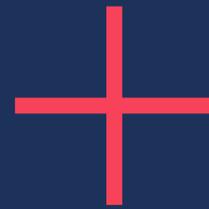


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STUDIES



THE ROLE AND  
PROTAGONISM  
OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
IN THE FACING  
OF THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC IN  
BRAZIL

Promotion:



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This study examines the path trailed by civil society and Brazilian philanthropy since the 1980s, which is crucial to the understanding of the dynamics and trends that support one of the theses developed throughout this work: civil society as a strategic element in the consolidation process of Brazilian democracy. Civil society organizations (CSOs) faced, in recent years, numerous reputation attacks and challenges concerning their political and financial sustainability. Faced with the Covid-19 crisis, they sought not only to oppose the prevailing denial and necropolitics through the construction of political agendas and networking, but also to produce responses based on the development of a set of practices and experiences founded on self-management and community organization. From a study of multiple cases, conducted with institutions selected according to the established criteria, it was determined that the CSOs were capable of building agendas, narratives, languages and forms of production and organization based on self-management, experiences based on a social dynamic where work and politics tend to coincide, as part of a process involving, at the same time, the organization of activism and production. They found independent ways to provide innovative responses to the crisis, coordinating actors, territories and communities, initiatives and resources, and searching for solutions involving everything from the distribution of food baskets to conducting information and humanitarian aid campaigns, in addition to conceiving innovative activism and resistance strategies, in the face of an adverse scenario.

São Paulo, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine the role of civil society and philanthropy within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil. It focuses on the mapping of experiences conducted by social organizations, especially grassroots community organizations, considered emblematic and a reference in terms of dealing with the crisis and the impacts produced within their operating communities. In addition, the text proposes a reflection on the role of civil society in an adverse political context, characterized by a lack of resources, the criminalization of social organizations and the shrinking of civic spaces, a trend that has intensified in the country, especially in recent years. So, the work urges the recognition of the importance of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the local communities, as well as their leaders and movements, to the development of collective actions aiming at find their own solutions to several problems faced within the context of the crisis health and the social issues triggered by the pandemic.

To carry out this study, secondary references for the field, scientific articles, analytical texts published in multiple media outlets and specific surveys were considered, which allowed for mappings, concerning both the scenarios and the experiences developed by community groups and social organizations in response to the crisis that unfolded as a result of the pandemic. In addition, cases are presented, selected according to the following criteria:

- + experiences for which there is public information available;
- + referential cases that represent the development of innovative social technologies in different fields of activity, allowing for replication and/or multiplication

in different contexts – provided that replicability does not mean the adoption of a singular model, but the existence of a heuristic standard that allows for the identification of broader (universal) elements;

- + emblematic experiences in terms of the responsiveness and level of organization of the communities involved, in areas such as production of knowledge; communication, mobilization and articulation; humanitarian assistance; mobilization of resources (financial, material and human); emergency support; assistance and protection (in the broad sense); and alternatives for the generation of work and income;

- + examination of the specific experiences developed by the organizations comprising the Brazilian Philanthropy Network for Social Justice (RFJS), which is an initiative that brings together local funds (thematic and community) that support civil society organizations and movements engaging in rights activism, less benefited by traditional or mainstream philanthropy.

The first chapter describes the history of civil society in Brazil from the 1980s to the crisis in the 2000s. The second chapter examines the scenario of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, while the third addresses the impacts on civil society organizations. The fourth chapter describes civil society's response to the pandemic, referencing cases with a view of social technologies and the developed strategies. Finally, the fifth chapter presents the conclusions of the study and points to community philanthropy as a strategy to reinforce civil society within the context of the pandemic.

## **1 THE HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BRAZIL: FROM THE LEADING ROLE IN THE 1980'S TO THE CRISIS IN THE 2000'S**

One of the primary notions that guided this study was the importance of civil society as a crucial segment for the consolidation of Brazilian democracy. To understand the practices in this field, it is imperative to recognize the existence of an array of political participation by civil society in view of expanding the possibilities of capturing the most voices and political expressions, and qualifying them to access the independent sharing of the exercise of their own political power (FARIA, 2010, p. 2).

So, this document addresses the importance of the institutional dynamism of civil society within the context of a democracy, considering that without it, political cultures would not be formed to guide actions capable of strengthening its political-institutional arena. The societal dynamic is what allows movements in this direction, and it is only possible thanks to a multiple set of actors: movements, foundations, philanthropic organizations, funds, associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), among others. From this perspective, the democratic pattern of a society is the result not only of civic density and its strength within the public sphere, but also of the plurality of institutionalized forms of participation capable of including civil society in the decision-making processes (FARIA, 2010).

In Latin America, a continent marked by a history of numerous military dictatorships, connecting democracy and civil society could not be more important because, in fact, it is a sector that played a crucial role in the activism and resistance against authoritarianism and, consequently, in the articulation of processes toward democracy.

In Brazil, in the 1970s and 1980s, the role of civil society identifies with NGOs, which supported popular

social movements that were leading the fight for the country's return to democracy. In addition to supporting the movements' struggles, the NGOs generated different scenarios for participation, focusing on new characters dedicated to the fight to take down the military regime. It was the NGOs and the movements that contributed to the reconstruction of the concept of civil society and the innovation of social activism, recruiting political minorities as active subjects of power (GOHN, 2013). So, not only was the path to allow for the return to democracy established, but a new ethical-political and cultural field was created as well, which, through joint and collective actions developed in alternative spaces for the expression of citizenship, gradually consolidated the importance of civil society to the decision-making processes.

The political effervescence of the 1980s and the activism of the CSOs and social movements contributed to a first major step in the transformation of the State

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and to the establishment of new rules for the game between the political and civil spheres. The struggle moved towards mechanisms that are more effective to control and follow-up on public policy, during the formulation and implementation phases. In this scenario, awareness was heightened about the need to share the management of the public sphere to enable the legitimate participation by society in the conduct of its policies.

As a result of the established political dynamics, the importance of certain issues - such as gender, ethnicity and race, urban development, environment, democratic administration, childhood and youth – started to be reassessed and, as a result of a build-up of discussions promoted by social movements and NGOs, new concepts arose, redirecting the demands of civil society, which were finally incorporated into the Constitution of 1988.

[...] the Health Reform that led to the institution of the Unified Health System [SUS], the various management councils for housing policies, women's rights, people with disabilities, [...] and other forms of collegiate and mediation structures between the State and civil society are living proof of the accomplishments and strength of that organized participation. These are spaces for negotiating and solving conflicts of interest, within a democratic administration, which generates a new form of participatory culture in Brazilian society (GOHN, 2013, p. 246)<sup>1</sup>.

The political-administrative decentralization and the municipalization of care, imposed by the Constitution, started a new time in the country's political scenario, with the formation of participatory local bodies. The creation of equal, deliberative tutelary councils to manage social policies, mainly, contributed to yet a new step. The established model instituted the co-responsibility of society and the State in the

formulation, execution and control of public programs and projects.

