

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



CatComm
CATALYTIC COMMUNITIES

RioOnWatch

COMMUNITY REPORTING ON RIO

INTRODUCTION:

This was an important year for *RioOnWatch*. As Brazil continues to make global headlines for alarming patterns in human rights abuses and deforestation, Rio de Janeiro has become something of an epicenter for backward policy and violent rhetoric. Unprecedented levels of police violence and attacks on favela communities in 2019 have forced us to step up our game, doubling down on our support for community journalists including working to ensure safety.

As part of this effort, we have expanded our operations. *RioOnWatch* now has a dedicated social media team, tasked with ensuring real-time updates and highlighting favela-focused content across major platforms. *RioOnWatch* now consistently receives over 50,000 monthly readers from 169 countries. This past year we averaged 350,000 people who had contact with us each month through our website, mailing lists and social media.

In our efforts to improve their safety and grow their voices, we have strengthened ties between favela community journalists and foreign correspondents based in Rio. Cognizant that international media outlets play a leading role in shaping global public opinion about favelas, in 2019 we launched regular meet-ups. Networking between the two groups has helped provide favela perspectives a direct line to global media.

Meanwhile, we have remained fast and true to our post-Olympic editorial line. In 2020 *RioOnWatch* will turn ten. The platform is so named because it was founded as Rio Olympics Neighborhood Watch, a site for favela perspectives on the urban transformations taking place in the lead-up to Rio 2016. That founding focus meant that

our early years were taken up with two-thirds reporting on human rights violations. In 2016, however, we set a new editorial line with a goal of reversing that statistic.

For three years now we have increased the percentage of *positive*, solutions journalism on the platform, focusing less on describing problems than on proposing solutions. In 2019 we achieved the goal set out at the beginning of our transition away from a focus on violations reporting to proactive, propositional reporting: 66% of our coverage profiled community solutions, described current public debates seeking solutions, or provided necessary research and analysis to understanding Rio's predicament. Meanwhile, 34% continues to maintain a fundamental ongoing spotlight on the abuses and counterproductive policies that plague Rio. And this shift was accompanied by a 50% increase in readership in 2019.

In 2020 we intend to continue this trend: presenting proposed paths through Rio's historic struggles that can also be instructive to communities and cities elsewhere in the world. We are bracing for damages during this year's summer rains following minimal investment in the infrastructure recommendations made to policy-makers after last summer. We will be closely following the battle for Rio's municipal elections. And we will be making connections back to Rio during next year's Summer Games in Tokyo. But all of this will be done while we also continue upping the ante on proactive, solution-oriented news.

On behalf of a more equitable, creative, and empowering urban future for Rio and other cities around the world, thank you!

MISSION

To transform the narrative of Rio de Janeiro's favelas by counteracting external, mainstream representations and focusing instead on community assets, resident perspectives, academic research and on-the-ground documentation and analysis of history, policy and human rights abuses.

TEAM

Ava Hoffman | Chloe Villalobos | Clara Ferraz | Edmund Ruge
Luisa Fenizola | Roseli Franco | Thainã de Medeiros | Theresa Williamson

WHAT WE DO

- **Report** favela perspectives, community events, debates and direct actions
- **Profile** community solutions, favela residents and organizers
- **Analyze** public policies impacting favelas and marginalized groups
- **Introduce** and compare policies, models and organizing strategies from around the world
- **Deepen** understanding of critical topics through in-depth series and calls for community submissions
- **Translate** all content between Portuguese and English
- **Promote** community media and publish articles by favela journalists
- **Organize** regular support group sessions with favela journalists
- **Keep** a pulse on favela events
- **Check** in on safety of community journalists
- **Engage** international correspondents with favela journalists at biannual meet-ups
- **Aggregate** favela news—from community to international—across social media
- **Publish** bi-weekly bilingual favela news email digests
- **Sharpen** international reporting on favelas offering context, contacts and story ideas
- **Facilitate** research on favelas by providing context, contacts and insight into trends
- **Provide** a private international solidarity update to concerned supporters
- **Host** visits from international universities in partnership with community groups

RioOnWatch Editorial Line:

