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THE PANDEMIC AND TERRITORIES: Results of public investment for community health communication in the five Brazilian regions

A Pandemia e os territórios: Resultados do investimento público para a comunicação comunitária em saúde nas cinco regiões brasileiras

La pandemia y los territorios: resultados de la inversión pública para la comunicación comunitaria en salud en las cinco regiones brasileñas



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ABSTRACT:

This research systematizes the outcomes of 15 internationally funded community health communication initiatives implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a qualitative and descriptive approach, the study utilized participant observation and document analysis to gather data. Content analysis revealed that these initiatives successfully expanded the network of local partners for community communicators, predominantly relied on local sources, and addressed community problems through the participation of community members in a network communication model. While the sustainability of actions post-funding was emphasized, collective evaluation mechanisms were notably absent. Creating a network of community communicators with the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation and the Pan American Health Organization was strengthened, highlighting the potential for multiplying community communication solutions in future health emergencies and their impact in other contexts.

Keywords: Popular and Social Media, Community Participation, Scientific Communication and Dissemination, Health Communication.

RESUMO

A pesquisa sistematiza os resultados de 15 iniciativas de comunicação comunitária em saúde que receberam financiamento internacional durante a pandemia de covid-19. O estudo é qualitativo e descritivo, com coleta de dados via observação participante e pesquisa documental. Por meio de análise de conteúdo, observou-se que a rede de parceiros locais dos comunicadores comunitários foi ampliada, e a maior parte das iniciativas teve fontes locais e pautou problemas comunitários, com participação de membros da comunidade em um modelo de comunicação em rede, se atentando para a sustentabilidade das ações com o término do financiamento, apesar da ausência de avaliação coletiva. A criação de rede de comunicadores comunitários com a Fundação Oswaldo Cruz e a Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde foi fortalecida, bem como a possibilidade de multiplicação de soluções em comunicação comunitária em emergências sanitárias e suas consequências em outros espaços.

Palavras-chave: mídia popular, participação da comunidade, comunicação e divulgação científica, mídias sociais, comunicação em saúde.

RESUMEN

La investigación sistematiza los resultados de 15 iniciativas de comunicación comunitaria que recibieron financiamiento internacional durante la pandemia de covid-19. El estudio es cualitativo y descriptivo, con recolección de datos mediante observación participante e investigación documental. A través del análisis de contenido, se observó que se amplió la red de socios locales de comunicadores comunitarios, y la mayoría de las iniciativas tuvieron origen local y abordaron

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problemáticas comunitarias, con la participación de los miembros de la comunidad en un modelo de comunicación en red, prestando atención a la sostenibilidad de acciones con el fin de la financiación, a pesar de la falta de evaluación colectiva. Se fortaleció la creación de una red de comunicadores comunitarios con la Fundación Oswaldo Cruz y la Organización Panamericana de la Salud, así como la posibilidad de multiplicar soluciones en comunicación comunitaria en emergencias de salud y sus consecuencias.

Palabras clave: medios populares, participación comunitaria, comunicación y difusión científica, redes sociales, comunicación en salud.

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Supplementary data can be publicly accessed on the Fiocruz Brasília website: (<https://www.fiocruzbrasilia.fiocruz.br/projetos-de-comunicacao-comunitaria-em-saude-avancam-em-todo-o-pais/>).

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic underlined critical gaps in health communication that require systematization. During the health crisis, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) prioritized popular and community communication as one of its key areas of action. Working with community communicators across the country, Fiocruz not only identified the need for greater investment in this field but also uncovered the specific demands faced by this audience.

Popular communication is an alternative form of communication that originates from popular groups, movements, and organizations, using and being shaped by their means of communication. Also referred to as community communication, it focuses on raising awareness about locally relevant issues and amplifying the voices of the community. In this context, the people are the protagonists, using popular and community communication to express themselves and advocate for the needs of those with common identities and shared interests (Peruzzo, 2015). The true essence of community helps to explain the basis of community communication,

which implies the active, horizontal, and democratic engagement of citizens; collective ownership; the cultivation of a sense of belonging among members; shared responsibility for content produced; collaborative management; the capacity to foster identification with local culture and interests; and the potential to drive the democratization of knowledge and culture. (Peruzzo, 2007, p. 22).

