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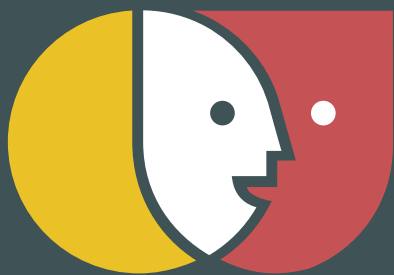
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Resisting *together*



A foundation that has been able to respond to the urgent issues of its time

By Ana Valéria Araújo*

Brazil Human Rights Fund was created on the basis of a solid original premise. In the mid-2000s, the need arose to build an organisation that would provide support stemming from the experience of those working in the field in Brazil, one that would share actions in a way that would allow activists and social movements to move forward with their social justice-related agendas in this country.

Fifteen years on we are pleased to see how the foundation has progressed and to see that the original idea has proven to be efficient and has guided work that consistently responds to the most urgent demands of our time, while also looking to the future.

Initially, we supported just over 20 projects a year through a general call for applications focused on combatting institutional violence and discrimination which embraced a formidable variety of causes under the umbrella of human rights. So, since the outset, a multiplicity of

We have always provided support to collectives with projects that play an important role in promoting human rights in their own territories

ideas and viewpoints have reached us, reflecting the diversity of Brazilian life and the many challenges and approaches to tackling problems, all independently formed and based on real-life experiences of daily life.

We have managed to reach places around Brazil that other support systems have not, because we have total trust in the ability of activists and grassroots groups to create their own relevant, effective strategies to tackle the rights violations

that impact on their communities. We have always provided support to collectives with projects that play an important role in promoting human rights in their own territories and who are focused on their local realities, but who have little or no access to sources of funding.

We have simplified the relationship between those providing and those receiving support, with the focus of this exchange centring around caring for people and resources, without relinquishing transparency. We have invested in monitoring, accompanying projects, creating opportunities for articulation between groups and for strengthening resource management skills. Our team have travelled around the country to talk to a large number of projects and organisations, in the environments where they live and practice resistance. Over the years we have built up a two-way relationship of open, attentive listening, in the field of human rights.

This capacity for listening can be seen in our strategy of calls for applications for specific

agendas that, over time, have come to be published in parallel with the general call for applications. We supported the mobilisation of organised civil society for the right to the city and against disappropriation and urban gentrification at the time of big sporting events in the country during the 2010s. We address human trafficking and violence against youths living in the peripheries. We became involved with investigative journalism when fake news first started to emerge and to reveal its powers of political influence. We have strengthened strategic litigation and we handle criminal justice. We work on tackling racism at the grassroots level of society, on discrimination and violence that affect the LGBTQIA+ community and on the rights of the indigenous peoples.

In addition to specific calls for applications, our capacity for listening has led to our providing support in dozens of emergency situations, when aid was needed to save the lives of human rights defenders and those around them and to support urgent denouncements and the protection of land rights in the Brazilian Amazon. Emergency funds, including those for indigenous peoples, are a recent and much needed strategy.

The Rio Doce Programme is also relatively recent. In its work as an expert advisor to the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, Brazil Fund supports the participation and the struggle of the people affected by slurry resulting from the Fundão dam burst, in Minas Gerais, in the process of ensuring full reparation for them for damages incurred.

Insofar as it is possible to make predictions based on the current situation, we are also looking to the future. This is a visionary point of view, but it is also pragmatic. Work that is already in progress will be strengthened by means of partnerships that will continue into the coming years. The first of these is with the National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Quilombola Communities (Conaq), with activities aimed at reinforcing their infrastructure and fostering the defence of the rights of the quilombola community. The second one is with the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (Apib) and the Coordination of the Indigenous Organisations of the Brazilian

Amazon (Coiab). They urgently require support to defend the rights of the indigenous peoples. Both these agendas are of concern to all Brazilians as they embrace issues that are pertinent today: food security and environmental conservation.

It is worthy of note that the growth in Brazil Fund's framework has always been a direct result of the strength of its capacity to increase its budget, continuously and consistently, without setbacks. This is also thanks to the activists and leaders,

As it completes 15 years of activities, Brazil Fund is proud and happy to have supported over 920 projects

working on a variety of human rights agendas, who have participated in the foundation's governing bodies since the beginning. These bodies, that set Brazil Fund apart, were designed to guarantee that there would be people with a profound understanding of the central causes of the fight for social justice in this country, at the management and decision-making level. Until now, about 50 people have participated in the foundation's committees and managerial positions, in a voluntary capacity. These people have played a fundamental role in the journey of human rights in Brazil.

Clearly, a journey of 15 years would not be without its challenges. One of the most important ones has been the widespread mobilisation of Brazilian society to support projects for the defence of rights. Fundraising by Brazil Fund has grown significantly and making it into a tool to sustain the foundation, also by mobilising resources in the country, continues to be a daily activity of creativity and persistence. This goes hand in hand with our efforts to promote philanthropy for social justice which is another relevant area of our work and the source of strategic partnerships focused on creating a culture that is: favourable to human rights; capable

of understanding the importance of a civil society working to defend rights and as a consequence able to support and mobilise resources to further strengthen the role of civil society.

As it completes 15 years of activities, Brazil Fund is proud and happy to have supported over 920 projects.

Mass incarceration and state violence carried out in attacks by police forces against poor black communities on the peripheries, under the guise of a public security policy, are regarded as urgent human rights matters. As such, we have been working for almost a decade on specific support for organisations focused on criminal justice.

Tackling racism is a matter that has been included in our lines of support since the first call for applications in 2007. However, over time the force of this debate in Brazilian society revealed a need for specific calls for applications to support grassroots anti-racism organisations, run by black people. Until now there have been two specific calls for applications, with a third one in the pipeline.

The urgent issue of attacks on human rights defenders in the country, threats to the lives and safety of these people and the criminalisation of the work of defending rights has been the driver behind the creation of support strategies to tackle this risk. The focus on the safety of the people who defend rights is currently one of Brazil Fund's central agendas.

These three themes, plus the ubiquitous Covid-19 virus, which has caused profound changes in organised civil society and has led to new priorities for the foundation, are the main topics of this issue, **Resisting together**. The objective of this publication is to tell the stories behind these agendas and to show some of the results of the work of the grassroots organisations that have contributed to the struggle for social justice, with Brazil Fund's support.

We would like to say a few words on the concept of results. Brazil Fund's support to grassroots organisations has the central objective of

mobilising people whose rights have been violated and providing the means for them to gain strength as the protagonists of their own causes. Our purpose is to create the conditions for them to publicly speak about, explain and defend their proposals and to find their own way to construct solutions in their territories, from the point of view of the community.

In this sense, pertinent results and the benchmarks of successful projects are seen when there is: increased leadership; the emergence of new collectives; improved organisational skills; the formation of discussion networks; cooperation between organisations and solidarity between people. Over time, causes gain ground, more far-reaching social impact and the capacity for advocacy with decision-making bodies through a combination of this broad range of initiatives. This is how they go on to create waves of change.

The work and results of thirty organisations are presented in the pages of this publication. They have all received support from Brazil Fund, some more than once. The publication also reveals how it is also possible to make an impact with small-scale support.

Finally, real life events show us that human rights are never totally guaranteed and a crisis can change everything. We are seeing this in Brazil today. Rights are constantly being dismantled, systematically denied or withdrawn.

However, it is worth remembering that the defence of human rights does not follow a linear path. The pace of the struggle is both urgent and unique. The strengthening of democracy happens through far-reaching participation and dialogue. This takes time and demands persistence and resilience.

The collective initiatives supported by Brazil Fund over the past 15 years have broadened the horizons of democracy and a diverse range of proposals for a future with more social justice has emerged.

Brazil Fund will continue to support small, medium and large human rights organisations, groups



Pertinent results and the benchmarks of successful projects are seen when there is: increased leadership; the emergence of new collectives; improved organisational skills; the formation of discussion networks; cooperation between organisations and solidarity between people

and collectives throughout the country and now the foundation has even more baggage, experience and conviction.

We invite you all to consider the relevance of this work and to join us in the struggle. [S](#)



***Ana Valéria Araújo is the executive director at Brazil Human Rights Fund**

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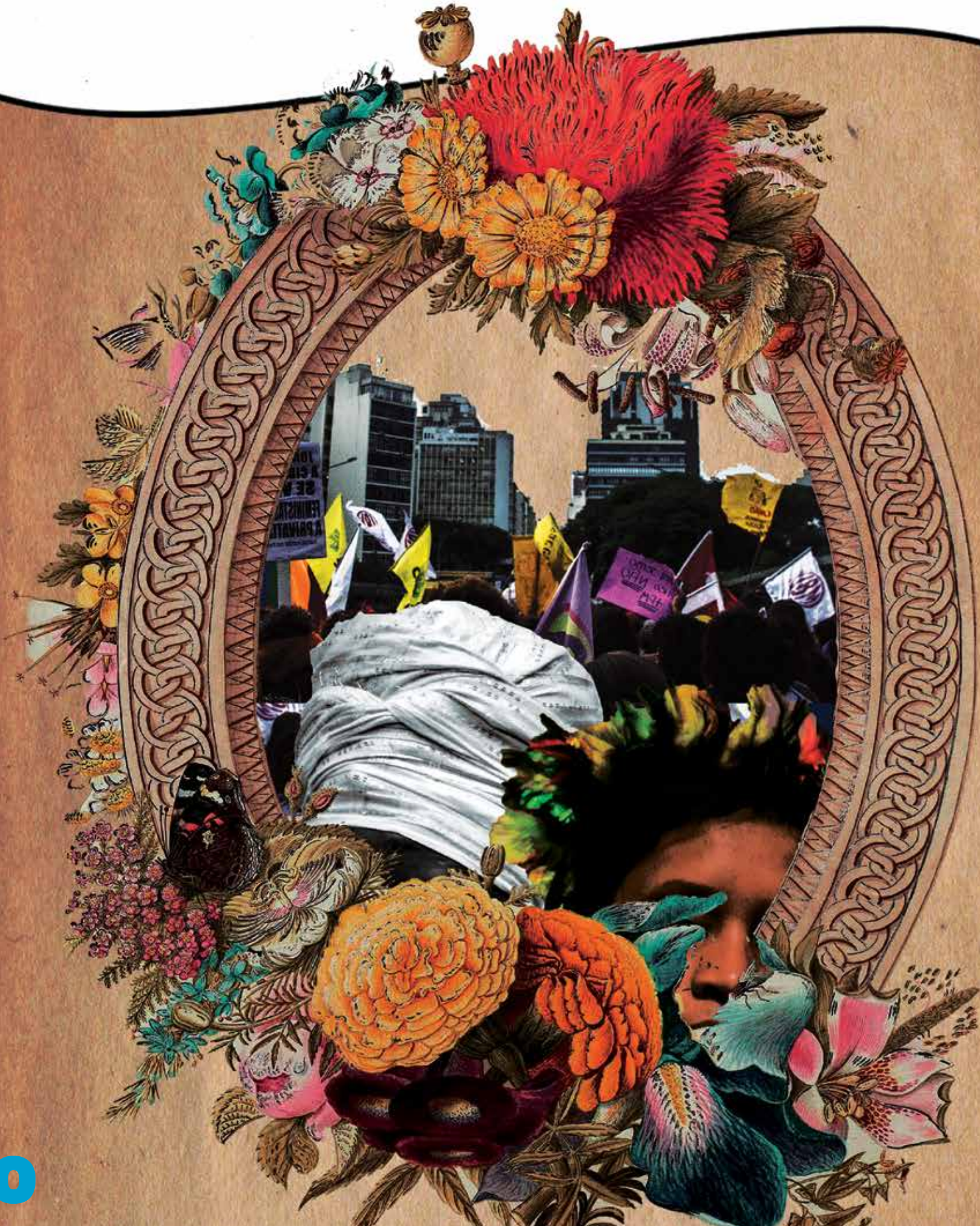
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Our
activities



It's the basis, human being!