Among the initiatives conceived to reinforce civil society's role in the decision-making process – specifically in regards to public policy – is the Brazilian Law 9790/1999, concerning the Public Interest Civil Society Organization (OSCIP). Developed on the basis of studies, discussions, proposals and dialogue between various representatives of civil society and governments, it proposed to implement an effective strategy for social development and to foster its growth and reinforcement, enabling progressive change to the design of public policies at all levels.

However, despite decades of huge accomplishments, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Brazilian civil society was faced with new challenges associated not only with the political and financial sustainability of social organizations and movements, but also reputation attacks linked to their performance, especially in relation to the mobilization and management of financial resources. This situation surely resulted in the extermination of CSOs and NGOs

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## **THE CREATION OF EQUAL, DELIBERATIVE TUTELARY COUNCILS TO MANAGE SOCIAL POLICIES, MAINLY, CONTRIBUTED TO YET A NEW STEP**

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<sup>1</sup> Text translated from Portuguese to facilitate understanding of the original quote. All citations included in this study were translated into English (from the original in Portuguese)

that were unable to assure the minimal conditions for their operation.

According to the survey titled Private Foundations and Non-Profit Associations (FASFIL)<sup>2</sup>, in 2016 there were 237 thousand private foundations and non-profit associations in Brazil, which, if compared to the year 2010, represents a decrease of 16.5%, representing a quantitative shrinkage of the sector – even more pronounced between 2013 and 2016, with a 14% decline in active institutions (IBGE, 2019a).

Considering the conditions of political and economic stability achieved within a few years of democratic trajectory, with important political and social accomplishments, cooperation agencies and international philanthropic foundations began to disseminate the idea that Brazilian society would be able to meet the needs of its social agenda endogenously. If in the 1990s international funding represented 80% of the resources used by the CSOs, since 2000 that funding has waned considerably, with the global prioritization of other regions of the planet. It can be said that the withdrawal of international funding was hasty, since it left a vacuum that resulted in the closing of institutions of reference and discontinued strategic programs, causing negative impacts on Brazilian civil society.

Despite a significant growth in private social investment (ISP) and philanthropy in Brazil<sup>3</sup> since the 1990s, which is the sector that currently mobilizes the most private resources for public uses, this was not enough to establish solid, effective dynamics to support CSOs and social movements with local resources. According to information from the GIFE 2018 Census, the sector's associates invested, in 2018, 3.25 billion Reais in social causes and

[...] although the direct execution of their own projects still prevails in terms of financial volume, the percentage of resources allocated to third-party projects, programs, actions or management climbed from 21% to 35% between 2016 and 2018, reaching the highest proportion of the historical series (GIFE, 2019, p. 45).

Although there has been a significant change in the work done by local corporate and familiar philanthropic organizations, there is still a trend of low investments of resources to support CSOs – and even less to grassroots organizations and social movements. The timid, incipient grant making efforts can be explained mainly by a lack of trust in CSOs, and by the absence of a regulatory framework that favors donations.

In Brazil, civil society's reputational problems started back in 2006, with the installation of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) to investigate the alleged misuse of public funds, which were allegedly transferred to various NGOs linked to the federal government, when Luís Inácio Lula da Silva was the President of Brazil. The so-called NGO CPI was criticized from the outset by a number of specialists who pointed to an attempt to criminalize the CSOs in general, without actually seeking to enhance the transparency of the relationship between public authorities, civil society and their organizations. The CPI was, in the view of several actors, an attempt to boycott the actions of the CSOs, calling into question their reputation and history, to the extent that were associated with cases of corruption.

[...] the CPI did, in fact, reference an odd timeframe, [to the extent that it] investigates federal government agreements with NGOs only from 2003 onward. According to the TCU, the irregularities in the transfer of funds began in 1999, during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB) [...]. In the document

<sup>2</sup> The research uses non-profit organizations registered in the Central Registry of Companies (CAGED) as its primary source.

<sup>3</sup> In Brazil, unlike other countries, there is a distinction between the concepts of private social investment (ISP) and philanthropy. The notion of ISP is associated with the performance of companies in the social field (through institutions and corporate foundations).

[in which ABONG addresses the NGO CPI, it is mentioned that] “[...] it proposes to deal in a CPI with issues associated with irregularities, for which the TCU has appropriate adjustment instruments, and which are not necessarily connected with bad faith in the handling of public funds”. [...] irregularities were identified in 29 agreements executed between the government and 11 NGOs, which is a far cry from the total of nearly 300 thousand NGOs existing countrywide (ABONG, 2020).

The NGO CPI had extremely negative repercussions, installing in the public opinion (encouraged by the media) the idea that donors and CSO (civil society organizations) were no more than tools used for money laundering, thereby ultimately discrediting the work performed by civil society and permanently compromising the trust of the people and the funders.

Clear efforts were made during the administration of President Dilma Rousseff to enhance the transparency of the NGOs’ work. The 2014 Regulatory Framework for Civil Society Organizations (MROSC) established a new legal framework for the execution of partnerships, encouraging democratic public management and appreciating the organizations as allies in the assurance and enforcement of rights. The simplification of the accountability process, greater transparency in the application of public funds and the possibility of better planning of the execution of the phases of the partnerships are some of the advancements achieved.

There are surely different analyses and views on the relationship between the State and CSOs, as some believe that an open line of communication has been created, while others believe that this dynamic entailed a significant gap, since no significant support was given the CSOs and movements, save for a number of exceptions.

It is also worth noting that, within the context of the funding vacuum resulting from the withdrawal of international cooperation and philanthropy, from the 2000s onwards, local funds began to arise, to support the demands of civil society. Surely, these organizations prompted a process of transformation not only in Brazilian philanthropy, but also in civil society, as they became an effective alternative for the financing and reinforcement small and middle-sized organizations and movements engaging mainly in the field of rights. Their capacity to support strategic causes, understand the scenario, the local networks and primary agendas, offer quick responses, as well as their capillarity and scope of action, represented innovative strategies.

The survey titled Profile of Civil Society Organizations in Brazil reports that, in 2016, there were 820 thousand<sup>4</sup> CSOs with active CNPJ numbers in Brazil (IPEA, 2018), which generally were consist with the country’s population density: 40% of the organizations were established in the Southeast, followed by the Northeast (25%), South (19%), Midwest (8%) and North (8%). The organizations having the purposes of developing and defending basic rights and interests, as well as religious organizations, were the most numerous (over 60%). In regards to the funding of the CSOs, the survey shows a sharp decline in the transfer of funds by the State since 2016.

As from 2016, the amounts decreased sharply, due to the decreased transfers of funds to the CSOs engaging mainly in the development and defense of rights and interests. This change increased the percentage passed on to the larger CSOs, engaging in the field of health (IPEA, 2018, p. 25).