Engaging in this form of communication demands utilizing resources beyond traditional mass media and redefining the concept of communication itself. It calls for a more participatory and critical approach, one that can organize the community and give support to popular actions, instead of just raising awareness about a specific topic (Kaplun, 1985).

It also requires effective mobilization, that is, the capacity to “summon wills to act in pursuit of a common purpose, guided by shared interpretation and meaning” (Toro & Werneck, 1996). To achieve this, the matters of any popular communication must originate from within the community itself, ensuring its active participation in shaping and developing content. When this content is ready for dissemination, the community, even if not directly involved in every stage of its creation, identifies itself with this communication. This sense of co-authorship fosters a connection, as the community recognizes itself in the communication and embraces it as its own.

Regardless of its significant potential, community communication in Brazil still faces the obstacle of an enduring challenge of limited popular participation, a legacy deeply rooted in the country’s history of four centuries of colonization and slavery, and in a Republic marked by authoritarianism, coups, and dictatorship (Paixão, 2015).

A recent study examining communication strategies across the three management levels of Brazil’s Unified Health System (SUS) during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the urgent need for mechanisms that foster emancipatory community communication, with community engagement and the coordination of “local leaders, resources, and institutions”. The research further advocates for “creating popular communication agents to work in health emergencies, particularly within Primary Health Care, aligning their actions with community initiatives” (Santos *et al.*, 2021).

In 2002, Fiocruz and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), with funding from the Government of Canada, launched a Call for Proposals for Civil Society Projects on Popular and Community Health Communication to foster this communication in participatory and decentralized health initiatives. Out of 138 submissions, 15 projects were selected, each receiving R\$ 45,000.00 and an eight-month timeline for implementation. These projects addressed the following topics: combating the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications through actions to promote health; enhancing access to public policies and rights; encouraging vaccination; combating fake news; ensuring food security; supporting mental health; strengthening health surveillance; fostering income generation; and promoting sociocultural diversity.

Beyond financial contribution, the initiative would also play a pivotal role in the educational training of popular and community communicators nationwide through a series of online Exchange Workshops on project management and health communication. These workshops would help the implementation of proposed initiatives, enable the replication of solutions in diverse contexts, and increase their resilience in times of health and social crisis.

This paper outlines the implementation of 15 initiatives selected from small and medium-sized civil society organizations across the country, incorporating critical perspectives on gender, human rights, equity, and ethnicity. During the preparatory phase, an online workshop was conducted to provide educational training in project development, focusing on health communication, and open to all interested communicators. Following the selection process, each project was assigned a socio-technical advisor appointed by Fiocruz and PAHO. These

advisors, experienced in health communication, were tasked with providing remote guidance and support to ensure the development of activities.

In light of this context, it is essential to explore the questions: To what extent did government financial support enhance the popular communication of the 15 selected projects? Throughout the implementation process, were connections forged between Fiocruz, PAHO, and community communicators, thereby fostering the development of a network of popular communicators? Moreover, were these communicators properly trained and qualified? Lastly, are the outcomes of these initiatives sustainable and replicable in other contexts or settings?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative and descriptive approach, offering a comprehensive synthesis of the monitoring and evaluation process applied to the results of 15 projects selected through a Call for Proposals for Civil Society Projects on Popular and Community Health Communication. The participants involved in these projects are briefly outlined in Table 1:

Table 1 - Selected projects in the Call for Proposals for Popular and Community Health Communication