Here come that human rights lot!

Moving forward together is a fundamental tool in the construction of a country with more social justice. Here, members of the Brazil Fund Administrative Board, Darci Frigo, Jurema Werneck, Mafoane Odara, Rafael Bezze and Susy Yoshimura consider some of the challenges facing the struggle for human rights in Brazil

By Maitê Freitas

At a scene of police brutality, four years ago, armed with my mobile phone, I moved closer to ask what was happening and heard: “Here come that human rights lot! Run for it!”. In his dismissal of my friends and me, that police officer, who had been in the throes of perpetrating institutional violence against a black youth, revealed that he felt threatened by the cameras and by the presence of human rights defenders who were paying attention. Our presence and attention led to him changing his tone of voice and the young man escaped with his life.

It was not a question of luck but rather of being brave enough to stand up and make a point in the face of what was clearly an abusive situation and this kind of situation is happening all the time. In Brazil, a young black man is murdered every 23 minutes (UN, 2017).

Clashes between the right to life and the trivialization of violence are seen and ignored on a daily basis

Recently, in another situation, I was on my way home with some friends when we saw and intervened in a fight between a young couple. The man was clearly upset and about to assault his partner, until the “feminist human rights lot” went over and removed the young woman from the situation. She could well have become another figure

in the statistics that show that around 1.3 million women are assaulted in Brazil, every year (PNAD – The National Household Sample Survey, 2019).

Clashes between the right to life and the trivialization of violence are seen and ignored on a daily basis. Although police brutality, domestic violence, racism, sexism and poverty in urban centres do make the headlines in the South-East, rural regions and the North and North-East of Brazil are also plagued by land disputes and disregard for public policies.

According to a report published by the Indigenous Missionary Council (2021), violence against indigenous people has increased systematically, either in the form of the murder and persecution of indigenous leaders or in land invasions, due to anti-indigenous bills being passed or because of the state’s procrastination and failure to proceed with the



“Human rights are tools for saving lives and guaranteeing quality of life. They push us to live well and to embrace a way of being and of keeping our feet firmly on the ground in a way which interacts with the many forces of life at a deep level”

Jurema Werneck

demarcation of land and because of the Timeline thesis - Brazilian colonisation re-asserting itself.

Furthermore, hatred levelled at the black community and evident in acts of police brutality, unequal pay between black and white people, invasions of *quilombola* territories and the expropriation of homes in areas of real estate speculation, negligence in access to healthcare, education and

spaces of power all raise a red flag and point to a country with a racist agenda, reflecting the effects of the false abolition.

“Everybody is witnessing death the whole time. We film, publish and watch people dying, without stopping it. It’s important to see, but not to intervene. People are so trapped they don’t even know they can intervene”, says executive director of Amnesty International, Jurema Werneck. Jurema is on the Administrative Board of Brazil Fund.

At the time of this conversation with Jurema, the number of people dying from Covid-19 was still 400 a day, the equivalent of a plane crash, every day. Jurema’s poignant words give pause: “People think this is normal, that this is good. When a plane crashes the country goes into mourning, but we are not going into mourning over these 400 deaths a day. This is not conjectural. It is almost structural in Brazil. A country that was built on the basis of a genocide will always find the tools to repeat genocides”, she warns.

Darci Frigo, coordinator at Terra de Direitos, says that it is now time to resume the dispute concerning an agenda of particular importance – that of showing Brazilian society that the authoritarian conservative discourse that human rights means defending criminals over good people has no foundation. Frigo was a member of Brazil Fund’s Administrative Board until December 2021. This much peddled false statement shows historic ignorance about who we are as a nation and it is used to invalidate the struggle and work of groups that defend equality and citizenship.

Brazil Human Rights Fund has been working on the articulation and strengthening of groups and leaders and on supporting collective projects to defend human rights for fifteen years. This is mainly done by means of calls for applications. Jurema Werneck believes Brazil Fund arose as a response to civil society’s requests for support for humanist practices. “The Fund has been seeking out real people, stories and practices in the defence of human rights for fifteen years.”

We have been working for fifteen years and



“What is most fascinating about Brazil Fund is following the progress of the projects and hearing the stories of diversity in Brazilian life. We have been on this journey for fifteen years and we are here, observing this diversity as it is mirrored by real people, all over the country”

Darci Frigo

have supported over 920 projects through programmes to combat institutional violence and discrimination in general, as well as programmes aimed at specific causes such as tackling racism, protecting human rights defenders and reducing violence and torture in the prison system throughout the country. Brazil is marked by inequality, threats and collective vulnerability. While this does not receive the attention of mainstream media, it is increasingly evident and rights are being claimed by means of the struggle



“Having a vision is the driver behind change. We need to change the paradigms of the vision, to stop envisioning individually and start envisioning together”
 Susu Yoshimura

of social movements, collective mobilisation and by independent people who are uniting.

“What is most fascinating about Brazil Fund is following the progress of the projects and hearing the stories of diversity in Brazilian life. We have been on this journey for fifteen years and we are here, observing this diversity as it is mirrored by real people, all over the country”, says Darci Frigo.

We are exposed to scenes and accounts of violence and we are quite sure that building a future will only be possible if the struggle for social justice is a collective one. While the

social basis of our country is founded on murder, theft, invasions and violence of all kinds, we are also a country of popular uprisings and insurgencies which over time have led to victory and progress. In recent years we have seen the inclusion of non-white people in universities. The number has increased considerably thanks to the racial quota policy, led and won through the mobilisation of the people, as well as an increase in black, indigenous and *quilombola* people, connected to social movements and getting involved in legislative disputes all over Brazil. And there are other examples.

The economist, Rafael Bezze, who is on the Administrative Board of Brazil Fund stresses the relevance of the collective struggle. He warns: “The Brazilian elite needs to engage in the fight for human rights”. Although the present situation could distort our vision of the future, Rafael Bezze says that, despite the indifference of the elite, “there is a movement of qualified people who are ready to build a future underpinned by human rights. This is what we have seen in the profiles of the groups supported by Brazil Fund”.

A future run by black and indigenous women

“When black women stand up [...] earth-shaking changes occur”. This quote by the activist, Angela Davis reverberates at black cis and trans women’s movement meetings. We represent a movement for social restructuring, born of the bodies and minds of black and indigenous women. When we are in control, the transformation and reorganisation of society – the future that we envisage – is expressed in the well-being and care circles and in the narrative and the voices of these afro-indigenous bodies.

Although the brutal murder of council woman, Marielle Franco revealed an attempt to silence non-white women as well as the discomfort they provoke at the institutional and political level, the failure to provide answers regarding who ordered the violent assassination have sparked and fanned the flame of action and given voice to non-white women in Brazil.

Mafoane Odara, the current president of Brazil



“There is a movement of qualified people who are ready to build a future underpinned by human rights. This is what we have seen in the profiles of the groups supported by Brazil Fund”
 Rafael Bezze

Fund’s Administrative Board believes the activities of black and indigenous women in consolidating tools to guarantee rights have been fundamental in reflecting on and claiming the right to life. “We have seen some progress in universal public policies, but the data available shows the urgent need to establish black women as the priority population for all public policies. In recent decades, black and indigenous women have not let their guard down and are positioning themselves as being jointly responsible for and at the forefront of developing multi-sector and multi-disciplinary actions and programmes to reinforce equality, with collaboration as the core value”. She says.

The support goes far

And this support is far-reaching “Nothing about us, without us”, says the Bahian sociologist, Vilma Reis. With regards to these claims for representativity, it can be observed that there is plurality and diversity in the groups of popular movements that have received Brazil Fund’s support during the course of its fifteen years. “It is no news that there are transvestite human rights groups in Acre. What is new is a Fund that reaches out to these groups, incentivises their actions and provides funding”, says Jurema Werneck.

In the light of this statement made by Jurema, Rafael Bezze reinforces that the relevance of the work of Brazil Fund is in “creating more accessible conditions for the groups receiving support to access resources and exchange knowledge with each other”. The Foundation’s

While a lot is said about survival and resistance, there is something more to be found at a deep level of the popular struggle and the articulation of groups: the revival of a sense of being

constant concern is not to make bureaucracy into another aspect of institutional racism. This has been an important value during these fifteen years of activities.

In Brazil, in 2021 it is hard to envision or imagine a better future, with less inequality. Witnessing the country’s return to the UN’s Hunger Map, the increase in inequality, the accumulation of wealth among the elite and people being brutally murdered is frightening, but more than that it causes a sense of fatigue. “We can’t breathe”, this sentence is almost a symptom of collective suffocation.

However, in the words of Conceição Evaristo “they agreed to kill us, we agreed not to die”. We are finding the strength needed to continue and to catch our breath. “We are losing people every day and we have lost many. But we have built tools for survival. There is always a survivor to bear witness and to continue the struggle into future generations”, Jurema Werneck reminds us.

Sometimes thinking about human rights in Brazil seems impractical and utopian. Darci Frigo throws down the gauntlet: “Now is the time to go straight to the heart of the matter and to show that human rights is not a question of defending criminals”. This idea, which is reinforced by political leaders, leads to social distrust and misunderstanding about what is important: everybody has the right to life.

“Human rights are tools for saving lives and guaranteeing quality of life. They push us to live well and to embrace a way of being and of keeping our feet firmly on the ground in a way which connects us with deep life forces”, says Jurema.