1. **Documenting favela residents' views of and for public policy** so as to inform municipal decision-making and international development professionals.
2. **Publishing favela-specific columns and opinion pieces** written by residents so as to mainstream favela perspectives on their own communities.
3. **Highlighting organizing strategies, community solutions and green technologies** from favelas in Rio and around the world so as to inform and inspire collaborative and sustainable grassroots development initiatives.
4. **Popularizing urban planning concepts** so citizens can develop their communities more effectively.
5. **Observing the Olympic legacy and monitoring** international and domestic press coverage of favelas so as to maintain and build on the legacy of RioOnWatch as an Olympic watchdog news site and offer lessons for cities contemplating or hosting mega-events.
6. **Analyzing parallels and showing solidarity** for informal communities around the world so as to establish connections, networks of support, and a sense of common experience and purpose across traditionally isolated communities worldwide (and in partnership with groups or sites similar to CatComm/RioOnWatch).
7. **Continuing to analyze, introduce and inform local policy** and social debates on Rio so as to dramatically strengthen the contextual understanding and compassion necessary to engender larger political shifts that would benefit the entire society.



OUR WORK

FIRST EVER MEET-UPS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENTS AND FAVELA JOURNALISTS

On November 7, 2019, *RioOnWatch* held its second Favela Journalist + International Correspondent Meet-Up, welcoming thirty reporters, including favela community journalists and communicators from organizations including *Maré 0800*, *Maré de Notícias*, *Fórum Grita Baixada*, *Observatório de Favelas*, *Favela Vertical*, *Marginal*, *Agência de Notícias das Favelas*, *Mulheres de Frente*, and *FavelaDaRocinha.com*, from the North, South and West Zones of Rio, and Greater Rio's Baixada Fluminense region. Among international correspondents and journalists were representatives from *Babel Press*, *Agence France-Presse*, *Upstream*, *Lonely Planet*,

Mediapart/Radio France, *CNN*, *Deutsche Welle*, and *The Intercept Brasil*, as well as researchers from the Fluminense Federal University and Pomona College, and a representative from the Consulate of the United States in Rio de Janeiro.

The first ever meet-up had taken place in June, with other outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *NPR*, *Die Zeit*, *France24 TV*, *BBC*, *El Mundo*, *Associated Press*, *Sputnik*, *Okay Africa*, *The Root* and *The Rio Times*, along with community outlets *Fala Roça*, *Coletivo Papo Reto*, *Núcleo Piratininga de Comunicação*, *FotoGuerrilha*, *Viva VK*, *Data_Labe* and *Blogueiras Negras*.

The evening's meeting began with a round of introductions. Participants were invited to share an article they were particularly proud of in recent months. These ranged from interviews with the families of victims of violence, to profiles on black psychologist collectives in the Baixada, to Brazil-US connections in the pro-gun movement.

Participants were then separated into groups and given a printed English-language article on favelas. International and community journalists together analyzed the articles, commenting on their strong and weak points. One article placed a deterministic emphasis on violence without mentioning solutions or the resistance of favela residents. Another was well-received for its inclusion of residents' perspectives and quotes, supporting research, and inclusion of the word genocide to refer to the systematic killings of black youth.

Last, participants engaged in a brainstorming session on possible topics for coverage. One raised the possibility of producing co-authored articles by community journalists *and* international correspondents. Among suggested topics, the group highlighted Christmas preparations in the favelas, stories of

“Enjoyed hearing the point of view of community journalists on the histories of their own neighborhoods”

Foreign correspondent





university students from the favelas, the street festival economy, summer activities in the favelas, entrepreneurship, how residents will be counted in next year's census, and stories of the elderly. Asked about potential editor-viable topics, international journalists responded that positive, resident-focused stories are in demand, and that stories on the favela economy, soccer, and music would all be welcome.

On leaving, foreign correspondents reported they “enjoyed hearing the point of view of community journalists on the histories of their own neighborhoods” as well as “different pitches” and “community journalist perspectives on international coverage.” Several favela journalists reported maintaining contact with the international correspondents they had met, working with them to provide leads and shift pervading narratives on their communities. One community journalist praised the meet-up for facilitating a debate on the “place of the favela in [foreign] articles,” and several others reported conversing with other favela journalists they had heard of but not had the chance to meet in person.

***RioOnWatch* Reporting Policy**

***RioOnWatch* aims to engender a more accurate picture of favelas**, their contributions to the city, and the potential of favela-led community development in Rio and around the world. We therefore work carefully to guarantee that everything we publish serves the featured communities and residents and serves to enhance the public debate on favelas.