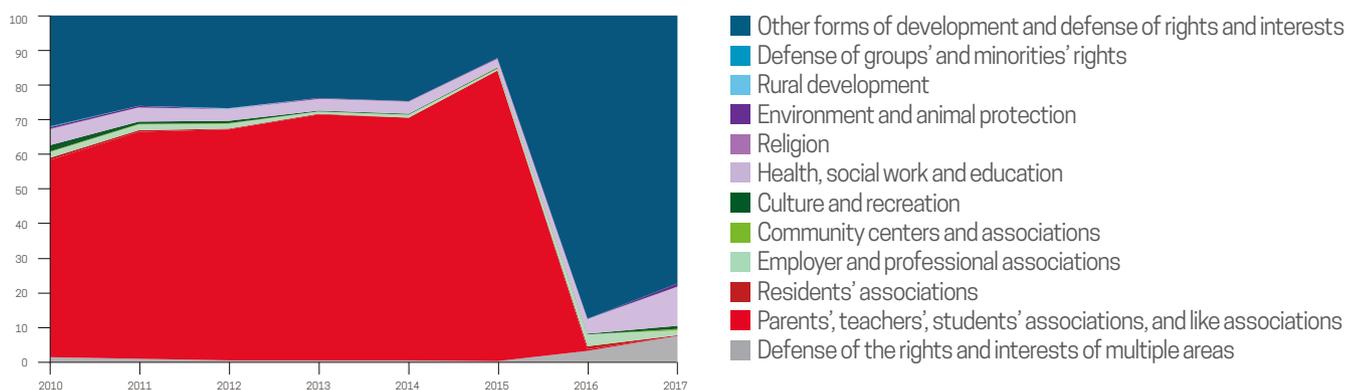
Of the transfers of funds included in the Federal Government’s General Budget, 38% is reserved for

<sup>4</sup> This survey by IPEA has a different database from the FASFIL survey (IBGE, 2019a). IPEA uses as its primary source the National Registry of Legal Entities (CNPJ), kept by the Brazilian Internal Revenue Service (SRF), for the year 2016, and the Annual Report on Social Information (Rais), from 2010 to 2015, of the Brazilian Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE), accounting for the largest sample.

organizations engaging in the defense of rights and interests, but the majority goes to investments in direct aid such as food, hygiene products, etc. For civil society

institutions acting in defense of the rights of political groups and minorities, negligible funds were transferred between 2015 and 2017 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 – Annual voluntary transfers to CSOs belonging to the group “defense of the rights and interests of minorities”, according to field of work (in %), 2010-2017**



Source: IPEA (2018).

The data from IPEA (2018) shows, from the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a tendency toward the shrinking of civil society’s work in the field of defense of rights and interests. In the same sense, a study by the Funders’ Initiative for Civil Society with data from 2019 (FICS, 2020) notes that civil space has closed more prominently, on a worldwide scale, as a result of a wave of restrictive laws applying to NGOs, a phenomenon observed since 2010<sup>5</sup>. These laws focus generally on regulating the sector in terms of financing from abroad.

Two decades of the “war on terror” have turned the cause of universal human rights back generations, and the effectiveness of the international human rights framework, long seen as the main enabler of civic space and other political freedoms, is now being questioned — and systematically contested by its detractors. Many regret the end of an “ineffective” United Nations (UN) and an “obsolete” multilateral order — characterized, for example, by accusations of bias and unequal treatment by the International Criminal Court and the political

captivity or deterioration of key institutions — and, yet, the political desire to promote reform has been silenced (FICS, 2020, p. 7).

In this regressive, conservative context, civil society and the CSOs have become the targets of governmental and non-governmental actors in the numerous parts of the world. Since Jair Bolsonaro’s inauguration in 2018, the Brazilian president has made a consistent effort to disseminate general suspicions about the performance of the NGOs, renewing the discredit that has plagued the sector since the CPI. Bolsonaro has claimed that the availability of foreign resources meant or local NGOs subverts the commitment of those organizations, thereby compromising the national interests. Surely, the president’s constant references to the NGOs’ performance are indicative of the fundamental role that those organizations play, especially in questioning the setbacks brought by his government to the fields of human, environmental and

<sup>5</sup> North America accounts for 80% of the investments in CSOs and global philanthropy, and 72% of philanthropy organizations worldwide face challenges in terms of political-economic sustainability (WINGS, 2018).

animal rights. The problem is that his accusations tend to be inflammatory, like when he blamed the NGOs for the widespread fires in the Amazon (in 2020), which were proven to be criminally started by farmers and miners to expand the agribusiness.

The situation of decreasing donations was intensified within the context of Covid-19. And the outlook is even more concerning for the CSOs engaging in the fields of social justice and human rights. In fact, the examination of the data from the GIFE 2018 Census allows for the conclusion that the promotion of gender, ethnicity and race equality do not qualify as priorities of the PSI programs, since they show a funding vacuum for organizations engaging in the field of defense of rights.

## **2 THE SCENARIO OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL**

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted, both in Brazil and on a global scale, the deep social inequalities affecting primarily political minorities and vulnerable groups. In Brazil, the social isolation measures to contain the spread of the virus, adopted in early 2020, implied the emergence of an unprecedented economic and social crisis, which further reinforced existing inequalities. The historical, acute situation of social injustice that affects political minorities – such as the black population; the residents of “favelas” and suburbs in large urban centers; the LGBTI+ population; native and indigenous peoples; poor and low-income population – caused them, when faced with the pandemic, to fight for survival even more desperately.

According to the 2019 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, Brazil is the seventh country in the world with the greatest social inequality. It dropped five positions in the ranking of the Human Development

Index (HDI)<sup>6</sup>, from the 79<sup>th</sup> to the 84<sup>th</sup> position among 189 countries. It also occupies the top positions in crimes against human rights: police forces murder a young black man every 23 minutes (WASELFISZ, 2016), and, during the pandemic, violent actions committed in “favelas” and poor suburbs have grown even more frequent (MUÑOZ, 2020). Every two minutes, a woman is assaulted in Brazil (ISP, 2019), provided that these incidents increased by 59% during the strictest periods of social distancing. Brazil registers the highest rate of murders of LGBTI+ people, indigenous groups, environmental activists and rights defenders (ISP, 2019), among other political minorities.

The first Covid-19 case in Brazil was registered on February 25, 2020, in the city of São Paulo, in a man who had returned from Italy. The first death, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, resulting from community infection, clearly showed how the impacts of the pandemic would be unequal in the country. The victim was a 63-year-old

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## **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTED, BOTH IN BRAZIL AND ON A GLOBAL SCALE, THE DEEP SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AFFECTING PRIMARILY POLITICAL MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS**

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<sup>6</sup>The HDI is an indicator that measures the progress of countries in terms of health, education and income.

woman, a domestic worker employed in the city's south zone, who contracted the virus from her employers who had returned from a trip abroad.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization qualified the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) as a pandemic. At the time, Brazil had registered 34 cases, all resulting from infection abroad and concentrated in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. However, the high rate of contagion of the disease and the rapid spread of community infections led public authorities, at the state and municipal levels, to implement social distancing measures to control and contain the spread of the virus and increase the responsiveness of the Unified Health System (SUS). Virtually all public administrative bodies opted to institute semi-remote or fully remote work regimes to help flatten the contagion curve (with the exception of essential services) – a fact that only occurred in the first month of the pandemic in Brazil (OPGH, 2020). Educational institutions closed their doors, as well as non-essential services<sup>7</sup>, which had considerable economic impact, particularly high unemployment rates<sup>8</sup> resulting from mass layoffs and a lack of means to create work and income (IBGE, 2020). The situation grew even direr due to the complete absence of government measures for humanitarian and social aid.