Region	Name	Location	Focus	Expected Products
Southern	People's Health Committee: Information is the best medicine	Santo André - SP	Develop content aimed at countering fake news; broadcast and share health and hygiene prevention tips; provide updates on government actions to combat the pandemic; and inform about programs promoting public health initiatives, such as vaccination campaigns.	Videos and graphic materials tailored for social networks; broadcast lists using the WhatsApp of Communities; audio spots in sound cars; banners featuring urgent warning messages; and informational materials.
	Young communicators - popular communication in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro's Metropolitan Region.	Niterói - RJ	Disseminate information about vaccinations available through the SUS, training young communicators to produce, verify, and share health-related content, thereby helping to combat misinformation.	Scholarships – support for the educational training of young communicators
	Community communication focused on a platform advocating the rights to a dignified life in popular territories.	Niterói - RJ	Develop and implement communication processes and materials that enhance community mobilization and engagement, respecting its cultural diversity, in the sociopolitical demands for rights.	Educational training of communicators and production of print and digital materials, fanzines and podcasts.
Midwest	On the airwaves: bringing public health within everyone's reach.	Alto Paraíso - GO	Integrate the educational process in the training of 20 young communicators with hands-on Educommunication activities.	Podcasts, videocasts, vignettes, and one weekly program.
	Positive Communication: mitigating the impact of fake news on public health policies.	Brasília - DF	Develop strategies to strengthen popular and community health communication actions aimed at combating fake news in public health; promote vaccination; and support the defense of the SUS.	Educational training workshops for multipliers; Social Media Communication Campaign advocating for vaccination.
	Romani youth: from invisibility to community health communication.	Cuiabá - MT	Educational training for young Brazilian Romani in community health communication to help their communities combat misinformation and fake news.	Online educational training and social media content production with a focus on health, grounded in ethical, anti-racist, and emancipatory principles.

Region	Name	Location	Focus	Expected Products
North	Communication project to promote health campaigns and encourage vaccination.	Boa Vista – RR	Inform, persuade, and engage the local community served by the collective migration network.	Implement a targeted health promotion campaign aimed at encouraging vaccination and combating fake news within the Venezuelan migrant community.
	Community communication to deconstruct fake news and denialism in the Tapajós territories.	Santarém - PA	Fight misinformation through the production of both online and offline content.	Social media content shared through various channels, including cards, videos, among others, community radio stations, campaigns, and printed materials to reach residents without access to telephone networks.
	Enhance food security and health communication in the Lower Amazon region.	Santarém - PA	Raise awareness among the people of the Lower Amazon towards the importance and care for food security and health promotion.	Podcast and radio spots for the network's partner and affiliated broadcasters, and for community radio stations.
South	Informing is vaccinating: a story of fake news against vaccination and the public health system.	Porto Alegre – RS	Create a documentary about vaccines and the impacts of misinformation on the public health system.	Documentary about fake news and vaccines.
	The Project “Caravan and Podcast Health and Culture”.	Rio Grande – RS	Disseminate information debunking fake news.	Biweekly podcasts and three cultural interventions in neighborhoods across the city.
Northeastern	Podcast “Minutes of better health in the territories: Carrapato Literary Radio” in the fight against misinformation.	Crato – CE	Improve the broadcasting and production of the Carrapato web radio and offer courses for community communicators.	Radio production, courses, and content for dissemination.
	Coque Community Radio - pathways to health.	Recife – PE	Broadcast programming about health on the Community Radio in the Coque favela/neighborhood.	Audiovisual content - Weekly informational programs.
	<i>Kuna Luvovelu Ua Jungu</i> stands in defense of life.	Salvador - BA	Strengthen the communication practices of traditional peoples and communities.	Educational training programs and communication strategies for a variety of topics, including COVID-19, mental health, vaccination, agroecological farming, combating fake news, food security, and sociocultural diversity.
National (considered as the southern region in the Call for Proposals)	The Toxic Agribusiness: how to report exposure to pesticides.	Iporã - PR	Present key findings from the research that includes 30 representative cases of rights violations in communities. Provide guidance on how to report pesticide poisoning and contamination in communities, particularly for peasant, riverside, indigenous, and quilombola populations.	Guidebook and a six-episode podcast series.

Source: the author (2022).

For the analysis, the process of social mobilization was examined through its four dimensions, each of which must be developed and carried out simultaneously. The first dimension is the imaginary, which reflects the selection and construction of shared interests by the group. The second is the field of action, which is defined clearly and realistically according to the possibilities of intervention and the limits of action. The third dimension is collectivization, which stabilizes the social mobilization process by ensuring participants act with shared purposes

and meanings and are aware of what is being done through some communication. Finally, monitoring, which provides criteria to assess changes, including making outcomes visible (Toro & Werneck, 1996).

The data were gathered through a combination of methods. Firstly, documentary research was conducted by analyzing 45 technical reports prepared by project leaders and technical advisors, who documented the activities carried out (Moreira, 2005). Secondly, participant observation (Laville & Dione, 1999) was employed during exchange workshops, events, and other activities where the groups were invited to participate. Each project produced three technical reports, with scheduled submissions in January, March, and May 2023.