WE...

- **Take a ‘do no harm’ approach** which means following the lead of favela/community organizers in what we cover and how we cover it. We recognize that the situation we are working in is much more complex than we can possibly imagine, and we should do whatever we can to ensure we do not harm the lives of those we are attempting to help.

- **Prioritize stories, events, and initiatives** for which favela residents request coverage, prioritize perspectives that have been historically excluded or marginalized in media, and prioritize stories that fill gaps in other publications’ coverage.

- **Actively communicate** *RioOnWatch*'s goals to community contacts and encourage input, collaboration, and critical feedback.

- **Explicitly ask** interviewees—before and after our interviews—if there are parts they do not want published, and respect their wishes.

- **Seek permission** from community-based organizers before covering their events.

- **Send articles to the featured community** individuals or organizations for their confirmation prior to publication in delicate situations or on request.

- **Make reasonable edits** or in critical cases remove an article even after publication if requested by a featured community member or organization.



PEER EXCHANGE

ANTI-EVICTION LEADERS FROM RIO FAVELAS VISIT HOUSING RIGHTS GROUPS IN NEW YORK

From June 18-23, three favela anti-eviction activists from Rio de Janeiro, whose struggles have been thoroughly documented on *RioOnWatch*, participated in an international activist exchange with housing rights groups in New York City thanks to a partnership with Pratt Institute environmental systems professor Leonel Ponce. Zoraide Gomes (Cris) from Prazeres, Emilia Souza from Horto, and Maria da Penha from Vila Autodromo each led successful efforts at stopping evictions in their communities, in whole or in part, and traveled to New York to share their stories with urban planners at the Planners Network conference, along with a number of the city's advocacy groups.

They visited with Bronx-based Nos Quedamos, Justice for Families, and Friends of Brook Park; in Manhattan, they had a deep dive in New York activist history at the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space, visited with leaders and members of the Cooper Square Community Land Trust,

“The United States has the same problems that we do”

Maria da Penha
from Vila Autodromo

**“On this trip, we
had the chance
to experience the
globalization of
exclusion”**

Emilia Souza from Horto

and learned about the state of homelessness in the city with Picture the Homeless; in Brooklyn they visited with Sure We Can, and attended the launch of a Jacobin magazine issue on housing rights at Verso Books.

Cris’ story of stopping evictions through aerial mapping which identified trash build-up as the primary culprit, Emilia’s story of dedicated resistance in a 200-year-old community under pressure from Brazil’s Globo media conglomerate, and Penha’s story of standing up to Brazil’s largest real estate developers adjacent to the Olympic Park inspired organizers and planners everywhere they went.

More than telling their own stories, however, what marked the trip for the group were the surprising similarities they observed between their own experiences and those of New Yorkers. “The United States has the same problems that we do,” said Penha. “They’re no different.” “On this trip, we had the chance to experience the globalization of exclusion,” said Emilia.



**READ ABOUT THEIR
THREE COMMUNITIES AT:**

Horto:

rioonwatch.org/?tag=horto

Prazeres:

rioonwatch.org/?tag=prazeres

Vila Autódromo:

rioonwatch.org/?tag=vila-autodromo



THIS YEAR IN NUMBERS

50% INCREASE
IN READERSHIP
in 2019

66% COVERING POSITIVE NEWS:
community solutions and proactive
information for social change

34% COVERING RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

202
RioOnWatch
articles
published
in 2019

1886
individual
articles since
May 2010

3229
total published
articles (**English**
+ **Portuguese**)
since May 2010

9
**COMMUNITY
REPORTERS**

44
**SOLIDARITY
REPORTERS**

36
**VOLUNTEER
TRANSLATORS**



54%
of articles by
solidarity reporters;
29% by
community reporters;
17% translated
from other sources

51,000
**MONTHLY
READERS**

In 2019, **60%** readers
from **Rio de Janeiro;** **40%**
from **215 countries and territories**



An average **350,000 PEOPLE**
reached per month through our website,
mailing lists, and social media



15,425
**FACEBOOK
FANS**

950
favela news posts
aggregated on Facebook



**4 FAVELA
JOURNALIST**
group meetings

**2 INTERNATIONAL
+ FAVELA JOURNALIST**
meet-ups



OUR WORK

HOW ONE COMMUNITY JOURNALIST'S REPORTING **IS MAKING WAVES**

Thábara Garcia, a community reporter for *RioOnWatch* who writes about the region where she lives, in Greater Rio de Janeiro's Baixada Fluminense region, has noted the direct impact of her articles time and time again. When Garcia profiled Ana Silva, a local mother struggling to raise twins born with dwarfism, she was immediately contacted by major newspaper *Extra*, whose journalists went on to write an extended feature on Silva. "I was so proud and shocked!" says Garcia.