The interruption of the activities at educational institutions inflicted hunger in the Brazilian families who were dependent on the meals offered at the schools to assure food for their children. The lack of assistance to help the poorest populations left them in a situation of extreme vulnerability. So, Covid-19 showed how crucial it was to have public policies in place for the distribution of minimum income to mitigate the effects of the crisis.

On the evening of March 24, 2020, Jair Bolsonaro made a pronouncement on national television, underestimating the crisis and criticizing of the social

distancing measures up until then defended by the Ministry of Health and adopted by most state and municipal governments. As of that day, Brazil had registered 2,201 cases of Covid-19 and 46 fatalities from the disease. As a result of the president's denial and the economic and social crisis arising out of the social distancing measures, two health ministers left the office between April and May 2020. The president then appointed a military man, Eduardo Pazuello, who had no knowledge of public health. Without integrated and coordinated policies, and a minister who was incapable of acting to implement measures and coordinating politically to face the pandemic, states and municipalities started to institute their own measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. It was the state and municipal governments that bore the burden of closing all non-essential activities while seeking to expand the response by SUS.

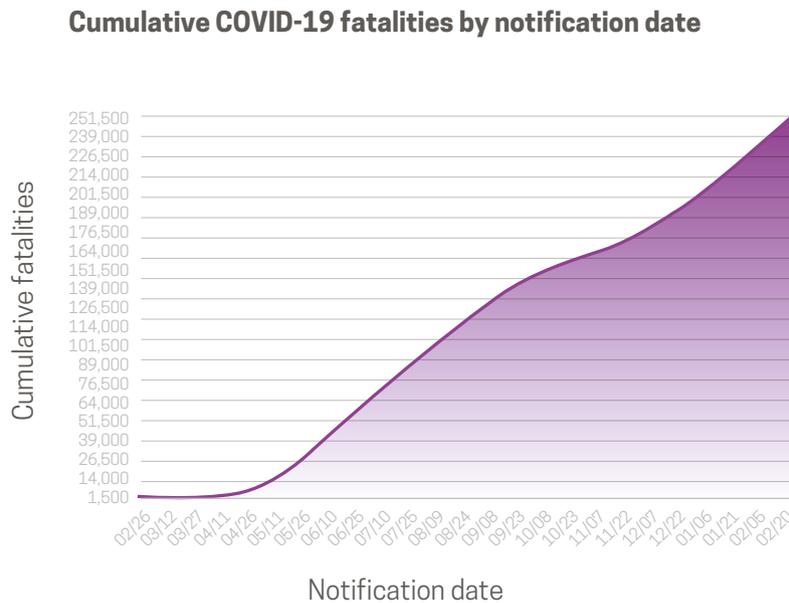
Since then, Brazil has become the main epicenter of the disease in Latin America [...]. The Ministry of Health [...] does not offer significant answers on how to flatten the curve and focuses its actions on the transfer of financial aid to states and municipalities [...]. The proposal to change the methodology to count the number of cases hampers the monitoring of the evolution of the disease and is seen as a maneuver to publicly minimize the seriousness of the crisis and hasten the end of social distancing. Action by the Federal Supreme Court [STF] was needed to compel the Ministry of Health to reestablish the full reporting of cases on the official platform (CIMINI et al., 2020, p. 3).

According to a technical note released by IPEA (2020), as of April 2020, the social distancing measures implemented by the municipalities were lightened. Figure 2 illustrates the progression in the number of fatalities since the start of the pandemic, reflecting the management issues noted.

<sup>7</sup> There was no national coordination, but a material group of governors and mayors generally decreed that non-essential services be suspended and public places closed to direct services to the public.

<sup>8</sup> According to the IBGE (2020), Brazil closed the year of 2020 with 14 million people unemployed, nearly 4 million more than in the month of May.

**Figure 2 – Cumulative Covid-19 fatalities in Brazil, February/2020 to February/2021**



Source: BRAZIL, 2020.

President Jair Bolsonaro’s speeches questioning the WHO’s recommendations and, later, defending the use of medications such as Hydroxychloroquine, with no scientific standing, have highlighted the progressive adoption of the obvious denial of Science and clearly genocidal position of the federal government. With this, some sectors of the population who support the president organized, between May and June 2020, a number of demonstrations against the Supreme Court and the National Congress, which are institutions that took a stand in favor of preventive measures against Covid-19. According to Danowski,

[...] **denial of Science** is a complex, serious phenomenon, which is quite widespread nowadays, and, in its many forms, is crucial to the understanding of cognitive, psychic and political paralysis in the face of the reality and problems posed by the current scenario (2020, p. 4).

According to the author, in the final months of 2020, in Brazil (as well as in other parts of the world), the feeling that the country was submerged not only in the denial and denialism of a fair share of the political class, intellectuals and the population in general (fake news, the inversion or denial of the truth), but in the very desire for death and the extermination of any form of alterity, which is the driving force behind every fascist or authoritarian regime. From the same perspective, Mbembe states that denial is connected with the notion of **necropolitics**, the power to “dictate who can live and who should die”. With this term, the author’s proposal is to show the many ways in which, in the contemporary world, structures exist with the purpose of causing the destruction of specific groups, mainly political minorities. According to biopower<sup>9</sup> and its population controlling

<sup>9</sup> Biopower is a term created originally by French philosopher Michel Foucault (2010) to reference the practice by modern States and the regulation of their subjects through an “explosion of numerous, diverse techniques to engage in the subjugation of bodies and control the population”.

technologies, “letting people die” becomes acceptable. However, the “killable” body does not apply to everyone, but only to “those who are constantly at risk of death due to the primordial defining parameter of race”, states the author (2019, p. 43). It is a powerful concept that applies to the examination of the Brazilian scenario, mainly the lack of integrated public policies to fight the pandemic and mitigate the devastating effects of the ensuing crisis.

Covid-19 contamination and death rates are highest among the poorest populations; women lost the most jobs during the pandemic worldwide; and the black population was the most contaminated, registering the highest fatality rate. In addition, the pandemic has made the 10 greatest billionaires in the world even richer, while the poor have become poorer (OXFAM, 2021).

The authoritarianism and necropolitics of the Bolsonaro administration have contributed to the increase of government control, imposing emergency powers, ignoring human rights and expanding surveillance, without much concern for legal and institutional limits. Furthermore, the constant attacks against journalists and the media have jeopardized the freedom of the press; civil society has been threatened and questioned, especially political minorities who were, additionally, left unprotected and, therefore, intensely affected by necropolitical practices.