Representing life in all its different aspects is practiced by the communities of the African religions, indigenous peoples, traditional peoples like *caiçaras*, who live in coastal regions, *ribeirinhas*, who live near rivers, rural workers and *quilombolas* and in popular festivals, Afrodiasporic food and the coming together of like-minded people and revellers. These are the socio-cultural tools of being. While a lot is said about survival and resistance, there is something more to be found at a deep level of the popular struggle and the articulation of groups: the revival of a sense of being.

As the rapper-poet Emicida sings “all we have is ourselves”. Suzy Yoshimura, member of the



“I see this moment as the chance to design a new project for Brazil. Every person must be respectfully included in this new design. Above all, there is a need to think about the nation we want to construct, one that is good for everyone”
Mafoane Odara

Brazil Fund Administrative Board sees vision as a means of constructing a new society. “To have a vision of the future is human. When we lose our ability to dream, we lose that which makes us human. Our visions drive change. We need to change the paradigms of the vision, to stop envisioning alone and start dreaming about the future together”, Susy says.

As we search for reflection and articulation regarding the visions that may be possibilities



Public rally carried out by the Grita Baixada Forum. Photo: Marina Alvez

for building a paradigm shift that we believe could be the foundation, it is worth remembering that after periods of darkness, the sun comes out and there is a gentle breeze. To dream about a country governed and constructed by powers that represent a commitment to human rights is necessary in proposing a new order, a new way of being.

“And in order to envision new stories and

the future we long for, we need more bridge builders. I see this moment as the chance to design a new project for Brazil. Every person must be respectfully included in this new design. When thinking about implementing, rather than preserving human rights, we need to go beyond considering equality, respect and fairness for the disenfranchised. Above all, there is a need to think about the nation we want to construct, one that is good for

everyone”, says Mafoane Odara.

May the future that is envisaged by those involved in the popular struggle become a reality and may human rights be guaranteed for all of us. 🇧🇷



Broadening the debate on race

Despite deepening violence against the black community in Brazil, which was even more evident during the pandemic, the antiracism agenda is gaining ground and form in the country, according to activists

By Helena Indiara and Naine Terena

“

Black Lives Matter” read the banner held up by a protester at Largo da Batata, in São Paulo. It was early June 2020 and the square, a traditional venue for protests in the capital of the state of São Paulo, had been taken over by a crowd who were demanding the end of police brutality against the black community. A few days earlier, in the United States, a white police officer had suffocated a black man to death. In Brazil, in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro, a joint operation by the federal and civil police forces had led to the death of a black teenager who was playing with his cousins at home. The crowd that took to the streets in São Paulo at the beginning of June were waving banners with key phrases, alongside photos of George Floyd and João Pedro Mattos Pinto — the boy murdered by the police.

Similar scenes were repeated in other Brazilian capitals. The activist Lúcia Xavier saw this as an indication of a kind of change in mentality. Thirty years ago, Lúcia Xavier helped set up the **NCO, Criola** – a Rio-based institution that works on tackling racism and promoting the human rights of black women. For a long time, she recounts,

“For decades, the black movement was the only one to speak of the genocide experienced by the black community in Brazil”, says Lúcia Xavier

this was a solitary journey. “For decades, the black movement was the only one to speak of the genocide experienced by the black community in Brazil”, she says. For decades, there was a myth of “racial democracy” in the country. This held that whites, blacks and indigenous people lived harmoniously and under equal conditions. Discussing racial inequality meant being a dissonant voice. “The inequality that affected the black community was attributed to poverty, economic issues, not to racism”, she says.

The size of the protests that took to the streets at the peak of the biggest pandemic of the century was a sign that the extermination of this

community had been made very clear and this caused a revolt. The black genocide, once almost exclusively an agenda for organisations of the black movement, had hit the streets and was being picked up by communications channels. “Society had changed. Nowadays, we have a much broader antiracism scenario in Brazil”, says Lúcia Xavier.

Anyone looking at Brazil in 2021 might not believe how much the country has progressed in fighting racial inequality over the last decade and a half. The figures still reveal a bad scenario. Over half the Brazilian population identify as black or brown. However, black men and women are a minority in arenas of power. Of the 56 thousand councillors elected in 2018, only 6% were black. Black people are also more likely to be the victims of lethal violence. Today, for every 100 people murdered in Brazil, 77 are black women, according to the 2021, Atlas da Violência.

But the data also reveals some victories. Since 2019, following years of mobilisation by social movements, black students represent the

majority of enrolments at federal institutions of higher education. And although the black community is under-represented in institutional politics, there are signs of progress. In the last elections, the number of black councillors elected grew by 4% in Brazilian cities with the biggest electorates. The racial debate in Brazil has gained ground on a backdrop of progress and setbacks. “The systematic extermination of the black population is ongoing”. Lúcia Xavier reiterates. “But there is also greater recognition that racism is a determining factor in inequality in Brazil and in the kind of violence that affects the black population.”

The knowledge and practices of black women to preserve health, joy and life in the community – and also of indigenous women who face specific forms of racism and discrimination, made more evident in recent times with the dismantling of indigenous rights – are paradigms that redeem a sense of humanity and well-being. The agenda of people and institutions that are tackling racism in the country is many-layered, with a variety of tools and strategies. From ancestry to the digital activism of the younger generations, this path is constructed on the basis of fighting racial intolerance, raising gender awareness, mobilising for the implementation of public policies to combat violence and generate dignified income, attaining access to healthcare and promoting the rights of women and girls.

Although the changes achieved always risk setbacks, they are the result of the work developed by organisations and collectives whose central focus, expressed in different formats, is combatting racism, all over Brazil.

This subject has been at the heart of Brazil Human Rights Fund since it was founded. In the very first call for applications for projects, launched in 2007, the foundation supported four initiatives put together by black organisations. They involved work concerning the health of black women and they organised cultural mobilisations and educational activities on the subject of antiracism. “The Fund’s commitment to keeping antiracism on the agenda is strategic”, says Xavier. “In this way, the Fund fulfils a

relevant role in supporting black organisations who do this work on a permanent basis”.

Glancing at the history of support provided by the Institution provides insight into how the scope of

In the last decade and a half, organisations of the black movement have done much more than just reducing the inequality seen in Brazilian social statistics. They have also worked on changing mindsets. “We can see the results of this. Nowadays, there are a lot more people in Brazil who identify as black and who are proud of their négritude”, says George Oliveira”

projects has grown over the years. Initiatives now include rap and hip-hop artists, *passinho* battles and support for the black transsexual community. This list is a tribute to the true diversity of the different organisations that are set up and run by black people. They have many voices and many different approaches to their work.

“In addition to the important denouncement campaigns and activities, the black movement

has been developing awareness raising actions that are echoing throughout the whole of society”, says George Oliveira. Oliveira is an expert in education and runs the **Steve Biko Institute**, with headquarters in Salvador. Since the 1990s the institution has been promoting social inclusion actions through education for the black community. The institute received support from Brazil Fund in its first call for applications in 2007. “Nowadays, these organisations work with music, such as hip-hop; with a number of education projects, such as preparatory courses for entering higher education and through black media, which is taking on the role of increasing the presence of black people involved in the communications industry in the country. The media has always adopted an approach of veiled racism, to the detriment of affirmative actions for the black population”, he says

Oliveira sees himself as a product of these efforts in the field of education and culture. “At 22 years of age I joined Steve Biko when I was preparing for my university entrance exams and it was only then that I started to identify as black”, he says. He believes cultural projects have the capacity to broaden our perception and open our eyes “We can see the results of this. Nowadays, there are a lot more people in Brazil who identify as black and who are proud of their négritude”. In the last decade and a half, organisations of the black movement have done much more than just reducing the inequality seen in Brazilian social statistics. They have also worked on changing mindsets. In its 15-year history, Brazil Fund has had the mission of supporting them on this journey.

Black women and the fight

In Brazil Fund’s history of providing support there has been a long list of organisations run by black women: **Criola; Bamidelé; The Sorocaba Black Women’s Movement**. Their presence is a reflection of a characteristic of this field. “Black women have always been on the front line, creating life when things hit rock bottom”, says Jurema Werneck. Werneck is Executive Director at Amnesty International and she is on Brazil Fund’s Administrative Board. “The fact that the Fund supports black women’s organisations is because the institution understands that their

mission is to find real people. To reach out to the people in the communities, who are engaged in the struggle”, she says.

In 2015, around 50 thousand women of the black women’s movement came together in front of the Brazilian Ministries on the Esplanada dos Ministérios. Right there, in front of the three levels of power of the Brazilian republic, The Black Women’s March established itself as a public space that echoed the historical struggle “against racism and violence and in favour of living well”, as the slogan of the march went, bringing a programme and project for the future. **The Pernambuco Network of Black Women**, which mobilizes articulation and meetings in a number of states and towns, arose out of this march.

The Network currently has about 100 components. It works on the promotion of initiatives to promote valuing the presence and contribution of black women in all areas of society. It seeks collaboration to overcome inequality of race, gender and class.

These non-white women are seeking to build a field, a path and a way to live the dream of their ancestors, alongside and at the forefront of communities. “We talk about ancestry because we understand that today we are carrying on a struggle that was started by the black women who came long before us”, explains Mônica Oliveira, one of the leaders of the Pernambuco Black Women’s Network. Looking back, without losing sight of the future, drives both the black and the indigenous Brazilian women who are leading the movement and building resistance. “We understand that the legacy of wisdom, their way of looking at the world and the struggle for equality and freedom that we inherited from them are reflected in our struggles today and this gives us strength”, says Mônica Oliveira.

On the periphery of the city of Salvador, in the Mata Escura neighbourhood, Brazil Fund got to know the **Creuza Oliveira Collective**. This initiative arose in 2016 out of a seemingly simple idea. The activist and union leader, Milca Martins wanted to bring the women of the

neighbourhood together to share experiences and talk about workers’ rights. Milca, 52, has been a domestic worker since she was a child. She was 40 years old when she discovered that she had rights that were applicable to all workers, such as being formally registered as

Although the changes achieved always risk setbacks, they are the result of the work developed by organisations and collectives whose central focus, expressed in different formats, is combatting racism, all over Brazil

employed, paid holidays and days off on a weekly basis. She is a black woman. She soon realised that her neighbours were in a similar situation. “Most of the people who work in this type of job are black women living on the outskirts of the city”, she says. “These women are the victims of racism, including at work, but they suffer in silence.” At the Creuza Oliveira meetings the tone is one of gaining political awareness. “We want these women to recognise that they are black women and to know their rights”, she says. The Creuza Oliveira collective was one of the initiatives selected by the 2019 general call for applications, which commemorated 70 years of

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Martins recounts that this area of work was hit hard by the novel coronavirus pandemic. The public health emergency increased the vulnerability of domestic workers. “There’s no such thing as working from home for this type of job”, she says. In 2020, two comrades close to us died. The work of Creuza Oliveira had to adapt to the times and started to include emergency actions, such as distributing food to families in need.

