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RIO DE JANEIRO'S COVID-19 IN FAVELAS UNIFIED DASHBOARD TO LAUNCH JULY 9

Initiative unites diverse peripheral collectives and civil society organizations and benefits from a network of trusted favela-based rapporteurs across the city

July 7, 2020—Even with extreme underreporting, Brazil is [today the second country with the most confirmed Covid-19 cases](#) and also confirmed deaths. Rio de Janeiro is second only to São Paulo as Brazil's hotspot of Covid-19 deaths. However, the death rate in Rio is significantly higher than São Paulo's among confirmed cases. And Rio de Janeiro's favelas are the epicenter of that infection.

Since Covid-19 reached Rio de Janeiro in March, the city has seen a growth curve with no sign of letting up. The impact is particularly felt by favela residents where a long list of factors all dramatically increase the chance of community transmission of the virus and death: historic public sector neglect, insufficient water supplies, limited resources, dense living conditions, poor access to information, the inability to forego work, insufficient access to testing and medical care, high comorbidity, among others.

Meanwhile, Brazil's leadership has downplayed the pandemic. Testing is grossly insufficient with two week wait times and a month's lag for results. Insufficient and tardy economic support has made it impossible for most favela residents to self-isolate. Many—beginning with national and local authorities—are relying on a misguided concept of herd immunity, even though [scientists have made it clear this is not an option for Covid-19 at this stage](#) of the pandemic. Authorities have in the past week, despite the growing infection rates, reopened the economy, including bars and restaurants.

The result is a crisis, with growing spread yet no real sense of how grave the situation is or where the hotspots are.

Favela Civil Society Responds to Covid-19

In this context, the responsibility for prevention and mitigation has been left to civil society. Given their neighborhoods' extreme vulnerability to the pandemic, favela-based organizations in particular have [risen to the task](#). Since March, hundreds of community groups have implemented [widespread communications campaigns](#) using everything from loudspeakers and graffiti, to WhatsApp and [podcasts](#), to inform residents about the virus. They have launched crowdfunding campaigns and drawn on their networks to provide thousands upon thousands of basic food baskets to those hit hardest by the economic shutdown. They have installed public sinks where water access is insufficient and they have been publishing daily on community news portals and social media feeds about the unfolding pandemic in their territories.

A handful of data-savvy favela-based groups, fully aware of the role of data in saving lives, have also set up their own dashboards with community monitoring of the illness, to try and overcome the data deficit. Community news outlet *Voz das Comunidades* updates a [dashboard](#) daily with information from a dozen favelas, based on public data. Community NGO Redes da Maré tallies, through direct channels with residents, suspected and confirmed cases and launches a weekly report called *De Olho no Corona!*

Now, dozens of organizations are coming together to more effectively respond to the data vacuum.

The Data Problem

Rio de Janeiro, and Brazil, are only counting test-based confirmations on their public dashboards, despite very low testing rates. Brazilian authorities are also discouraging the counting of cases among those with comorbidities as Covid-19 even if the immediate cause of death was Covid-19. There is no public information on suspected cases as is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Thus, a majority of Covid-19 cases are going unreported, and a great many deaths as well. This situation is particularly grave in favelas. [One recent study in just four favelas](#) projected that 90,200 people had been infected who never appeared on public dashboards.

Whereas the [WHO uses a three-tier system](#) for counting and reporting Covid-19 cases (suspected, probable, and confirmed), with only the "confirmed" tier relying on laboratory test results to confirm the presence of the virus, Brazil uses a two-tier system, counting only suspected and confirmed cases, but placing only confirmed cases on public dashboards. Since [at most 1 in 10 cases](#) is actually tested for in Brazil, and this rate is lower in favelas (which have [30 times more cases than officially registered](#)), the policy of only showing confirmed cases on public dashboards puts the public at grave risk due to lack of information to make sound decisions, whether at the household, community or city level.

Whereas data on all three (suspected, probable and confirmed cases) are needed for effective prevention and policy-making, in Rio de Janeiro we only have access to data on confirmed cases. It has been made [clear by the WHO](#) and [countries that are conducting the most accurate counts](#) of the virus, that in the context of the shortages in testing capacity, counting suspected cases through the careful observation of symptoms becomes absolutely critical.

On top of these significant issues, nowhere is the city of Rio de Janeiro collecting information by favela, even though 24% of the city's population lives in some 1000 favela neighborhoods and their diverse characteristics put them at a much greater risk of contagion than other areas of the city. One large favela with high infection rates, Rio das Pedras with its 140,000 residents, is showing up with very low rates in public data counts because their cases are being counted in datasets corresponding to the larger region of the city of which they are a part (Itanhangá). It is estimated, however, that [25% of the community has been infected](#).

Introducing the Covid-19 in Favelas Unified Dashboard

In response to this massive data problem and inspired by the initiatives of *Voz das Comunidades*, *Redes da Maré* and other community groups conducting local data counts, a growing coalition of favela-based and favela-supporting civil society organizations have come together around the Covid-19 in Favelas Dashboard, being launched today.

Local favela advocacy organization Catalytic Communities (CatComm), which has supported favela-based organizers for twenty years, partnered with Esri to realize the dashboard, available at www.favela.info. The Unified dashboard works to seek out data on probable and confirmed cases (combined in orange) and deaths (in red) from the

above-stated community sources, dozens of favela-based rapporteurs across the city, government-published dashboards, and news clippings. It also allows for [residents to report their symptoms directly](#) using a symptom-checking algorithm, the results of which also appear on the dashboard (in yellow). The dashboard's primary goal is to support favela-based prevention efforts in informing their own residents and pressuring for needed public policies, while also providing a more accurate view of the impact of the pandemic on favelas. As residents add symptom data to the platform, hotspots of contagion will become visible, informing areas which require greater attention and stay-at-home outreach efforts. And as trusted community-based rapporteurs and other sources produce greater accuracy than publicly-available data and do so by each favela, a clearer view of the true reach of the pandemic across Rio's favelas will emerge. In the process of developing the dashboard, organizers are also improving on the public favela map made available by the City of Rio, by addressing inaccuracies observed by favela rapporteurs as they report their Covid-19 data.

Though civil society is limited in what it can do in the context of historic and accumulated, multi-generational public sector neglect in favela territories, the Unified Covid-19 in Favelas dashboard is one more tool in our collective tool belt.

PRESS LAUNCH

Please join our press conference (in Portuguese) to launch the dashboard on **Thursday, July 9, 2020 from 14-15:00** in Rio de Janeiro (GMT-3) [on Zoom here](#) using Meeting ID: 829 5123 0308 and Password: 522741.

CREDITS

Realization: [Catalytic Communities](#) (CatComm)

Project Partners: [Coletivo Conexões Periféricas-RP](#) | [Data_Labe](#) | [Fala Roça](#) | [Favela Vertical](#) | [Fórum Grita Baixada](#) | [Frente de Mobilização da Maré](#) | [Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica em Saúde-ICICT/Fiocruz](#) | [Mulheres de Frente](#) | [Observatório de Favelas](#) | [PerifaConnection](#) | [Redes da Maré](#) | [SOS Providência](#) | [TETO](#) | [Voz das Comunidades](#)

Development and updates: [Esri - Environmental Systems Research Institute](#)

Demographic data: [Prefeitura Rio e IBGE 2010](#)

Integration technology: [Integromat](#)

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