The series of statements by Bolsonaro discrediting science and the health professionals working on the frontlines in the fight against Covid-19 also caused a wave of dangerous misinformation in the country and the world, which, in the context of the pandemic, was named misinfodemic. The coexisting pandemic of misinformation about Covid-19 affects people’s lives and livelihoods directly and significantly in every part

of the world (UNESCO, 2020). Fake news has proven to be deadly, as it instills doubt and behaviors that directly affect personal and political choices. Although misinformation is not news brought by the pandemic – since it was a big political resource that led to the election of Bolsonaro in 2018 – the misinformation on Covid-19 called medical and biological science into question; resulted in a growing distrust in government authorities and democratic institutions; the polarization of debates; and the placement of obstacles to the dissemination of prophylactic knowledge (such as the use of masks and the risks brought by crowd gatherings), to the detriment of the overall greater good.

The motivations to spread misinformation are many. [...] it could be to make money, secure political advantage, undermine trust, shift blame, polarize people and undermine the responses to the pandemic. On the other hand, some determining factors may be ignorance, individual egos or the misguided intention to help. Misinformation [...] can be shared by individuals, organized groups, certain media and official channels – and it may or may not be premeditated (UNESCO, 2020, p. 5).

It is in this scenario that civil society acts, whose organizations (CSOs, NGOs and movements) sought not only to oppose the necropolitics and denial through the construction of political agendas and networked efforts, but also to respond to the crisis. According to Foucault (2015), if there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. Power and resistance face each other through multiple and shifting tactics, and that is how the emergence of initiatives by community-based organizations and civil society can be construed as authentic expressions of defiance and noncompliance. So, we can understand the prominent role that organizations, movements and social groups played in the fight against the pandemic.

From this perspective, the economic emergency aid granted by the federal government in 2020 cannot be seen as a gift from the public power or a spontaneous articulation by the Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, but rather as the result of an important coordination strategy implemented by this sector, whose organizations – “Nossas”, “Coalizão Negra por Direitos”, “União de Núcleos para a Educação Popular”, among others making up the Pact for Democracy, a major articulator of the initiative – started a movement in favor of the aid, in conjunction with a number of congresspersons and senators, mobilizing a network of 163 institutions. The petition by those organizations, demanding the distribution of basic, emergency income, quickly secured half a million signatures and the endorsement of more than two thousand YouTubers – some with millions of followers. Finally, after lengthy negotiations between the federal government and the Brazilian Congress, emergency aid was granted in three installments of 600 Reais, and three more of 300 Reais, between June and December 2020, for a maximum of two adults per family.

Civil society did not just play a leading role in fighting the pandemic, but also in the search for articulations and responses to mitigate its effects, both by mobilizing donations and implementing initiatives in the fields of

humanitarian assistance, emergency aid, communication and production of knowledge and defense of rights.

### **3 THE IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON BRAZILIAN CSOs**

One of Brazilian society’s visible responses within the context of the pandemic was the mobilization of foundations, companies, and extremely wealthy individuals and families, who made unprecedented donations, in terms of both volume and speed, to respond

to the recent social and humanitarian crisis, in an unprecedented dimension in Brazil. At the beginning of the crisis, between March and May 2020, the country experienced a boom in donations, led by fundraising campaigns, philanthropic live performances by artists and, above all, corporate groups. In two months, more than R\$ 5 billion were raised to benefit funds and institutions and, even though the

donated volumes decreased between May and August 2020, the number of people donating increased. There was also an important mobilization and adjustment by business foundations and companies, which created or expanded their internal social investment programs. Brazilian philanthropy’s unprecedented mobilization within the context of the pandemic differs from the sector’s history: until 2019, the country was always

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## **CIVIL SOCIETY DID NOT JUST PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN FIGHTING THE PANDEMIC, BUT ALSO IN THE SEARCH FOR ARTICULATIONS AND RESPONSES TO MITIGATE ITS EFFECTS**

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<sup>10</sup> For a more in-depth look at the research conducted within the context of the pandemic, refer to Barroso (2020).



in the lower half of the rankings of the strength of philanthropic efforts in each country. In 2017, Brazil registered the worst performance ever in the World Giving Index, the global solidarity ranking, dropping from the 75th position to the 122nd position in the general ranking, which features 146 countries (CAF, 2020).

In addition, a number of actions emerged in the sense of providing information on the fields of social investment and philanthropy, with several studies and surveys<sup>10</sup> performed to map the trends, donations and experiences that might help examine the scenario and the impacts on Brazilian society<sup>11</sup>. One was the Covid-19 Emergency project, developed to contribute to the production, coordination and dissemination of responses by philanthropy, social investment and civil society to make the actions to face the impacts of the pandemic in Brazil more effective (GIFE, 2021). The project compiles information relevant to the field, assisting in the sharing of experiences and performance benchmarks.

In August 2020, the report titled “Covid-19’s Impact on Brazilian CSOs: from immediate response to resilience”

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## **WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC, THE SITUATION DETERIORATED, AS 65% OF BRAZILIAN CSOs REPORTED A SHARP DROP IN THE ACCESS TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

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was published. The study sought to understand how the sector planned the development of the actions and is preparing to face the post-crisis scenario. Based on a questionnaire prepared for the CSOs, a set of strategic information about the sector was compiled based on the 1,760 valid responses received. According to the study, Brazilian CSOs have faced challenges in terms of financial sustainability since 1990, largely due to their difficulties to mobilize resources. Within the context of the pandemic, the situation deteriorated, as 65% of Brazilian CSOs reported a sharp drop in the access to financial resources; 73% claimed they were debilitated during the pandemic, adapting their activities to remote contact or other formats in order to save on resources; 69% said they needed resources to cover their operating costs; and 46% claimed to rely on community social engagement to support vulnerable or at risk populations. What is most concerning is that 44% of the CSOs noted a decline in the number of active volunteers and 40% mentioned their team’s stress and overwork (MOBILIZA and REOS PARTNERS, 2020). The CSOs in the health area were reinforced by donations, as well as those with annual budgets in excess of 3 million Reais. So, this is a donation pattern that strengthens primarily the large CSOs, but not the middle-sized and small CSOs, which usually engage with political minorities, acting in their own territories, within their own communities, without the support or endorsement of major foundations and/or specialists.

However, even when faced with a funding crisis, these organizations did not stop their work, but rather reinvented action strategies in light of the emergent situation. The emergency mobilized different sectors of civil society, mainly community-based organizations, in multiple territories. So, many NGOs and organizations

11 Examples: Giving Monitor (ABCR, 2020b) and Report on the First 60 Days (PONTE-A-PONTE, 2021).

associated with local philanthropy, which before would think in the medium and long term, were forced to respond immediately to the urgency imposed by the socioeconomic, health and organizational crises that arose within the context of the pandemic. The study by Mobiliza and Reos Partners (2020) indicates that 87% of the CSOs offered/are providing assistance to vulnerable populations that are now at risk, with actions ranging from the distribution of personal hygiene and food products to preventive activities and activities to raise awareness. Without this sector's work, the impacts of the crisis would surely have been even worse.

This discrepancy between the volume of resources mobilized and the lack of support with donations to civil society, although concerning, is not surprising, since the work done by the corporate, familiar and large fortunes branches of philanthropy has not firmly instituted practices to support civil society (grant making) and, so, does not usually donate to third parties.