The data for content analysis (Bardin, 2011) were systematically organized into the categories outlined in Table 2 following the submission of execution reports. For each category, the presence or absence of the categories was documented in an Excel spreadsheet. This documentation included observations and illustrative examples extracted from the reports which substantiated each data point. The categorization framework was established based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature on community communication. The data collection instrument was pilot-tested using the first 15 reports submitted by the collectives. In this phase, the definitions of each category were verified and checked whether they were mutually exclusive, homogeneous, exhaustive, and objectively classified. Once data collection from the reports was completed, the spreadsheet was forwarded to the project coordinator and respective sociotechnical advisors for validation.

Table 2 - Categories for content analysis on elements of community communication

Category	Description	References
Location	The messages directly address community problems and align with local culture and interests, offering insights into that group's daily life and activities, thereby shedding light on topics of local interest.	Peruzzo (2005), Kaplun (1985), Peruzzo (2015)
Sources	The voices of community members serve as important sources for creating communication materials, incorporating a diverse range of actors (polyphony) who express themselves in the crafted messages.	Kaplun (1985), Peruzzo (2015), Santos et al (2021)
Participation and Production	The involvement of community members in the production and development of materials is characterized by an active engagement, a horizontal structure, and a democratic approach. (Is this participation consistently documented through records of production meetings, for example, or is decision-making primarily restricted to project coordinators?)	Peruzzo (2005), Kaplun (1985)
Collective Assessment	The community evaluates the materials after they have been distributed. (Do the coordinators assess the quality of the actions and whether the objectives were achieved, or is there room for collective evaluation?)	Kaplun (1985)
Connection	Keeping open channels of dialogue with the community; dialogic communication: active interaction/dialogue, creating a two-way communication between interlocutors. (Description of these channels and their functioning, with examples.)	Kaplun (1985), Santos et al (2021)
ICTs	Activity enhanced by access to Information and Communication Technologies - ICTs.	Antunes e Coqueiro (2022)
Clarity of Language	Use of clear and simple language, proper grammar, well-structured design, and easily understandable information.	Santos et al (2021)
Communication Model Adopted	Communication can be informational (linear and one-way, from sender to receiver) or networked-based (where multiple voices, discourses, ideas, and proposals interact, with receivers also regarded as senders).	Santos et al (2021)
Sustainability	The continuity of actions after the funding period is planned, and the execution process is known.	Call for Proposals
Replicability	Records of the stages and steps of implementation that allow for application in various contexts.	Call for Proposals
Counterpart	Description of the workforce involved, including the number of participants; use of the institution's physical space for project management; use of equipment required; the existing network of contacts the institution or group already has within the community; other local partnerships, etc.	Call for Proposals

Source: the author (2022)¹.

It is widely recognized that “community communication becomes a space for sharing across both similarities and differences, bridging the new and the old, and recreating new cultural identities and possibilities for social transformation” (Paulino, Mendes & Pedrosa, 2009). From this perspective, eight exchange workshops

¹ More information: <https://www.fiocruzbrasil.br/projetos-de-comunicacao-comunitaria-em-saude-avancam-em-todo-o-pais/>