This scenario was seen across other organisations connected to the black movement. Generally speaking, the black community were more harshly hit by the public health emergency. In May 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, data published by researchers linked to the Brazilian Association of Collective Health (Abrasco), collected in over 5 thousand municipalities, showed that 55% of seriously ill black patients in hospital with Covid-19 died, compared to 34% of white patients. As unemployment and hunger grew worse, many institutions that previously focused on political training and advocacy had to rethink their activities, in order to provide emergency help to communities where people were going hungry.

It was a harsh blow. “We, black and indigenous people, were at rock bottom again”, says Jurema Werneck. According to her, since before the pandemic, Brazil had already been experiencing a process of crumbling utopias, in which past victories were being put in check. In this context, it is difficult to envision future projects. “My generation of activists thought they would pass on better conditions to the next generation. And they did, but these better conditions did not last forever”, she says.

However, she upholds the believe that it is not all bad. The current situation presents new challenges to those who are committed to fighting racism and to defending human rights. Jurema says there are people who are organised and are able to face up to misfortune.

“I am a hopeful activist”, she says. “We are at rock bottom, but we have the ability to make an effort and get out of this situation.”



Justice starting at the grassroots level

Incarceration in Brazil has increased rapidly over the last 15 years. Meanwhile, civil society has also ramped up activities focused on tackling the racist criminal justice system, in which there are torture and rights violation, at all levels

By Aline Rodrigues, Camila Lima, Laís Diogo and Thiago Borges, at Periferia em Movimento

The distance between Manaus and Tabatinga, a municipality on the border of the state of Amazonas with Colombia, is 1,106 kilometres. By boat, it takes 6 days via the Solimões River. By plane, a direct flight takes 2 hours. In addition to the difficulties imposed by travelling times, there is also a financial issue. The journey can cost anything from R\$400 to R\$6 thousand. Many families have to take this expense into consideration when they have to visit relatives who are detained in the capital city.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the situation worsened. The state government transferred prisoners being held on remand, from the interior region of the state to Manaus. In other words, the distance is not only geographical, but is also an issue of whether rights are being respected or not, in a region that has experienced an explosion in its prison population. From 2000 to 2019, the number of people in prison in Amazonas went from 2 thousand to 12 thousand, with over 60%

awaiting trial. The situation was already complex before, due to the lack of information, but the fear of catching Covid-19 in jail and the long distances caused further suffering.

“Narrowing this gap is both good and gratifying because we are managing to provide guidance and raise people’s awareness of their rights”, says Priscila Serra

To narrow this gap, the **State Front for the Decarceration of Amazonas (Desencarcera AM)** is running a project aimed at explaining

bureaucratic and legal procedures pertaining to people being held on remand, to family members and to those in detention, particularly those who live in the interior of the state. “Narrowing this gap is both good and gratifying because we are managing to provide guidance and raise people’s awareness of their rights”, explains Priscila Serra, spokeswoman for Desencarcera AM, an initiative that receives support from Brazil Human Rights Fund.

This front was created in March 2020 and brings together university professors, social movements and families to raise and process the demands of relatives and survivors of the system, as well as monitoring penitentiary administration, inspection bodies and providing information to the public. There are 10 prisons in the capital, 10 in the interior and 57 lockups in a territory of 1,571 thousand square kilometres. These conditions are ripe for tragedy and that is exactly what happened.

In 2017, uprisings led to deaths among inmates and prison workers. The state responded with sanctions on the families, ranging from restrictions on the contents of food parcels (known as the 'jumbo' in other parts of the country) to the demand for an official declaration of common law marriage for partners to visit. Even the type of underwear that partners were allowed to wear inside the prison was controlled, with lacey underwear being forbidden. "The effect of prison goes beyond the prison walls. It directly impacts on us because it is torture for a mother or a wife", says Priscila, whose brother served time.

During another uprising in Manaus, in 2019, visiting family members were removed from the prisons and went days without any news at all. "When we asked a social worker for information, she starkly replied that 'if the inmate is not on the list of those who have died, he is alive'", Priscila recalls. This was when she and some other people created the Collective of the Families of Inmates in Amazonas. In the following year they started to talk with other groups and received the support of 47 organisations from around the country to form Desencarcera AM. The type of denouncement remains unchanged, with the difference that now family members are able to access certain institutional spaces. "In the past, we didn't even know how to get in touch with the Public Defender's Office", Priscila explains.

Kenarik Boujikian, a Fundo Brazil consultant, believes the appropriation of these channels by social movements is fundamental in the preservation of rights, the correction of injustice and in the struggle to end rights violations in the criminal justice system. "The work of civil society is the most important driving force in preventing the situation from becoming more serious than it already is", she says. She is a retired judge from the São Paulo Justice Tribunal, the founder of AJD (Association of Judges for Democracy) and the creator and a member of the Study and Working Group, "Women in Jail".

"The role of Brazil Fund is to foster the promotion of human rights of the vulnerable prison population", says Kenarik. Given the current

challenges, including draft bills aimed at setting the country back, she says that it is even more important to recognise and support this type of work. "These organisations have been working with such dignity, forcefulness, intensity and enthusiasm that they are becoming a driver for the construction of human rights", she says.

The Maranhão Human Rights Society helped to create a protection system in civil society that received recognition and became public policy

During its 15 years, Brazil Fund has fostered a number of initiatives focused on tackling mass incarceration and rights violations in the prison system. Marina Dias, executive director of the **Institute for the Defence of the Right to Defence (IDDD)**, believes the foundation has also played an important role in encouraging articulation, making connections between initiatives and fostering network-style activities.

Increased incarceration

From 2006 to the present day, the Brazilian prison population has grown more than the general population. The number of people in full- or part-time incarceration grew almost 70%

in this period. It went from 401.2 thousand 15 years ago (according to Infopen) to 682 thousand in 2021 (according to a survey by the G1 portal carried out with state governments). While the total number of inhabitants in the country increased by 13%, from 188 million to 213 million, according to IBGE estimates.

Kenarik Boukikian calls this "hyper-incarceration" and it is stimulated by both the drugs law that came into effect in 2006 and a very conservative judiciary who are somewhat out of touch with the general public, which is why the judge highlights the importance of movements putting pressure on the justice system: on courthouses, the prosecutor's office, the defender's office, the police forces and legislative authorities.

The **Prison Pastoral**, created in 1986 by the Catholic Church, is closely monitoring these changes. At the time of the Carandiru massacre, in 1992, this service became a reference for anyone who is opposed to repression in the penal system. Ever since it has been a national and international voice on this matter. The struggle has been far from easy. "Pervasive massacre has become the principal management policy with the extermination of the disenfranchised who are labelled as social enemies", says Sister Petra Silvia Pfaller, national coordinator at the Prison Pastoral.

Given the deterioration in the situation, the Pastoral has noticed the need to adapt to the "new political conditions being implemented and to concentrate efforts on fighting back against the state, rather than within state and institutional settings", Petra says. So, the group has strengthened and increased its systems for receiving and monitoring denouncements, for media coverage and for contact with local pastoral workers and the families of inmates. In addition, their weekly presence at the prisons is strengthening advocacy for a world without prisons.

The **Maranhão Human Rights Society (SMDH)**, was founded in 1979, to promote, protect, defend and repair rights. SMDH was one of the institutions at the forefront of denouncements about what was happening at the Pedrinhas

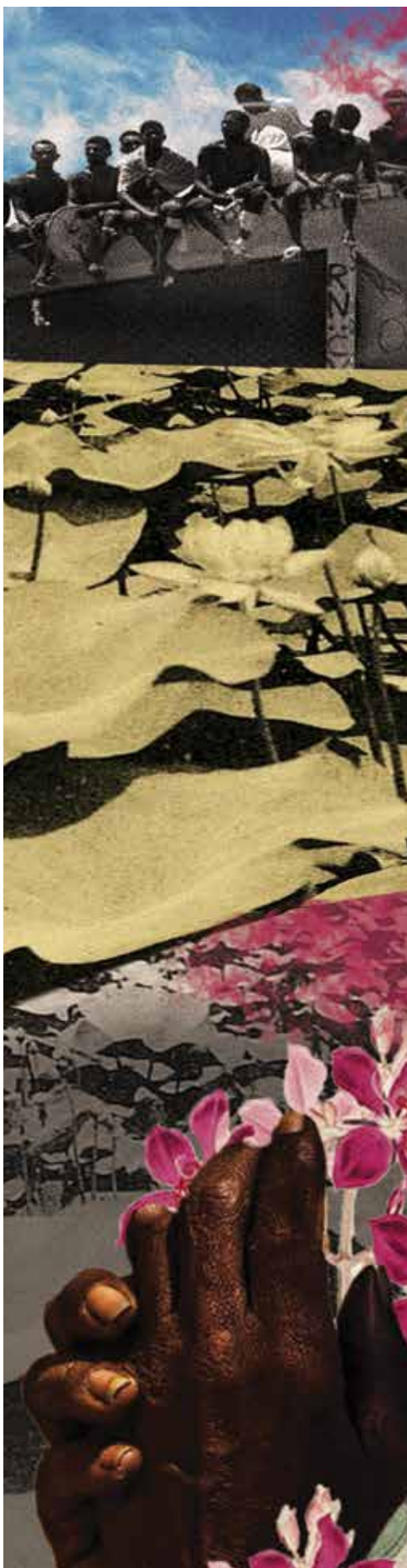
Penitentiary Complex, before this gained media attention and grew to huge proportions in 2013, when there was a massacre that left dozens of inmates dead.

The group of militants visited the families of the victims and the occurrence took SMDH to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. “One year later, as Brazil had not made much progress with taking the necessary steps, precautionary measures were put together and these became provisional measures”, explains Joisiane Camba, lawyer and coordinator at the organisation. As a result, every quarter since 2014, Brazil presents what it has done to guarantee the lives and physical integrity of inmates at the unit and SMDH then deems this effective or otherwise. Since the incident, the organisation has also carried out periodic inspections – every three months, every six months and sometimes on a monthly basis.

In 2016, with support from Brazil Fund, SMDH started to make daily visits to the Central Courthouse of São Luis to analyse documents and research data on the situation, the profile and the existence or not of torture, as well as arguments used to deny or grant the release of prisoners at custodial hearings.