In places like Brazil and the Global South, where social and health systems have collapsed, collaborative

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## **HELPING THESE RESOURCES TO REACH THE BASES, COMMUNITIES AND STRATEGIC ACTORS ENGAGING IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19 QUICKLY IS HUGELY TRANSFORMATIVE**

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dynamics and mutual aid led by community social movements and organizations are now more important than ever and must be reinforced as they are, in fact, mobilizing their networks and territories to respond to the health, humanitarian, social and economic crisis, especially for vulnerable groups. Helping these resources to reach the bases, communities and strategic actors engaging in the fight against Covid-19 quickly is hugely transformative. And the resources donated at the bases surely have an important multiplier effect, to the extent that they can leverage and boost other initiatives (community donation campaigns, for example).

This path also expands the possibility of relying on the communities' leadership and decision-making power in the mobilization and investment of local resources in areas and initiatives deemed a priority, reinforcing the autonomy of civil society and opening up a space for the institution of innovative dynamics in the field of community philanthropy.

### **4 CIVIL SOCIETY'S RESPONSE: CASE STUDIES, PRACTICE COMMUNITIES AND INNOVATIVE SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES**

Within the context of the pandemic, civil society was faced with an emergency caused by both the lack of public policies and the funding gap. Despite the installed crisis, the CSOs, movements, groups and agents in the territories conceived responses and sought solutions based on the development of a multifarious set of initiatives and tools.

The plurality of responses was massive. For the purposes of this study, the cases deemed emblematic for representing innovative social technologies and/or integrating practice communities with a potential for multiplication were selected<sup>12</sup>. These cases involve

<sup>12</sup> Defined as "a group of people [who] come together around the same topic or interest. These people work together to find ways to improve what they do, that is, to solve a problem within the community or in daily learning, [with] regular interactions" (WENGER et al., 2014, p. 1).



technologies and social practices that were developed, designed and multiplied by people, movements, groups and base communities to respond to problems faced by the local populations within their own territories. Without any ranking of schools of thought, nor impositions by specialists with ready-made solutions. They are emblematic cases for consisting of experiences developed by political minorities, which could be replicable and/or serve as inspiration for a number of contexts.

#### **4.1 Paraisópolis: mobilizing local actors and leaders to act within the communities**

According to the analysis conducted by Instituto Pólis, in territories deemed as precarious, the community organization formats prevail in the control of Covid-19 and have been the most effective response to the crisis. This is the case of Paraisópolis, one of the largest “favelas” in Brazil, located in the city of São Paulo, with more than 70 thousand inhabitants (IBGE, 2019b) and a demographic density of 61 thousand inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The effort by Paraisópolis

[...] caused the favela to register, on May 18, 2020, a Covid-19 fatality rate of 21.7 people per 100,000 inhabitants, while Vila Andrade as a whole recorded 30.6 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants. The rate is also lower than the municipal average (56.2) and the average of other vulnerable districts such as Pari (127), Brás (105.9), Brasilândia (78) and Sapopemba (72) (INSTITUTO PÓLIS, 2020, p. 1).

It was the Associação de Moradores de Paraisópolis (Paraisópolis Residents’ Association), right at the start, with the first confirmed cases of Covid-19 in São Paulo, organized its work in the attempt to prevent the disease from decimating the community, anticipating that the public health policies would not sufficiently cover nor protect the local population. First, it created the system

of “street presidents”, which assigned certain people the responsibility of identifying individuals and families showing symptoms of Covid-19 and developing activities to raise awareness about the virus and the precautions needed to prevent the disease. They collected and distributed food baskets, battled against fake news and were qualified to refer any persons showing symptoms.

To support the street presidents system (420 in total, each being assigned to inspect 50 homes), the community hired ambulances, to operate 24x7, qualified doctors and nurses, supplying them with the appropriate equipment to treat the severe symptoms of Covid-19. In addition, 240 residents trained first responders to support the 60 emergency bases manned with civilian firefighters. Lastly, two public schools were used, which were requested and made available by the state government, to ensure the isolation of infected people, especially those residing with large families and/or in small homes.

It was an experience in self-managing, horizontal, community-based social organization. Communication strategies were also centralized and deemed a priority, as was the assurance of delivering food and access to preventive care to the local population. The organization and involvement of the community were crucial to controlling the infection and fatality rates in 2020.

#### **4.2 Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil (Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil) (APIB): indigenous peoples facing the pandemic**

“All this destruction is not our mark, but rather the footprints of the white people, your tracks on earth” (Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, s. d.)

The cases of Covid-19 in indigenous populations and individuals exceed the numbers notified by the Secretaria Especial de Saúde Indígena (Special

Secretariat for Indigenous Health) (SESAI), which has only counted cases in homologated indigenous lands. According to official data, 35,897 indigenous individuals allegedly contracted Covid-19, in contrast to the compilation executed by APIB, which counted 41,794 infected individuals as on 12/15/2020 (APIB, 2020). In regards to fatalities, official data account for 501 Covid-19 fatalities, as compared to 894 registered by APIB, affecting at least 161 indigenous peoples.

In light of the underreporting of indigenous infections in the official data, APIB has been conducting an independent survey, under the responsibility of the Comitê Nacional de Vida e Memória (National Committee for Indigenous Life and Memory) and the grassroots indigenous organizations that make up the association. So, it is a communication strategy to provide visibility to that which is invisible, by employing its own communication methodologies, strategies and tools to report information that the government and traditional media do not show.

Additionally, complaints were made about the poor infrastructure of the public health system specializing in Brazilian native peoples and reports of biological cataclysm<sup>13</sup>, given that it may have been the health professionals themselves (linked to the government or the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples, FUNAI) who took the virus into the isolated tribes and peoples and caused massive waves of infection within indigenous communities.

In addition to working as a network, APIB disseminates actions and campaigns developed by each tribe, ranging from the donation of basic food baskets and personal hygiene items; and communication items (both infrastructure and technology to enable the creation of informative contents and their dissemination). The

unification of data and joint coordination against a health crisis are extremely important in light of the appalling situation of advances into indigenous lands by the federal government, agribusiness and extractive industries.

An initiatives database of the tribes comprising APIB shows multiple, diverse actions.

### **4.3 Rio contra o Corona (Rio against the Coronavirus): the importance of networking**

Rio contra o Corona (Rio against the Coronavirus) is an initiative that stemmed from the work of “Movimento União Rio”<sup>14</sup>. It comprises three managing organizations that work on a voluntary basis, as a network: Instituto Phi receives the financial donations; Banco da Providência buys the inputs for donation and transports them to their place of distribution; and Instituto Ekloos coordinates the receipt of the inputs and their distribution to the population through local organizations.

From March through November 2020, the initiative managed to raise R\$ 24,657,076.64 from 6,956 donors, benefiting a total of 309,794 families in 237 communities. This is not only about civil society coordinating to ensure the basic rights of the population (welfare and humanitarian aid), but also the importance of networking, expanding the reach of the work, generating collaborative actions and reinforcing the ecosystem of Brazilian civil society with new potentials and partnerships.