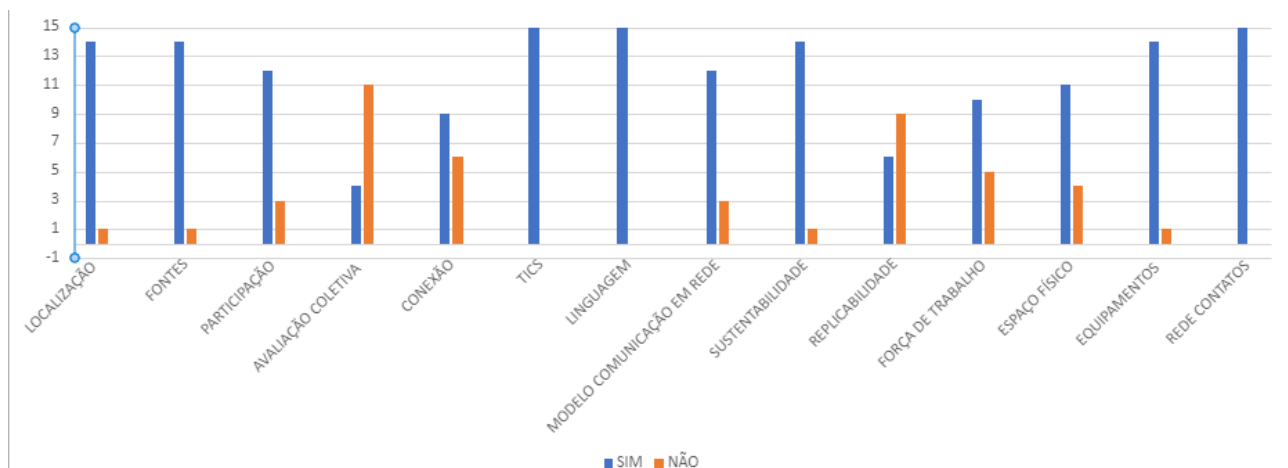
were conducted on topics such as access to information, SUS, vaccines, combating fake news, risk communication, audiovisual production, and scientific dissemination, among others. Furthermore, a specialized workshop on report writing was held to address the specific needs of the selected projects. These workshops played a crucial role in monitoring activities. To showcase the outcomes and inspire similar initiatives, an online seminar was held in March 2023, where the results of all executed projects were presented.

Given the diverse nature and objectives of these projects, which stem from popular communicators with varying levels of experience - ranging from well-established figures to those just starting -, the analysis neither concentrated on the specific theme of each project nor compared their advancements and limitations. Instead, it examined the degree to which they introduced elements of community communication. Furthermore, the research did not draw comparisons between the initiatives and their findings; instead, it offered an overview of the application of resources and the effective implementation of community health communication. The research was formally registered with the Ethics Committee of Fiocruz Brasília².

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from 45 reports submitted by the participants of the Call for Proposals showed that the analysis categories were consistently reflected across most of the actions undertaken, as illustrated in the chart below.

Chart 1: The presence of the categories analyzed in the 15 supported projects



Source: the author (2023).

All supported groups used ICTs to present their products and community communication initiatives. Apart from the use of social media in various formats – such as social media cards, podcasts, and WhatsApp groups –, it was observed that some groups supported by the Call for Proposals, in actions with favela residents, rural populations, indigenous communities, and other marginalized groups, continued to rely on more traditional communication means that remain valuable in community communication. These included banners, posters, flyers, sound trucks, radio poles, and motorbike announcement services. After all, the excessive technologization and formalization, common in the history of government communication with society, hinders meaningful dialogue in the public sphere (Gil & Matos, 2012). On the other hand, the use of ICTs proves indispensable for communicating health messages in times of crisis. These technologies empower the dissemination of information among communities, communicating about care, allowing the members of a community to voice their concerns, or even to request support, with people playing an active role in communication rather than merely being passive receivers of information (Antunes & Coqueiro, 2022).

The language employed across all collective productions was deemed appropriate and used simple vocabulary and standard Portuguese, ensuring accessibility to anyone, without reliance on academic jargon. On the other hand, it was noted that one of the productions incorporated the non-binary dialect (where the letter “E” is placed before the letters “A” and “O” to denote gender neutrality). This may pose comprehension challenges for those unfamiliar with this dialect, particularly regarding certain groups, such as dyslexic individuals, for example, as the dialect lacks established linguistic support and has yet to be widely debated to be imposed as a norm and included in communications. Additionally, some spelling errors were identified, which could be addressed by having the materials reviewed by a community member with stronger proficiency in Portuguese.

² Accessible at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTSWZKKQrHk>.

All groups also reported the formation or expansion of their networks of contacts and partnerships as a direct result of the actions conducted. These efforts included reconnecting with community leaders and using broadcast lists to reach residents from other communities, among other activities. Key partners cited in these collaborations included the Municipal Health Department, universities, social movements, the Municipal Health Council, and non-governmental organizations. In some instances, the partnerships led to the development of proposals for university extension courses.

Community communication is rooted in networking, where each partnership increases the potential reach for expanding health communication and the quality of the work, given that partners not only receive materials for dissemination but are also invited to contribute in meaningful ways. As stated by Gil and Matos (2012, p. 163), “The denser the network, the more positive effects it tends to have on the development of that community.” This networked communication, which also involves the population, enhances the possibility of understanding and addressing health demands while fostering community engagement (Santos *et al.*, 2021).