“We created a protection system in civil society that was recognised and became public policy”, says the lawyer who emphasises the need to develop a new popular protection network, given the challenges, and to create an environment that favours change. “The fight is for decarceration, for people to get out, but also for them not to go in”, she says.

Global Justice, based in Rio de Janeiro, also represents beneficiaries of the provisional measures applied by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. As well as the Pedrinhas Complex, there is the Espírito Santo Youth Detention Centre (Unidade de Internação Socioeducativa do Espírito Santo) and the Complexo do Curado, in Pernambuco. The organisation was founded in 1999 and one of its principal areas of human rights activities is strategic litigation. “The application of these



provisional measures is the result of the work of organisations, pressure and denouncements”, says Isabel Lima, coordinator at Global Justice.

Through participation in networks and discussion and action activities, Global Justice communicates with other organisations that are seeking to combat the institutional violence that affects Brazil’s prison population, racism and systemic selectivity in sentencing. At the end of 2021, the organisation completed its mandate

“We cannot ignore the fact that we are in an extremely difficult political scenario, but I am quite sure matters would be worse without the solid work of civil society”, says IDDD’s Marina Dias”, diz Marina Dias

as a member of civil society on the National Committee for the Prevention and Combat of Torture. This Committee is also composed of public authority figures and it is currently housed in the Ministry for Women, Family and Human Rights. It is now facing complex issues. According to a note signed by over 120 groups, this is due to obstacles to its work being imposed by federal government.

Global Justice and another eight organisations are members of the **Criminal Justice Network**.

This coalition, created with the objectives of participating in the public debate in this area and of reverting the rationale of over-incarceration as a public security measure, is also supported by Brazil Fund. It was created in 2010 and its role has been strategic in driving collaborative action: monitoring decisions in the three branches of government; campaigns and mobilisation against measures with the potential to increase rights violations in the criminal justice system.

“We cannot ignore the fact that we are in an extremely difficult political scenario”, says Marina Dias, at IDDD, “but I am quite sure matters would be worse without the solid work of civil society. We managed to hold back the former Justice Minister, Sérgio Moro’s anti-crime pack and we are resisting attempts to hold all custodial hearings online”, she says.

IDDD was created in 2000 with the “core principal of fighting mass incarceration and illegal incarceration”. According to Marina, it was one of the first organisations to fight for custodial hearings – a tool that provides for prisoners to come before a judge within 24 hours, with the objective of analysing the circumstances of the arrest, its legality, the need or otherwise of preventive detention and also to prevent and combat police violence. “Hearings are a strategy for reducing the over-incarceration that we see in Brazil as a result of the Drug Law. The imprisonment of women is growing as a result of this law.”

The number of women in prison in Brazil was 17.2 thousand in 2006. In 2017, this number had more than doubled, reaching 37.8 thousand, according to Infopen data. Of these 66.5% identify as black and 64.5% are in prison for drug trafficking.

Marina Dias believes there is a need to revive public debate regarding custodial hearings. In a report published in 2019, IDDD showed that of the 2,584 cases analysed, only 23 people arrested on the spot were released without any precautionary measures. In other words, contrary to the conservative discourse that hearings are synonymous with impunity, they are actually failing to be effective in the role of avoiding illegal

unnecessary imprisonment. This is because the law courts consider them to be a mere bureaucratic hinderance, rather than a right.

A system founded on racism

Tackling the punitive model based on selective sentencing and racism is the focus of the work of the **Black Initiative for a New Drugs Policy (INNPD)**, founded in 2015. The organisation is

Articulation between the mobilisation of the families of victims of state violence and organisations with activities in the field of criminal justice has resulted in an increased number of people working at the state level on decarceration and the National Agenda for Decarceration

in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Salvador and Altamira (PA). It carries out actions to defend human rights from the point of view of the black community. They monitor the national and regional agendas of public security, the judicial system and mental health.

Since 2020, the Black Initiative has been carrying out research and analyses on the subject, talking to organs of the judicial system and movements in order to build a guide to best practice, with diagnosis concerning the treatment of people accused of drug-related crimes in the penal system and their experiences during consultations and conflict resolution, outside the penal system.

“These resources [*grants by Brazil Fund*] have been fundamental in establishing the Black Initiative as a relevant player in the field of criminal justice, focusing principally on drug-related crimes”, says sociologist and co-founder Nathalia Oliveira.

In Recife, the **Office of Legal Advice to Popular Organizations (GAJOP)** ran a training programme for the Military Police, on tackling racism. GAJOP has worked for 40 years on victim and witness safeguarding, especially for young black people on the peripheries who are often arrested without lawyers. They took their everyday experiences to a debate with public security officers. “It was an extremely challenging experience to be with 20 or 30 uniformed police officers in a classroom, discussing their racist attitudes”, recalls Deila Martins, executive coordinator at GAJOP.

GAJOP is also a member of the Criminal Justice Network. In addition, it works on strategic litigation and on constructing a people’s agenda for public security.

Families at the forefront

The past decade has seen the strengthening of another type of organisation, one focused on combatting rights violations in the prison system. These groups are made up of people who have fallen victim of this system, either as prisoners or as people connected to someone in prison i.e. family and friends.

Articulation between the mobilisation of the families of victims of state violence and organisations with activities in the field of criminal justice has resulted in an increased number of people working at the state level on decarceration and the National Agenda for Decarceration. This is



Conflict and overcrowding at the Alcaçuz penitentiary (RN). Photo: Everton Dantas

a popular agenda with 10 focal points, the objectives of which are decarceration and the demilitarisation of social relations, with a view to significantly reducing the prison population.

“The so-called war on drugs is a war on a specific sector of the public”, says Marina Dias. “IDDD is placing increasing importance on articulation with groups and organisations on the ground because they are the ones who have the understanding needed to tackle systemic violence. This is also the approach of Brazil Fund who are supporters of this point of view.”

FPriscila of Desencarcera AM came into contact with other groups of families and inmates around the country through the Prison Pastoral and one of these people was Maria Railda da Silva. Railda, together with Miriam Duarte, is one of the founders of **Amparar (Association of Friends and Families of Prisoners)**. They met in 1998 and created the group, Mothers of FEBEM, the former São Paulo correctional facility for adolescents.

The mothers would meet at the gates of the

facility on the Imigrantes highway, in São Paulo, to talk, exchange news on their sons who were deprived of liberty and to demand information from inside the institution, always known to be a violent place. It was closed in 2002 following a series of tragic events. Nowadays, the area is a Paralympic stadium.

Amparar is a highly relevant organisation of mothers and families of inmates. It took over from the Association of Mothers and Friends of Adolescents at Risk (AMAR). These centres sprang up all over the country and increased the handling of violations committed against adolescents in the correctional system until the mid-2010s.

Amparar became official in 2004 and aims to provide social and legal support to the families of people in prison. In 2017, for example, a project supported by Brazil Fund made it possible to provide financial assistance to some of these families, so they would be able to visit their families in jail. It can cost as much as R\$600 per visit, with expenses such as clothes, food parcels and transport to the prison unit.

“It’s a lot, especially when you remember that these mothers, grandmothers and partners are living busy lives on the outside and are not usually well off. However, they need to help and they are fearful about what might happen to their relatives in prison”, says Fabio Pereira, 42, articulator at Amparar and a student of social services.

The **May Mothers** movement stemmed from the protagonism of mothers. This movement fights for justice and for the memory of the victims of the 2006 May Crimes. Between 12 and 16 May of that year, at least 564 people were killed in the state of São Paulo under conditions that point to police participation in an act of revenge for so-called attacks by the PCC (First Command of the Capital).

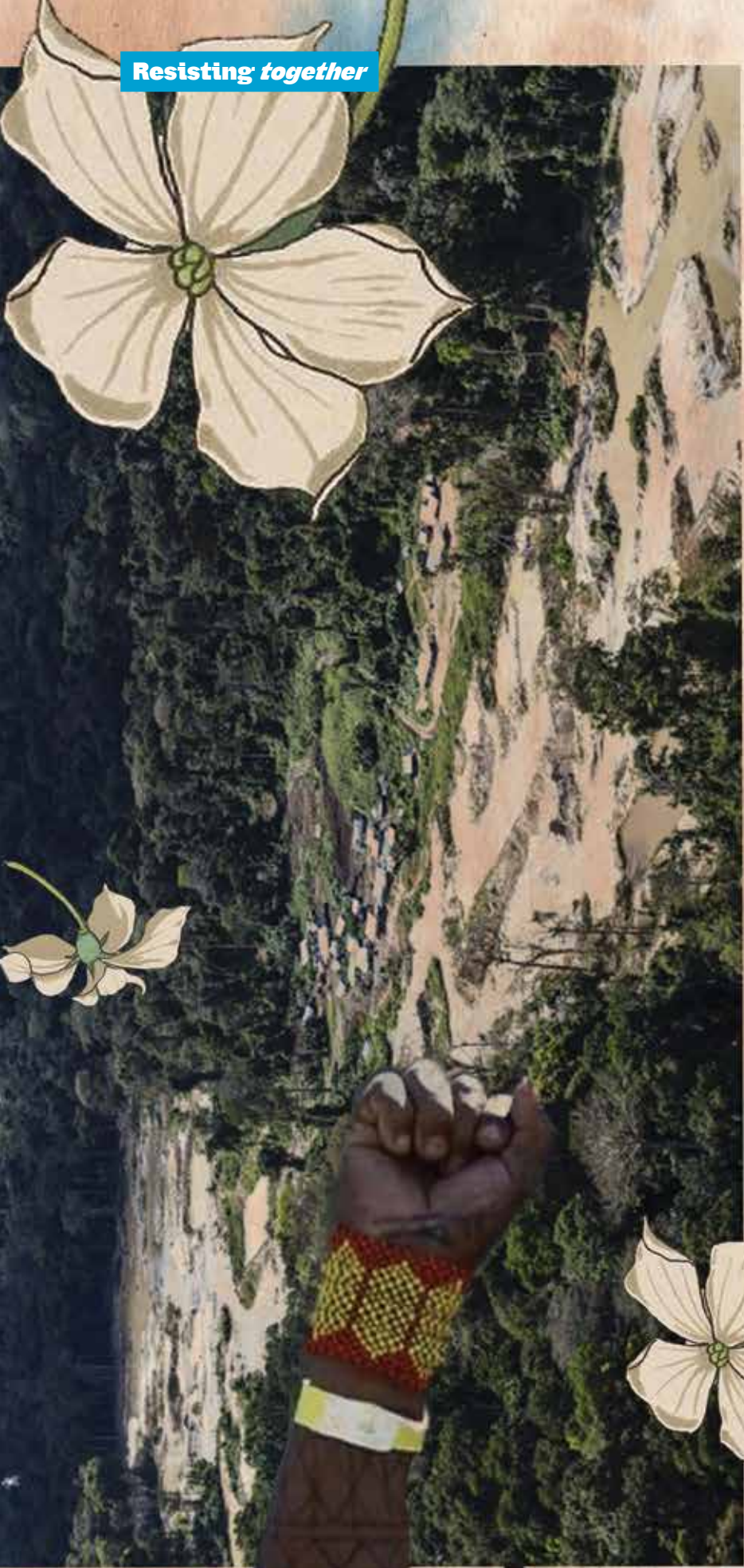
One of the victims was Edson dos Santos, who was 29 years old at the time and the son of Débora Silva Maria. The street cleaner disappeared after being approached and released by police officers one night. The next day, Débora learned of his death and of that of many other victims in the Baixada Santista, on the radio. The housewife met other women who had lost their children and together they started to demand justice.