Another article of hers on youth film collective BaixadaCine in the peripheral city of Belford Roxo caught the eye of students taking their college entrance exams (one noted she had used the piece to answer a question on access to movie theaters) as well as lawmakers: Garcia was contacted by a congressional aid hoping to write legislation spurring the construction of a movie theater in Belford Roxo.

Garcia reflects on her collaboration with *RioOnWatch*: "I admire the network-building and mediation that CatComm, through *RioOnWatch*, conducts in the territories, together with its community reporters, in the (re)construction of new paradigms and narratives on the favelas and peripheries," she says. "*RioOnWatch* is essential to this work."



READ THÁBARA'S WORK HERE:

<https://www.rioonwatch.org/?writer=thabara-garcia>

RioOnWatch does a beautiful job of correcting the typical first-world elitist biases of most English-language reporting on Rio's favelas. With on-the-ground in-depth reporting by people who understand the complexities of favela life and the policies that constrain equal access to education, health, urban services and public safety, RioOnWatch shines a light on what is inaccessible to English-speaking audiences.

ELIZABETH LEEDS

Founder and Honorary President,
Brazilian Forum for Public Safety

I admire the professional and respectful way that RioOnWatch brings to the forefront topics and people that have been [traditionally] marginalized.

CARLA SOUZA

Rocinha favela
community reporter

RioOnWatch provides vital insights into favela society and amplifies the voice of residents far beyond their communities and out across the Portuguese and English-speaking worlds. No other organisation does this as effectively.

JONATHAN WATTS

Global Environment Editor, *The Guardian*

Reporting for RioOnWatch was truly a life-changing experience for me, but CatComm's work was all the more apparent to me after leaving the organization. It is one of the only groups that is giving voice to some of the most important movements in Rio. It does so in a way that lifts community perspectives above all else and empowers those who are doing work on the ground. In this tumultuous time, their work is vital in supporting community groups who in turn support thousands of residents who are being targeted or neglected by the powers that be.

TYLER STROBL

former RioOnWatch Land Rights Intern, now pursuing his MA in Public Policy, Duke University

You give us readers a unique window into real people in real life daily situations. Thank you for the in-depth analysis of people and issues which are not visible to most observers, especially we who are far away. Rio is a microcosm of urban living worldwide, the joys and tragedies. RioOnWatch's observation of Rio can help us understand other places of great concern.

OLIVER DAVIDSON

International Disaster
and Development Specialist

I LOVE translating for RioOnWatch: it allows me to keep supporting CatComm from the UK; it keeps me involved in the political situation in Rio and keeps my Portuguese ticking over. A win-win situation :) Keep up the great work.

SARAH JACOBS

former RioOnWatch intern,
currently working in Oxford, UK

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

RioOnWatch Dissected by Cambridge Researcher

Research by former *RioOnWatch* editor, Cerianne Robertson, published in 2019, examined the role of *RioOnWatch* and the Popular Committee on the World Cup and Olympics in building critical counternarratives about the Rio 2016 Olympics. It traces how these two initiatives both documented the negative impacts of the city's Olympics preparations, but also asserted that media narratives were serving to hide,

misrepresent, or even justify human rights violations and the construction of an exclusive city project. Robertson's report identifies five key strategies for advancing counternarratives within mainstream media and serves as a "how-to" manual for those looking to learn lessons from *RioOnWatch*'s approach.

READ THE MULTIMEDIA REPORT:

bit.ly/StrategicMediaRio

RECOGNITION

RioOnWatch was selected to participate in the gallery of projects featured as part of the "Accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals Local Projects Challenge." The site was launched by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in November 2019 at the Urban Thinkers Campus at Columbia University.