It is noteworthy that 12 out of the 15 supported groups reported employing a dialogic and participatory approach to communication with the community, in contrast to the other three groups, which followed a *transmission* and informational model (sender-message-receiver), where communication was solely planned and executed by the project management team. This top-down approach contrasts with the principles of community communication, which presupposes the democratization of decision-making and activities. Nevertheless, for health-promoting communication to be effective, it is crucial to ensure community engagement at every stage, ranging from the development of materials to evaluation. This prevalence of top-down communication has already been observed in communication strategies adopted by SUS management during the COVID-19 pandemic, where communication often excluded the population from the process (Santos *et al.*, 2021). Community communication, on the other hand, empowers individuals to access communication channels as content producers and disseminators, rather than merely serving as passive receivers (Peruzzo, 2015).

Community communication positions individuals as protagonists and message receivers (Peruzzo, 2015). Rooted in grassroots movements, it is driven by “communities and social groups that share identities and interests” (Peruzzo, 2005, p. 22). In this perspective, 14 collectives provided information that highlighted the local nature of the activities, addressing community problems aligned with local culture and interests. These collectives relied on sources from community members themselves. Furthermore, they outlined strategies to ensure the sustainability of actions beyond the timeline of the current funding and the use of their equipment as a means to facilitate the execution of activities.

It should be emphasized that one of the collectives produced a documentary focused on COVID-19 vaccination - a subject that transcends specific communities, cultures, or local interests. Notwithstanding, the group took proactive steps to screen the documentary in key spaces, including the Municipal Health Conference and at meetings of the Municipal Health Council, engaging the population in discussions, and fostering awareness about the importance of vaccination - with reports indicating that some participants who, influenced by the debates, decided to get vaccinated afterward.

It was noted that another group, in turn, chose not to utilize local sources, relying instead on experts from outside the community for their news coverage. This approach is not inherently problematic; however, in the context of community communication, the group could have also heard the voices of community members as sources of their reports. Additionally, the group members failed to clarify how the sustainability of the actions would be maintained beyond the funding period, nor did they address whether their equipment would be used to carry out activities.

Most collectives reported employing their own physical spaces and workforce to support their initiatives. However, some collectives allocated resources specifically to hire staff to help develop and manage activities, while others invested in enhancing their existing spaces through renovations and the acquisition of new equipment, such as radio studios and loudspeakers for radio poles to be placed on the streets of the community, for example.

Undoubtedly, while every community communication initiative serves as a means of disseminating locally relevant content, raising awareness among people requires more than just dissemination. Efforts should be made to ensure that people not only absorb the messages being shared but also actively and directly participate in the creation and dissemination of messages (Peruzzo, 2015). This participatory approach was evident in nine projects. These initiatives fostered open dialogue between groups and the community, as outlined in the reports, through diverse ways, such as social network interactions; community testimonials; listening to participants; and recorded discussion during activities. Moreover, campaigns were designed based on community feedback and suggestions; radio stations addressed listener requests; and daily face-to-face and online interactions encouraged community active participation and even content integration inspired by input from community social movements.

The replicability of the projects was notably absent in most reports, with only six outlining methods for other collectives to learn further and replicate their successful experiences. The described methods included: providing health communication materials for social networks on other online profiles; writing an academic paper about their experiences for later publication in a book or Journal; organizing study groups; creating practical replication guides; sharing programming with other regional web radio stations; training professionals from other communication spaces; and producing handouts and guidebooks that can be reproduced. On the other hand, it is important to consider that the inclusion of replicability as a criterion, if explicitly stated, could potentially undermine the sustainability of the collectives, particularly those reliant on resources gained through mentoring in their respective fields. This may explain the lack of this category in most reports. Material with reports on the development of each project is available online.

