

BRAZIL | mega-event evictions show ongoing discrimination and rights violations Abuse of Eminent Domain and State Abuse of Expropriation | an OSF Cross-Cutting Topic

Favela-dwellers in and around Rio de Janeiro, Brazil face threats of eviction as the city takes on rapid development, infrastructure, and building projects in preparation for hosting the 2016 World Cup and 2014 Olympic Games. The evictions are carried out without sufficient compensation, forewarning, or community consultation. Communities and NGOs have responded with online video advocacy projects, appeals to international news outlets, and independently-created alternate development plans that include the interests of the favela communities.

THE CASE

Planning for the upcoming mega-events¹ in Brazil have led to forced evictions of long-term residents of *favela* communities throughout the city. While government officials stand by their official rhetoric of progress, development, and city planning to argue for the necessity of these evictions, residents and activists argue that the real motive is to realize pre-existing visions for urban development, which do not take into account the best interests of the poor. The energy generated by hosting these major events cloaks the violations of rights, and enables government officials and private developers to carry out large-scale, rapid evictions. The wide range of concurrent projects and participating actors also allows politicians and developers to avoid accountability. Renato Cosentino, of [Comitê Popular Rio Copa e Olimpíada \[pt\]](#), CPRCO, offers an example of this, saying "...the governor says he has to remove the Museum of the Indian (Indigenous Museum) because FIFA has requested it. However, FIFA has since clarified that that wasn't their rule. Politicians are using the mega-events to accelerate their own view of development, without feeling a need to consider what residents need or want."

Government plans to raze neighborhoods and evict residents typically come as a surprise to those affected by the plans. Priscilla Neri, project manager at WITNESS, says, "As a first step (or warning) that a

house is slated for demolition, the local government usually spray paints the front door (today it is spray painted with SMH for *Secretaria Municipal de Habitação*; in colonial times it was an X). Sometimes this is how the residents first learn of any threats [to their homes]." In other cases, residents are notified in the middle of the night, just hours prior to demolition of their homes. In the event that residents are given prior notice, they are often deceived or lied to about the events that will unfold, the compensation that they are entitled to, and the recourse they may seek. Once the evictions take place, residents receive unfair or insufficient compensation, relocation to neighborhoods hours from their original homes and sources of income, or nothing at all.

RIGHTS AND EVICTIONS

While the communities facing evictions are repeatedly told that they are being removed in order to make way for a necessary construction project, they are aware that underpinning their removal is also the high value of their land (they are often situated on prime real estate, near the city center), and their status as urban poor.

The official treatment of wealthy residents of other communities highlights this perception; in 2012, when construction was expected to inconvenience residents of the exclusive Leblon neighborhood in Rio, authorities provided valet service and assistants to the affected residents to soften the blow of their hardship. These residents were not being evicted, but were simply dealing with construction noise and having to park their cars further away from their homes than usual.

¹ Mega-events encompass a wide variety of sporting events like the Olympic Games, political events such as IMF, World Bank, or WTO meetings, and cultural events such as World Expositions.

Priscilla Neri commented on the discriminatory nature of the evictions of favela residents taking place around the upcoming mega-events, saying, “I think the underlying (and unifying) thread between this [illegal evictions and demolitions] and other kinds of abuses is that it reliably happens to the same groups of populations (poor, underrepresented, historically excluded, etc.), regardless of the specific type of violation. The glue here, in my view, are definitely the deeply rooted patterns of discrimination that have long haunted Brazil (the trend of [marking] homes in favelas to make room for the more powerful was already happening during Portuguese colonization when over 30% of Rio’s poor was forcibly evicted in [the] early 1800s so that the Portuguese nobles could live on those very hillsides... sadly familiar).”

TOOLS AND TACTICS

Video advocacy | In reaction to the forced evictions discussed above, [WITNESS](#) and [Habitat International Coalition](#) (HIC) have teamed up to train community leaders in affected favelas on how to use video advocacy to further their resistance. [One of their videos](#) discusses this partnership and the training methodology, combining it with some community member testimonies. The Brazilian organization *Plataforma DhESCA Brasil* (for the promotion of Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental human rights) also worked with WITNESS on a project called “[Voices of the Mission](#)” which interviewed residents of communities facing eviction. This collaboration has empowered local activists to tell their stories in a new way and bring new energy to the resistance against forced evictions. The activists learned fundamental research skills that can be applied to other formats and issues, including what questions to ask interviewees, how to obtain informed consent, how to ensure their safety and that of the interviewees, and how to tell a story visually.

International news coverage | The stories of evictions gained attention on international news sources that were not affected by the nationalist rhetoric surrounding the coverage of the sporting events in Brazil. Renato Cosentino notes that international media coverage was essential to the success of some

activists and favela residents in Rio in changing the direction of projects, or at least obtaining more adequate housing upon eviction. He says, “The key element was the attention that the activists were able to get... they were able to get the word out on international media sources. They received very little support from [local and national] elites and politicians...”

Alternate plans | In Vila Autodromo – a favela near the Olympic Games site in which evictions were being carried out in the guise of development – residents, university students, and researchers came together to create a [Plano Popular \[pt\]](#) – a development plan that took into account the residents of the *favela*. This plan, motivated in part by the residents’ intuition that their displacement was motivated by the rising land values in the area, demonstrates that it is more expensive to demolish the favela and build new housing (likely for new, wealthy residents) than it would be to regularize or upgrade the favela for the existing residents. As of this writing the government had not replied to the community’s counter plan, but the residents of Vila Autodromo were able to secure resettlement to a nearby community, instead of one many miles away and, according to Cosentino, moved directly into homes that were already built and ready to be inhabited – which he points out is not typically the case.

RELATED READING

[Rio on Watch Forced Evictions](#)

[WITNESS Blog “Key for a Key: Unlocking a Video Advocacy Training in Brazil”](#)

[WITNESS blog “What do the World Cup and Olympics have to do with Human Rights Violations?”](#)

[NYT “Slum Dwellers Are Defying Brazil’s Grand Design for Olympics”](#)

[NYT Op-Ed “In the Name of the Future, Rio Is Destroying Its Past”](#)

[Comitê Popular Rio Copa e Olimpíada \[pt\]](#)

[CPRCO Report \[pt\]](#)

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