VISIT: bit.ly/LPCRioOnWatch

LOCAL PROJECT CHALLENGE

Center for Sustainable
Urban Development
EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU TO OUR 2019 FAVELA COMMUNITY REPORTERS:

Bárbara Dias, Beatriz Carvalho, Carla Souza, Fábio Leon, Fernanda Gomes, Jota Marques, Miriane Peregrino, Thábara Garcia, Thaís Cavalcante

THANK YOU TO OUR INSTITUTIONAL
AND COMMUNITY **REPORTING PARTNERS**



THANK YOU TO OUR 2019 **INTERNS** AND **SOLIDARITY REPORTERS**

Abby Hanna, Adam Talbot, Agathe Robin, Alix Vadot, Antoine Horenbeek, Ben Bildsten, Camilla Piccolo, Carolina Medina, Cerianne Robertson, Chauncie Bigler, Chero Eliassi Sarzeli, Colin Andrew, Daiana Contini, Daisy Longden, Desirée Poets, Eli Nemzer, Emma Bergman, Felipe Litsek, Hannah Rodin Bome, Jessica Goodenough, Joe Brandon, Jorge Sanchez Garcia, Jorge Santana, Katja Majcen, Laura Bunn, Mareen Butter, Maria Luiza Belo, Nadine Terasa, Nasir Grissom, Patricia Basile, Priscilla Mayrink, Rachel Mucha, Renata Queiroz, Robin Huppe, Sharonya Vadakattu, Shawn Provost, Simon Yang, Sofia Bazin, Stefanie Bessler, Suzanne Caflisch, Tara Nelson, Thomas Blondal, Tyler Strobl, Zaynah Karem

THANK YOU TO OTHER **WRITERS FEATURED** AND **TRANSLATED ON RIOONWATCH**

Alba Valéria Mendonça, Aline Lima, Angelina Nunes, Bruno Sousa, Carolina A. Miranda, Cecília Olliveira, Cristina Alves, Edu Carvalho, Elvira Lobato, Felipe Betim, Flávia Medeiros, Gizele Martins, Gregory Scruggs, Jessica Santos, Joel Luiz Costa, John Manuel Andriote, Júlia Dias Carneiro, Leonardo Coelho, Line Algoed, Ludmilla de Lima, Luís Eduardo Macedo, Marcela Lisboa, Maria Luiza Belo, Mariana Assis, Mariana Praça, Mariana Simões, Marina Lopes, Mayara Ximenez, Michel Silva, Neuza Nascimento, Oliver Steunkel, Pedro Prado, Poliana Monteiro, Rafael Chaves, Rafael Soares, Raull Santiago, Regina Eleutério, Steve Dubb, Terrence McCoy, Thamyra Thamara de Araújo, Washington Fajardo

THANK YOU TO OUR **VOLUNTEER TRANSLATION TEAM**

Abby Cramer, Camila Moraes, Caroline Quintanilha, Carolyn Oliveira, Cheyne Bull, Chris Fradkin, Desiree Poets, Dylan Blau Edelstein, Elfie Lawson, Felipe Moretti, Fernanda Lacerda, Francine Oliveira, Gabriel Martins, Geovanna Giannini, Habib Msallem, Helena Bulgarelli, Jiselle Steele, Joana Chetwynd, Júlia Hara Medeiros, Larissa Troitino, Laura Bachmann, Lee Weingast, Leila Lak, Lia Matos Viegas, Lucas Costa, Maria Fernanda Godinho, Marina Hennies, Patricia Gomes, Peter Edwards, Rodrigo Hiroito Nishizawa Soares, Sabrina Fantoni, Sarah Jacobs, Sharon Gogar, Sharonya Vadakattu, Sofia Kawall, Tara Mittelberg

THANK YOU TO OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN COMMUNITY REPORTING MEETINGS

Buba Aguiar, Eliane Salles, Gabriela Anastácia, Gilberto Vieira, Gracilene Firmino, Jota Marques, Michele Silva, Naldinho Lourenço, Nyl de Sousa, Pedro Lira, Rafael Oliveira, Raull Santiago, Salvino Oliveira Barbosa, Samuel Lima, Tati Lima, Thiago Soares de Lima, Vinícius Pierre

AND A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO **OUR READERS!**

LEARN MORE

Email: contact@rioonwatch.org | **Site:** www.rioonwatch.org

YouTube: tv.rioonwatch.org | **Facebook:** facebook.com/rioonwatch

Twitter: twitter.com/rioonwatch | **Instagram:** instagram.com/rioonwatch