Another essential aspect lies in the evaluation of community communication, which should be conducted by the message receivers - the community members themselves (Kaplun, 1985). Regarding this category, among the groups studied only four engaged in some form of collective evaluation. One group, which conducted educational training for women from the community, assessed both individual and collective learning, involving coordinators, consultants, and workshop facilitators at the end of each activity. This evaluation aimed to guide future sessions in terms of content, teaching resources, and instrumental methods. Furthermore, the planning of subsequent project phases was also designed participatory. The evaluations brought up the agenda of social demands related to community health, as well as concrete demands for a more informed, qualitative, technical, and proactive approach to managing digital platforms, as stated in one of the submitted reports. According to it, "Besides mastering a conceptual and methodological repertoire on community communication, gaining practical experience with digital tools and platforms is equally vital. Therefore, we began a series of creative exercises aimed at producing digital community communication products."

On the other hand, a group that worked with podcasts planned to share the produced content with the interviewees to gather their feedback. However, the group did not specify the methods or criteria used for this evaluation. Another collective, which produced the previously mentioned documentary, promoted screening sessions as opportunities for exchange and dialogue, broadening the discussion and conversation on innovative forms and spaces for exhibition. Meanwhile, the fourth group reported that participant feedback underlined "the need to improve how we communicate with the priority audience," though without detailing how this would be achieved.

It should be underlined that the true value in community communication lies not in the mere dissemination of a message, but rather when the receivers begin to reflect, discuss, and apply the communication. As Kaplun (1985, pp. 258-259) aptly states, "A message that is not completed, enriched, recreated, and embraced by those to whom it is addressed is somewhat of a wasted effort. Our messages are not ends in themselves but means, instruments to trigger processes."

One limitation of the research was the constrained timeframe between receiving funding and implementing the original proposal. This tight schedule impacted the measurement of results. In the context of community communication, key characteristics include the shared responsibility of community members for the content produced and the sense of belonging fostered by the content developed among community members (Peruzzo, 2005). Nevertheless, this is the type of data that would rarely be described in the reports or could be assessed without inherent bias by technical advisors or project managers.

It is also acknowledged that the process of design and implementation of the Call for Proposals was overly focused on the coordinating team, even because of legal and bureaucratic constraints inherent in public administration. It could be that the expectations concerning the projects were not sufficiently clear to the participating collectives. Simultaneously, the Call for Proposals might not have fully met the collectives' expectations. Although the initiative aimed to foster horizontal relationships, the roles of sponsors and sponsored are unavoidable in certain contexts. These dynamics may have influenced the delivery of the projects, both positively and negatively.

Despite potential constraints and conflicts, the Call for Proposals underlined a crucial point of convergence between the communication of governmental bodies and international organizations and community communication: the public interest. Public interest communication - or public communication - is dialogic, participatory, citizen-centered, and a vital promoter of citizenship. Far from being optional, it is a duty of the State. To fulfill this obligation, it is imperative to strengthen and give prominence to community communication, as "public communication demands the participation of society and its segments, not merely as receivers of government communication, but as engaged producers" (Nascimento, 2012, p. 295).

FINAL REMARKS

The findings showed that all projects integrated ICTs and expanded their networks of local partners by leveraging activities developed with public funding. Most initiatives primarily relied on local sources and addressed community problems. Importantly, they adopted a networked communication model rather than a *top-down transmission* approach, thereby ensuring the sustainability of actions after the funding period concluded.

In contrast, most reports significantly lacked collective evaluation and replicability. Despite this, there was a significant emphasis on initiatives working with community communication, including the establishment of a network of community communicators in collaboration with Fiocruz and PAHO. These efforts underscored the potential for multiplying innovative solutions in community communication to effectively address health emergencies and mitigate their consequences.

Even though the study did not prioritize comparing the performance of different groups, it was evident that some groups underperformed when compared to others. To augment outcomes in future Calls for Proposals, it is critical to condition the transfer of subsequent resources to the fulfillment of complete and high-quality deliverables. Moreover, it is imperative to ensure the originally planned timelines without shortening them, thus guaranteeing that all groups can fully execute their activities as outlined in the approved project.

Finally, it is recommended that future funding proposals incorporate the need to present community communication concepts and practices, whereby groups evaluate whether they are genuinely empowering people as the protagonists of communication or simply perpetuating traditional mass communication models. This research opens the door for further studies that directly measure, in collaboration with the communities involved, the participation and connection between community communicators and the people, as well as their shared responsibility and evaluation of the content produced. The findings and recommendations of this study thereby indicate a pathway toward enhancing public communication by fostering community communication.

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