The May Mothers started to do their own investigations, to stand up to public authorities in order to obtain access to forensic reports and to pinpoint contradictions and untruths in these documents. The movement became well known in the media, with international repercussions. They did not manage to get the state condemned, but they did find a way to go on and to keep the memory of their dead alive.

As well as Débora, Railda and many other women, movements and organisations have arisen out of the need to resist a system that still does not guarantee rights for all people. Priscila, at Desencarcera AM, was also moulded by this daily struggle.

“I experienced prejudice and racism because I am a black woman from the periphery. Prison showed me a very harsh, cruel reality and I was mistreated for standing by my brother, who is someone I love”, Priscila recalls. “I used my sadness and my anger to fight and not let them destroy me.”

Resisting together



Defending the lives of rights defenders

The safety and physical integrity of activists are increasingly becoming the target of threats. In this scenario, there is growing concern over the safeguarding of these people as well as the need for strategies and tools to preserve their emotional well-being

By Sanara Santos

The day-to-day life of Maria Leusa Munduruku, taking care of her coffee, guaraná and corn crops, making manioc flour and bringing up her children, started to undergo profound changes when she realised that she would have to stand up and fight the growing incursions onto the indigenous lands of her people and violence against her relatives.

The name Maria Leusa may be familiar. She

is a leader at the **Munduruku Wakoborun Women's Association**, in the municipality of Jacareacanga, in Pará, and is dedicated to the defence of the rights of the women of the Munduruku and Sai Cinza indigenous lands. She suffered an attack in May 2021, in the Fazenda Tapajós village. The incident was widely publicised in the press. A group of non-indigenous men and some indigenous men who support the mining industry, attacked the village, armed with fuel-filled soda bottles and

firing shots at the ground. They set fire to the homes of Maria Leusa and her mother, Cacica Isaura. The family, including the children, were forced to shelter in an unspecified location, to save their lives.

The number of indigenous people murdered in Brazil in 2020 was the highest in 25 years. According to a report published in October 2021 by the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), 182 indigenous people were murdered, the highest since records started

in 1995. This is an increase of over 60% in relation to the previous year, 2019, when 113 murders of indigenous people were recorded.

Indigenous leaders who fight for respect for ancestral territories, demarcations, an end to deforestation, illegal mining and environmental destruction, are the principal targets for murder.

Indigenous leaders who fight for respect for ancestral territories, demarcations, an end to deforestation, illegal mining and environmental destruction are the principal targets for murder. In 2020, 26% of all human rights defenders murdered in the world, one in four, were working for indigenous rights

In addition, according to a survey by CIMI, 261 indigenous lands were invaded by miners, loggers and poachers in 2020. Another report pertaining to the same year, by the international organisation, Front Line Defenders, showed that 26% (one in four) of all human rights defenders

murdered in the world in the period were working for indigenous rights.

The Front Line Defenders report ranks Brazil sixth on the list of countries with the highest number of violent deaths of defenders in 2020. The situation has worsened over the last decade. The country went from four murders of defenders in 2012 to 16 last year. Within this period, 2017 was particularly lethal for human rights defenders in Brazil with an unbelievable 66 murders. In 2018, the Rio de Janeiro activist and councilwoman, Marielle Franco, entered the statistics, after being ambushed as she left an event to discuss the rights of black women.

In 2018, in an attempt to respond to the growing violence, Brazil Human Rights Fund launched an emergency support project, one of the objectives of which was to direct funding to defenders who needed rapid support in protecting their lives and physical integrity. In the following year, 2019, this line of support grew and became Emergency Support – Human Rights Defenders, which receives continuous requests from people at risk and guarantees a response in just a few days.

Still in 2019, Brazil Fund started a national survey of organisations and collectives that were seeking to build safeguarding for their activists or people interested in embarking on this type of work. Over 170 groups were identified and they were invited to submit proposals for the foundation's first specific call for applications aimed at tackling the issue of the risks to life and physical integrity involved in the defence of human rights in the country. The call for applications provided support to 22 projects. A further public call was released at the end of 2021.

A genesis of violence

Brazil is a country created out of multiple acts of violence. Land invasions, genocide and a social system based on slavery are at the root of what we now call human rights violations.

However, while Brazilian history is replete with rights violations, there are also many people fighting these violent acts. Black people kidnapped on the African continent, indigenous

people and low-income workers have marked the five centuries of the country with a story of rebellions and uprisings.

In 2004, in the face of violence against rights defenders in Latin America a group of activists, grassroots organisations and social movements proposed the creation of civil society articulation on the agenda of safeguarding defenders. This was how the Brazilian Committee for Human

The knowledge of the Brazilian Committee for Human Rights Defenders helped Brazil Fund when they were putting together a call for applications to foster initiatives to safeguard human rights defenders and their networks

Rights Defenders emerged and nowadays, it brings together over 40 organisations.

The knowledge of the Brazilian Committee for Human Rights Defenders helped Brazil Fund when they were putting together a call for applications to foster initiatives to safeguard human rights defenders and their networks.

Since the start of the Committee's activities,

most of the denouncements received have been about threats to the lives of defenders in the field: indigenous people, river communities and *quilombolas*. This information was provided by Darci Frigo, a lawyer, a coordinator of the organisation, Terra de Direitos and until December 2021, a member of the Administrative Board of Brazil Human Rights Fund. Frigo was one of the founders of the Brazilian Committee, in 2004.

“Having territory means having the means to develop. The ground you walk on is where you take steps towards fighting for rights”, says Darci Frigo. For this reason and because the denial of access to land for the majority of the population is one of the public policies underlying inequality in Brazil, people who defend this right are systematically attacked.

With the traditional communities

Identity forged out of a strong connection to the land is a powerful reason why people decide to tackle the violation of their rights. For most people, becoming a human rights defender is a calling, not a choice.

In Pará, in the middle of the Amazon region, the challenge is made greater by long distances and also in recent years by the empowerment that governors on the extreme right have been granting to people invading the territories of traditional farmers, river communities, *quilombolas* and indigenous peoples. Since 1975, the **Pastoral Land Commission (CPT)** has been working on tackling these violations. The lawyer, Raione Lima Campos has been working in this area since 2012.

“It is difficult to be a human rights lawyer in this region because you feel very alone. It is a high-risk area”, says the activist. Raione, who monitors the conflicts of the Munduruku and Sai Cinza Indigenous Lands, recounts that threats are received on a daily basis and the criminalisation of people who defend rights, including imprisonment, is a reality. So much so that she never turns off her mobile phone, for fear of missing something critical.

CPT has been in existence since 1975 and was

one of the organisations that received support in the first call for applications in the history of Brazil Fund, in 2007, with a project to combat excessive exploitation and the trafficking of rural workers. “The support meant we were

Threats to community leaders who tackle these violations and fight for territory has added to the processes of exclusion, expulsion, harassment to suspend litigation and lifestyle changes. The Suape Forum is investing in training on rights and communication as a way of facing intimidation

able to increase our capacity to articulate in order to face a difficult reality”, says Raione. CPT also works on research and systematising data and information on violence in the field. The organisation has also received support from Brazil Fund to monitor and strengthen actions to safeguard the lives and physical integrity of its activists.

The **Suape Forum** is an organisation in



Pernambuco, created to tackle the socioenvironmental impacts affecting communities living on the coast, as a result of the construction of the Saube Port and Industrial Complex. In addition to exclusion, expulsion, harassment to suspend litigation and lifestyle changes, community leaders who fight to tackle violations and fight for territory have been receiving threats.

“I see the defence of human rights as a commitment in my life”, says Patricia Oliveira. “This is a daily commitment that is full of challenges. With the families [of people who have fallen victim of the state], this challenge starts with a sense of belonging and in talking. Talking takes time”

The Suape Forum is investing in training on rights and communication as a way of facing up to intimidation. “We need to burst the bubble”, says the lawyer Mariana Vidal, a member of the Forum. “because the Suape Port has been presented, also by the press, as representing progress.”

State targeting of peripheries

In 2003, police officers shot four youths dead at point blank range in the Borel community, in the North zone of Rio de Janeiro. They gunned down two more. This action, which came to be known as the Borel massacre, gave rise to an organisation formed mainly of women, called **The Network**

of Communities and Movements Against Violence, aimed at fighting institutional violence and violations perpetrated by the Brazilian state in the Rio de Janeiro communities and *favelas*.

The Network is dedicated to supporting the families of victims of state violence, including providing legal assistance. It articulates collective actions, makes denouncements, promotes campaigns and raises awareness about rights. The work of denouncing abuse committed by officers of the state – including police officers – and demanding the end of violence against people living on the peripheries places the physical integrity of many activists in constant danger, which is not always understood or assimilated very quickly.

Patricia Oliveira is one of the founders of the Network. She lost a brother in the Candelária massacre in 1993. “I see the defence of human rights as a commitment in my life”, she says. “This is a daily commitment that is full of challenges. With the families [of people who have fallen victim of the state], this challenge starts with a sense of belonging and in talking. Talking takes time.”

The Network of Communities and Movements Against Violence received support from the first call for projects in the history of Brazil Fund, in 2007. According to Patricia, the calls for applications are important in making it possible for the collective to continue denouncing institutional violence. The activist emphasises that this is a difficult matter and that there are few available resources.

Darci Frigo, a Brazil Fund advisor stresses that human rights are the target of a discourse of hatred through which a distorted impression is deliberately spread, reinforcing the idea that defending these rights means protecting criminals. This impression is also a historic construct, based on racism and classism. This movement has gained ground with the politicians who are currently in office, on the basis of a conservative, violent discourse and is reflected in the criminalisation of non-governmental organisations. “How can you ask for money to support your struggle for social justice if you are

part of a criminal group and if your own human rights are criminalised?” He questions.