### **4.4 Casa Nem: the LGBTI+ population faced with the pandemic**

Casa Nem takes in LGBTI+ people who have been thrown out<sup>15</sup> of their homes or have no place to live. The daily routine at Casa Nem, based in Rio de Janeiro, in the Flamengo neighborhood, has changed: “We

13 “Biological cataclysm” was an expression used by anthropologist Henry F. Dobyns (1966) to describe the effect of the epidemics brought by European invaders to the Amerindian populations.

14 Voluntary civil society movement in Rio de Janeiro, which brings together people and NGOs that are serious and committed to the state. Volunteers surveyed the main demands to reduce the impacts of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

15 Inclusive language is used here in the Portuguese version of the document, as it is used by the LGBTIQ+ population residing at Casa Nem.

suspended our activities on March 13, and on the same date we released the first notice canceling the language courses and all outside activities in which the house participates,” explains sex worker Indianarae Siqueira, 49, founder of the institution. Soon afterward, the residents closed the building, keeping only a few activities going, such as the workshops to produce facemasks, organized so that the residents would have a source of income during the economic crisis.

The fourth floor at Casa Nem was adapted and turned into a quarantine space, for both new residents and any infected individuals. Indianarae says that everyone who arrives at the location must sanitize their shoes and change their clothes, including residents and employees in charge of the essential services, such as psychologists, who have never interrupted in their work routine. The extra care was critical to keep the intake home free from confirmed Covid-19 cases, to the extent possible.

Casa Nem, which currently has 60 residents, did not suspend the intake of new residents for understanding that, in this scenario, more LGBTI+ persons might need shelter. Every two days, the residents would hold a meeting to discuss the realities of the pandemic. Anyone who needs to go out may only leave if they wear a mask and gloves, to avoid infecting others. Indianarae explains:

Not only did we not reduce the number of residents, but we increased the scope of our outside assistance. We currently reach 700 [...], with the distribution of food baskets, masks, cleaning and personal hygiene kits.

Indianarae contributes the experience she had with serious illness in the 1980's, when the LGBTI+ population faced the HIV/AIDS epidemic. So, her response to

Covid-19 was not created from scratch. With a variety of actions, such as training, internal organization to continue taking in new residents and distributing food baskets, Casa Nem fills the gap that public policies on gender and sexuality were unable to fill within the context of the pandemic.

#### **4.5 LabJaca: the black and the “favela” population speak, act and produce during the course of Covid-19**

Traditional media does not usually report on what happens in “favelas” and urban suburbs from the perspective of their residents. However, several community communication groups (involving free media outlets and media booksellers) began working to produce contents and information at a local level, creating media and narratives within the communities, thereby challenging the traditional media outlets.

LabJaca is a lab that works to generate data and recover narratives about the Jacarezinho “favela”, on the north side of Rio de Janeiro. The initiative emerged during the pandemic from the grouping of six young black people, who began producing reliable data on education, public security and health in the “favela” where they live. Initially, like many CSOs, the group started distributing basic inputs to “favela” residents, but, in the midst of so many questions about the official data produced about the pandemic, they decided to focus on producing information based on surveys. According to Bruno Sousa, researcher at LabJaca,

The numbers from the Rio de Janeiro Health Department pointed to less than 10 suspected cases in the entire “favela” and no confirmed cases. Our team’s survey showed dozens of suspected cases and many seriously

suspected cases, which were not confirmed for lack of testing. The data we ultimately produced directly contradicted the “official” data, with much higher numbers. This is what generally happens when the data is produced by organizations that work in the assurance of human rights. Showing this discrepancy to everyone has the main purpose of guiding public policies to solve the problems posed by the so-called “unofficial” data that the official bodies attempt to discredit (SOUSA, 2020).

LabJaca produces accessible audiovisual narratives, to fill the knowledge gaps that hamper the Jacarezinho residents’ access to public policies and basic rights. During the pandemic, it also proposed to discuss measures to protect and fight for the rights to fair and equitable care and treatment. So, communication is consolidated as a strategic activism tool, to the extent that it is produced by those who identify as agents of local change, achieving powerful dynamics of transformation.

#### **4.6 The role played by the members of the Brazilian Philanthropy Network for Social Justice (RFJS) in the fight against Covid 19**

The RFJS consists of 13 donor organizations (grant makers) – thematic funds, community funds, community foundations – that support CSOs, NGOs, movements, groups, associations, networks, leaders, rights activists, civil society groups and leaders. Although the donation amounts from the local funds comprising the RFJS is not comparable to the resources mobilized by major fortunes, the Network’s role was and still is strategic within the context of the pandemic due to its ability to react quickly and assertively, meeting multiple demands, with a focus on political minorities and vulnerable groups. According to internal surveys, the 13 members directly donated, during the course of 2020, 14 million Reais to nearly one thousand initiatives. Indirect donations (basic foods

baskets, personal hygiene kits and humanitarian aid, in general) added up to approximately 2.9 million Reais.

Besides donations to civil society (made through public notices, invitation letters and/or direct donations), the Network’s organizations mobilize funds from other sources, including campaigns with extensive engagement capacity, reach and capillarity throughout the national territory: domestic and international philanthropic institutions; individuals; companies; public power; global cooperation, etc. So, mobilization is conceived as a partnership between funders of different kinds, since community funds and foundations have a deep-seeded knowledge of local agendas and the capacity to distribute resources, causing them to reach multiple grassroots organizations.

Based on internal surveys conducted with the members of the RFJS, three strategic lines of action were identified<sup>16</sup>: a) creation of emergency funds and donations; b) local mobilization and donation campaigns; and c) production of knowledge and communication. A number of experiences developed by the member organizations of the RFJS are described below.

##### **4.6.1 Emergency funds and donations: donating resources to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19**

On this front, lines of support stand out, which entailed the launch of project calls/competitions, actions for the direct donation of financial resources and the creation/reinforcement of specific emergency funds to fight inequalities and injustices aggravated by Covid-19.

The members of the RFJS that played a leading role in this action strategy were: Institute for Society, Population and Nature (ISPN), ELAS - Social Investment Fund, Baobá – Fund for Racial Equity, Fundo Positivo, Brazil Human Rights Fund, CASA Socio-environmental Fund, iCS – Institute for Climate and Society (iCS) and the ICOM - Instituto Comunitário da Grande Florianópolis.

<sup>16</sup> Divided to better organize the information, but, in most cases, the actions are integrated and involve multiple activities.



The coordination of the RFJS, in turn, implemented a program to support member organizations in the reinforcement of the initiatives to fight Covid-19, donating resources to develop mobilization plans and boost the donation of resources; communications; capacity reinforcement; monitoring and assessment; specific mappings; organization of experiences; consolidation of partnerships and joint actions.

#### 4.6.2 Local/territorial mobilization and donation campaigns: actors, donors and resources for direct actions with organizations and grassroots groups

The scenario of the Covid-19 pandemic brought a need for urgent action, which included mobilization efforts, donations and community engagement. These actions were not top-down welfare initiatives, since the populations affected by the crisis were protagonists in the identification of their own issues and in the elaboration of strategies to solve them, with the support of donor organizations.

