petrobras (Brazil), Society of Jesus (Germany, Switz, Austria) & Plan International, plus many local sponsors & individual donors.

**What type of team (staff, volunteers, etc.) will ensure that you achieve the growth milestones identified in the *Social Impact* section? [75 words]**

Over the last decade, Sonidos has assembled a team of dedicated professionals and volunteers who will enable it to achieve the growth milestones mentioned above. Currently, this team consists of about 500 adult volunteers who run the local organizations that support Sonidos music schools; about 80 music teachers, many of them graduates of Sonidos; a small central administrative staff; and its Board comprised of leading Paraguayan musicians, entrepreneurs and other professionals.

**Please elaborate on any needs or offers you have mentioned above and/or suggest categories of support that aren't specified within the list**

We are especially interested in new ideas & marketing channels for products & services that Sonidos could sell in order to increase program-generated revenue. We would be pleased to assist organizations that would like to establish self-sustaining, community-based music programs for disadvantaged youth.

**Source URL:** <https://www.changemakers.com/empathy/entries/sonidos-de-la-tierra#comment-0>