In Ceará, the group, **Voices of Juvenile Prison System and Prisons** tackles a number of rights violations. The women who make up the collective are the mothers of young people who are serving sentences in correction centres. In addition, they experience poverty and difficulties in accessing basic rights.

According to activists at The Trans-Feminist Network, it is no longer possible to separate physical from online security. Both are aspects of the overarching need to safeguard human rights defenders

Alessandra Félix, one of the founders of the group, recounts that it is common for the women to come from far away to see their sons only to be refused entry to the prison. Other women witness ill-treatment and torture. “This is what the state, that is responsible for our sons, has to offer us”, says Alessandra. When she started her degree in Education and learned more about the Statute on Children and Adolescents, she started to question situations she experienced and witnessed during visits to her son who was being held in a youth correction centre in 2014. She was in the queue one day when she saw a mother yelling at the top



Activists in an articulation meeting held by Brazil Fund. Photo: Shai Andrade

of her voice that she wanted to see her son. I went over to her and said “I want to shout with you”. The collective was formed in 2015.

 “We started to gain recognition and stopped being seen as merely mothers. I always say we became human rights defenders”, says Alessandra.

 The combination of these conditions of deprivation and violence leads to misinformation, suffering and the need for caretaking. With support from Brazil Fund, Voices of the Correction Centres developed a project to raise awareness of rights and collective caretaking aimed at mitigating emotional harm to these mothers. They also work with young people, holding ad-hoc meetings in extremely vulnerable regions to try to talk to the boys and girls “before they encounter bullets and handcuffs”, says Alessandra. “We have to safeguard our youngsters.”

All-round safety

According to activists at the Trans-Feminist

Network, who prefer not to be named, it is no longer possible to separate physical from online security. Both are aspects of the overarching need to safeguard human rights defenders. Indeed, this is a very contemporary agenda in the field of defending rights. Many groups have started to think about the virtual environment as the source of violations, but few have started to develop ways of tackling this challenge.

 This need had been latent until the beginning of 2020 when the pandemic led to a huge part of the struggle for rights being digitalised, with online meetings and the possibility of sharing strategies in the virtual environment. This has made concerns over digital security more pertinent than ever before.

 The **Trans-Feminist Network for Digital Safeguarding** stresses that it is possible that the criminalisation of the fight for social justice could start digitally and reverberate in the physical world. The group was born

out of this discomfort and works on care, articulation, providing support and training and protecting women all over Brazil through digital safeguarding measures. In a project, that received support from Brazil Fund, the Network held a training course for human rights defenders to hold discussions and create strategies for digital and psychosocial safeguarding.

 “In the past, the children would go out to play”, says Maria Leusa Munduruku. “These days, after the attack, they stay at home, watching TV. It’s very hard for us”, she goes on. However, even in the face of the series of threats she suffered, she continues to fight because she believes that all lives must be preserved. “Think of a tree: it provides shade; food; raw material for making products and it purifies the air. One tree that is cut down means all that is lost. A life that is cut short is the same; land that is burnt; territory that is stolen or a seed that is not planted. All the struggles are worth it, even if they are for a single life!” she reflects. 🇧🇷

Resisting *together*



Survival first

Faced with the historic emergency imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the field of human rights redirected its efforts in order to fight for food and access to healthcare. Now, support is needed to restructure grassroots organisations in their territories

By Vanessa Cancian

At the beginning of 2020, everything we had planned and envisioned for the future was transformed. In the midst of the pandemic, quite unfamiliar to our generation, fears and uncertainty abounded. It was an illness about which very little was known, the pain and the deaths caused by it as well as unemployment and hunger became the central needs of the Brazilian population.

Covid-10 transformed the human rights agenda. Groups, collectives, activists and organisations immersed in the urgent demands of survival, turned their attention to helping to mitigate emergencies in their communities with food, drinking water, cleaning and personal hygiene products, masks, immediate access to public health policy and equipment and to financial support.

In other words, defending human rights in the pandemic became synonymous with survival

Covid-10 transformed the human rights agenda. Groups, collectives, activists and organisations immersed in the urgent demands of survival, turned their attention to helping to mitigate emergencies in their communities

and literally saving the maximum number of lives possible.

“The challenge we faced in the pandemic was that of helping our community with everything that was lacking – healthcare, food and hygiene”, says the activist, Colle Cristine, a communicator at **Casa Nem**, an independent centre for the shelter and support of LGBTQIA+ people in the city of Rio de Janeiro. She says that it was immensely difficult to get staple food parcels, hand sanitiser and other items, at the beginning of the pandemic.

Casa Nem was among the groups and activists helped by the Brazil Human Rights Fund initiative, Covid-19: Emergency Support Fund which was launched in April 2020 to help the human rights field in Brazil to cope with the consequences of the pandemic working among the most vulnerable people and communities in the country.

This emergency fund, focused on the pandemic,

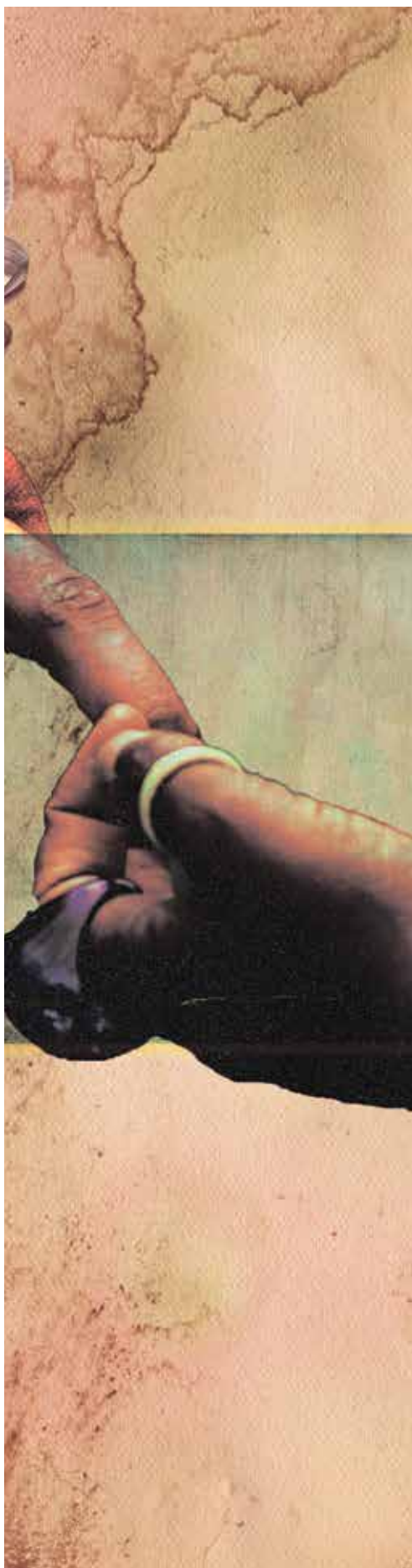
was an unprecedented initiative in Brazil Fund's history. The foundation, created 15 years ago, with the mission of promoting respect for human rights, has a central methodology. At the heart of its mobilisation to defend rights there is a mission to help people to organise themselves and to encourage and strengthen networks for action.

"With the onslaught of the pandemic, we carried out a deep dive and saw that at that moment we were facing an emergency situation, a question of life and death", says Ana Valéria Araújo, executive director at Brazil Fund. "We understood that, because of the pandemic, the defence of rights would not survive without basic food parcels, hygiene products and logistical support in distributing the humanitarian aid. Guaranteeing the defence of rights at that time was primarily a question of guaranteeing people's survival."

Community leaders played a fundamental role by carrying out registrations, organising documents and helping people to access government initiatives, like emergency aid. And they needed support in order to be able to do this work remotely. "Funding was also directed to expenses with internet, telephone and other spending on infrastructure, so people would be able to work from home", says Allyne Andrade, deputy executive director at Brazil Fund, who took up this position at the beginning of the pandemic.

The Covid-19: Emergency Support Fund responded to 275 requests for help from grassroots groups, communities and human rights defenders, in all the Brazilian states. This represented a total of R\$2.5 million. In order to do this, extra efforts for fund raising were needed, via campaigns and conversations with national and international institutions.

In practice, mobilising this volume of funding for humanitarian aid was a way of supporting the defence of human rights which was both possible and necessary, in the face of the historic emergency. Allyne Andrade observes that at that time, the field of human rights concentrated its efforts on guaranteeing food on people's plates, vaccinations, defending public health - SUS (the



Brazilian public health service) and combatting fake news. "Brazil Fund managed to respond quickly to the demands", she says.

“The field of human rights concentrated its efforts on guaranteeing food, vaccinations, defending public health - SUS (the Brazilian public health service) and combatting fake news”, says Allyne Andrade

Food on people's plates

The **Izidora Occupation**, in Belo Horizonte is an enormous collection of urban settlements where around 8 thousand families live. Access to the Covid-19: Emergency Support Fund helped leaders like Paula Cristina Fonseca da Silva, known as Paulinha, who coordinates one of the occupation centres, called Vitória, to supply food to the most vulnerable people living there. "In the middle of the pandemic, we invested everything in food and this washow some families had something to eat", says Paulinha.

Food campaigns at the Izadora Occupation

continue, given that the public health crisis has meant a sector of the Brazilian population have no income, the national employment rate has been between 13% and 14% throughout the whole period and only 25% of Brazilian children between 2 and 9 years old, monitored by the public health service, eat three square meals a day. According to Paulinha, there are still at least 750 families living in conditions of extreme food insecurity.

Ajeum in the Streets, a project that feeds people living on the streets in the centre of the city of São Paulo, say access to emergency funding made it easier for them to provide meals at a time when the donations and raffles that sustain the initiative had become difficult given widespread hardship. The project's creator, Nega Duda considers herself to be a survivor: "I am a singer, a samba dancer and a black woman who lives from her art", she says about herself. Ajeum nas Ruas gained relevance during the public health crisis, offering "food full of axé (good vibrations)" to one of the sectors that became most vulnerable to scarcity during the pandemic.

Indigenous women living in Manaus also found themselves suffering extreme scarcity due to social isolation and the risks of Covid-19. Many of them work as cleaners and do not have fixed jobs. "Our relatives who live in the villages have plantations and can fish. Here in Manaus we found ourselves in a situation of food insecurity and we had to rely on food parcels", explains Clarice Arbela, director at the **Association of Indigenous Women of Alto Rio Negro**, made up of around 70 women.