The RFJS members who executed this type of action were: Casa Fluminense, ICOM, Tabôa Communitarian Strengthening Institute, Instituto Baixada Maranhense, Redes da Maré and ISPN. Casa Fluminense worked in the coordination of several donors to enable emergency

support for projects in vulnerable communities and regions lacking infrastructure within the metropolitan area (MR) of Rio de Janeiro. ICOM developed an effort to captivate, mobilize and retain local donors to work in Greater Florianópolis in order to guarantee the people's access to safe, nutritious, plentiful food, also touching on the point of food sovereignty. In turn, Tabôa distributed basic food baskets and personal hygiene kits to families residing in southern Bahia. Instituto Baixada Maranhense developed a methodology focused on hearing local populations, to “avoid establishing top-down dynamics [and using] a methodology we call “people listening”, by which we listen precisely to what they want to say,” according to its director executive. The campaign developed by Redes da Maré – in the “Complexo da Maré” community, made up of 16 “favelas” – focused on the following lines of action: food security; assistance to the homeless population; income generation; health care, access and preventive care; production and dissemination of safe information and contents, based on a coordinated communication campaign; and emergency support to artists and cultural groups.

#### 4.6.3 Communication and knowledge: information campaigns, news portals and information gathering and analysis

The members of the RFJS played a strategic role in the fight against the misinfodemic and in favor of widespread access to rights, health and Covid-19 prophylaxis.

The webpage Covid-19: Promoting Human Rights within the Context of the Pandemic, an initiative of the Brazil Fund, seeks to publicize the organizations' standings and actions; encourage donations to the Emergency Support Fund: Covid-19, which are passed on to support the work of groups and grassroots activists; and promote

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## THE POPULATIONS AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS WERE PROTAGONISTS IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF THEIR OWN ISSUES

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<sup>17</sup> Public institution to promote health and social development, generate and disseminate scientific and technological knowledge, be an agent of citizenship. These are the concepts that guide the actions of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), under the Ministry of Health, the most prominent institution of science and technology in health in Latin America



other funds and open notices to allocate resources to face the pandemic.

In 2020, Casa Fluminense, consistently with the work it has developed since its creation in the fields of information and mobilization, produced the [Map of Inequality](#), a diagnosis of the reality of the MR of Rio de Janeiro, presented in the form of 40 indicators, divided into 10 themes. Surveys such as this help to scale the scenarios faced by the population on a daily basis.

The ISPN, in turn, developed Canto da Coruja, a podcast production program targeting indigenous peoples and communities and family farmers. Interviews with representatives of the peoples, health authorities, governments and ISPN collaborators are featured constantly in the program, offering guidelines, coping strategies and political information.

Redes da Maré has also developed communication efforts, producing podcasts, news bulletins and a newspaper targeting audiences outside the “favela” – financiers, the general public, etc. – and inside the “favela”, producing content with secure sources (some in partnership with Fiocruz<sup>27</sup>), to disseminate information independently, ensuring the population’s access to knowledge about their basic rights and the pandemic in general.

Fundo Positivo, which works essentially with health, created the [Covid-19 Positive Communication](#) project. Raising awareness among community leaders about the importance of their actions to promote and defend rights, reduce health inequalities and map the problems that arose or worsened as a result of the pandemic, the project contributed to the fostering of political advocacy efforts with public managers and society in general. A set of communication tools was produced: podcasts, information cards and live presentations, which reached

beyond the public benefiting from the actions. As of September 2020, a new phase started, featuring an interview program: there were six editions with experts addressing topics connected with the pandemic.

The RFJS, in turn, also developed a series of actions to advertise the work of its members, both on its [institutional website](#) and on a [blog](#), reaching local and international audiences.

## **5 COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY AS A STRATEGY TO REINFORCE CIVIL SOCIETY TO FACE COVID-19**

Based on the analysis conducted during the course of this study, it is safe to say that civil society played a leading role in facing the pandemic and, even though it is now in a fragile, vulnerable situation, it has shown an exceptional capacity to act and react within a scenario of crisis.

However, although we do recognize the distinguished role played by civil society, there is a clear disparity between its performance and the volume of resources mobilized in the philanthropic field for the CSOs, social movements and NGOs. Reviewing the donations made within the emergency scenario using the Donation Monitor (ABCR, 2020), we find a visible gap between the resources mobilized by local philanthropy and their application to support civil society, which prompts some strategic reflections. Deboni (2020) raises some strategic questions about the destination of philanthropic resources

Have these resources been reaching the smaller, lesser-known social organizations from all regions and corners of this country? Or does the lion’s share of those resources continue to reach only the bigger, better-known NGOs? Are those resources also being directed to help cover those organizations’ fixed and institutional costs? Or are they being

used solely to buy donations, food baskets and supplies? After the pandemic, will those social organizations that act/acted in the mediation of those donations be reinforced or weakened? Will they be able to keep their teams, physical spaces, infrastructures?

As the analysis conducted during the course of this study has shown, **community philanthropy** requires recognition, as it contributes with a vision to act in the social reality, in view of promoting the development of efforts and engagements, reinforcing voices and the power of the communities and their actors in search of solutions to existing problems. So, it is an approach that seeks to challenge and subvert the hierarchy of power and transfer it to communities, seen as the rightful protagonists in terms of the decision-making processes and the development of actions to fight inequality and ensure social justice. The matter of power is established as a key, priority issue, considering that, in the donor-beneficiary relationship, there is no intent to empower or assign authority to groups and CSOs, but rather to recognize the power they already have in their ability to seek solutions independently and in their power to act.

Grantmaking is a key strategy within the context of community philanthropy, as it is through the donation of resources that civil society seeks to strengthen and catalyze community action, acting as a bridge between different groups based on the mobilization of assets and the building of trust and responsibility, thereby establishing bottom-up dynamics.

Surely, to move forward with the construction of a local philanthropy that effectively incorporates the approaches of community philanthropy, it is crucial to

install a “decolonizing shift”, abandoning the colonialist perspective, breaking away from structures and knowledge inherited from the colonization process. Decolonialism admits that there is an imposition of knowledge from the predominantly white and male global North, to the detriment of the knowledge of the black population of Africa and diasporas, women, native peoples, the LGBTI+ population, among other political minorities and groups. So, it is a matter of redefining and tropicalizing<sup>18</sup> the concept of community philanthropy in the light of the local dynamics, understanding that it takes on dimensions and meanings determined by their forms of action and the different socio-political contexts.

At this moment, social movements and community organization mechanisms are more important than ever. There is a window of opportunity for foundations and wealthy individuals to act as catalysts and help build a future that can take advantage of the time of crisis to face some of the social and environmental problems that, until a short time ago, seemed impossible to face on a systemic level.

This is the time to recognize the importance of civil society and to reinforce it by contributing flexible resources. Changing the action plan of local philanthropy grows crucial within the context of the pandemic (and post-pandemic), to enable the granting of unlimited donations to trusted partners so that they can face the crisis situation alongside the communities, recognizing the work that the grassroots social organizations have developed in places where the most vulnerable, marginalized people were and will continue to be most affected by the crisis.

18 For a more in-depth look at the tropicalization of concepts, specifically associated with the field of philanthropy, consult the document prepared by the Network (2020).

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