Clarice, who is of the Tukano people, says that many indigenous women have been unable to return to their former jobs even after almost two years. However, because emergency support ensured they had food parcels, a number of these women were able to improve their skills at producing handicrafts from tucum fibre, which has become a source of income for some of them. This is a clear example of how even the smallest support can make a big difference in the struggle for social justice. The Covid-19 Fund made

emergency grants of up to R\$10 thousand for each collective or community.

This role of extrapolating the reach of the grant was also seen at the Casa Nem, in Rio de Janeiro. In addition to providing food and hygiene products to the people receiving

The Association of Indigenous Women of Alto Rio Negro used the support received for more than just surviving the emergency situation. They invested their efforts in making handicrafts from tucum fibre and turned this into a source of work and income

shelter, the funding also made the work of Cozinha Nem possible. She had a solidarity-based economic initiative providing vegan food for delivery during the pandemic which generated income for the people working there.

Support to carry on

Brazil Fund's capacity for reflection, listening and dialogue in the field of human rights meant it was able to put together the Covid 19: Emergency Support Fund swiftly. These skills have also left a more long-lasting legacy in the work of the foundation. It was perceived that the organisations defending human rights needed some time to catch their breath, in order to restructure and get back on their feet, so in the second half of 2020, some of the calls for application gained the primary focus of providing institutional support to these groups.

"This means that when groups are sending proposals for the calls for applications, they can request funding for rent, help with the expenses of activists and volunteers and other items that are needed for the upkeep of their organisations and the work they do", says Allyne Andrade. "Support is no longer just for the projects and a specific set of activities. Now it is so the groups can continue resisting setbacks to rights."

In 2021, the strategy used in order to continue providing support to human rights groups in tackling the consequences of the pandemic, was to join forces with the campaigns created by organisations at the grassroots level. Brazil Fund put its fund-raising skills at the service of initiatives by the **Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB)** who wanted to ensure healthcare and food for the indigenous peoples of Amazônia, and the **Black Coalition for Rights**, and their campaign People are Going Hungry.

We agree with the words of the creator of Ajeum nas Ruas, Nega Duda, when she says "we are people who never stop believing". She believes that looking to the future means "recycling, taking care of each other and keeping up the strength to make public policies that safeguard the wonderful people who live here. The future is ours and we are going to turn this around", she concludes.



The figures over the last 15 years

R\$ 38.5 million

in grants to human rights organisations

30

general and themed calls for proposals

922

projects supported around the country

25

training meetings for participants in supported projects

161

visits to supported projects in their locations, in all 5 regions of the country

46

public awareness-raising events (themed seminars, concerts and others)

29

campaigns and 40 communications products (publications, videos and a content platform)



our work

922 supported projects around the country

The right to free expression, organisation and protest

The right to free sexual orientation and gender identity

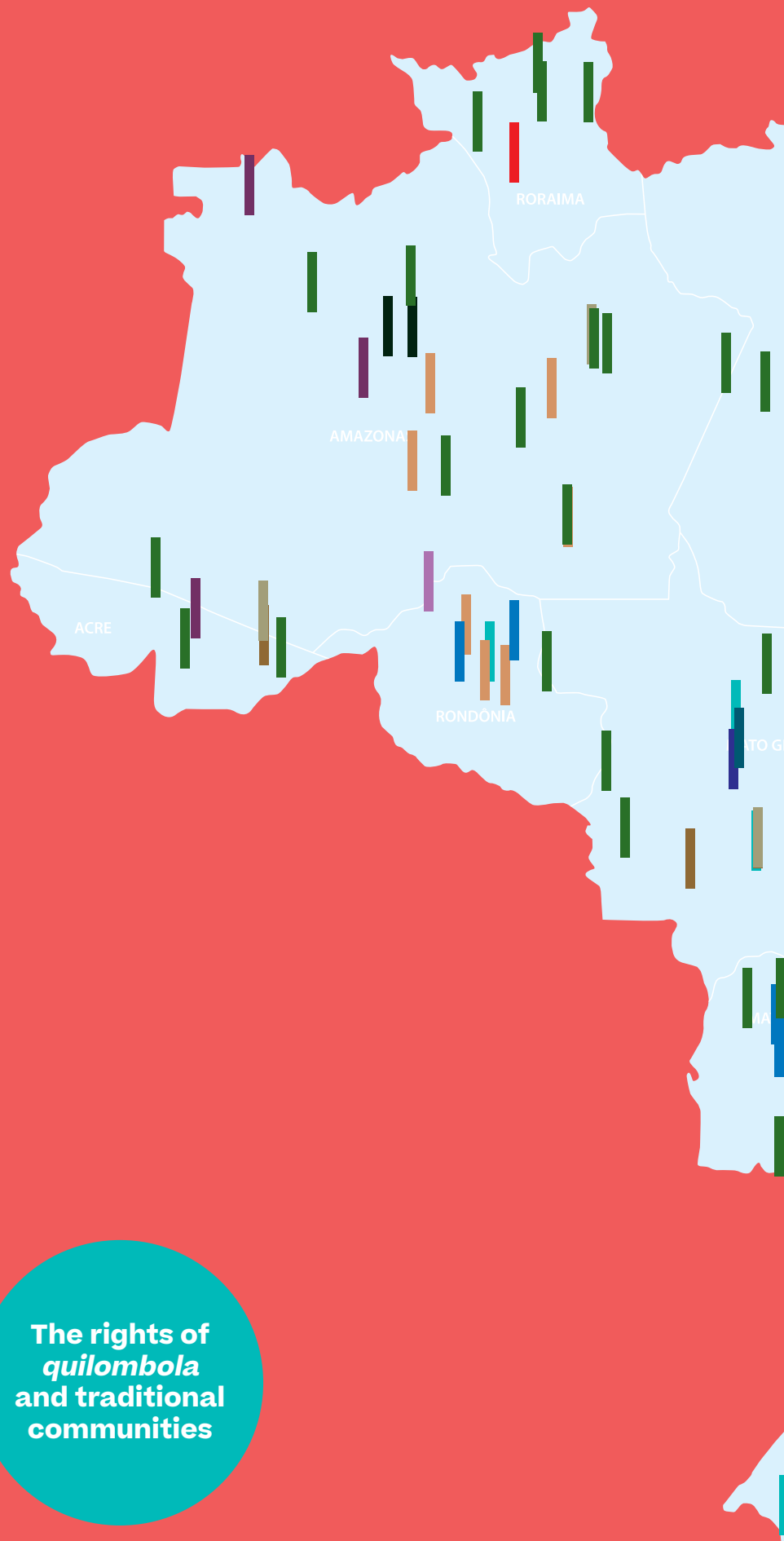
The rights of children and adolescents

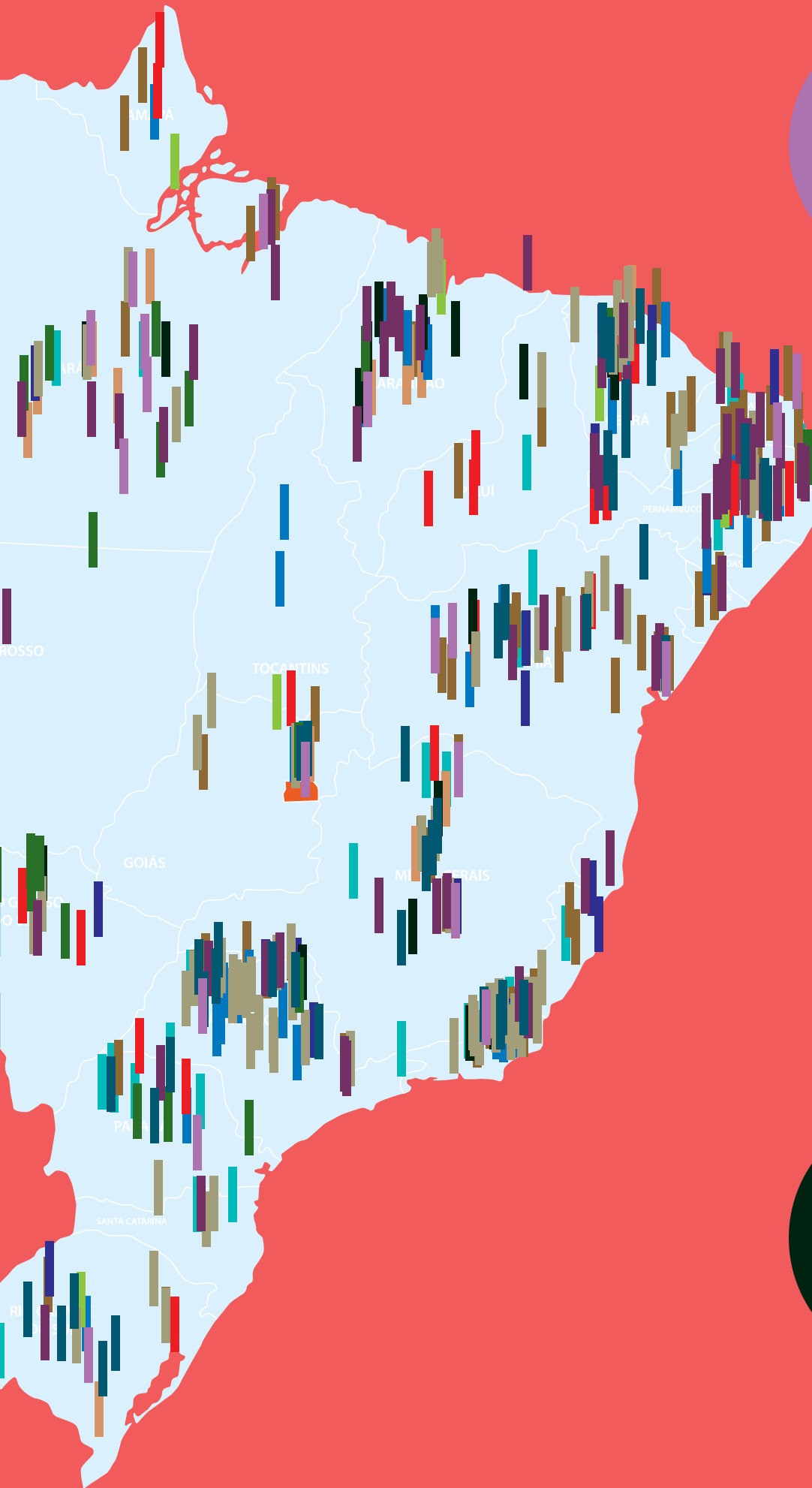
Youth Rights

Socioenvironmental rights in the scenario of mega-projects

Tackling racism

The rights of *quilombola* and traditional communities





The right to land

The right to fair and sustainable cities

Women's rights

The rights of indigenous peoples

Tackling the trafficking of people and slave labour

Guaranteeing Rule of Law and Criminal Justice

