

Favelas as a Model of Sustainability

📍 Rio de Janeiro

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About

In Brazil, favelas, or informal neighborhoods, are frequently stigmatized as environmental villains. However, sustainability problems they face (e.g., sewage problems, trash accumulation, building on government conservation lands) come from the lack of state capacity in providing adequate affordable housing to all people. Meanwhile, favela residents actually pioneer many grassroots sustainability initiatives. The Sustainable Favela Network at Catalytic Communities seeks to connect community organizers involved in these initiatives and promote rectification of historic and present day environmental injustices.



Global Relevance

In the context of the current climate crisis underscored by geopolitical tensions and tragedy of the commons dynamics, the reciprocity and collaboration modeled by favela residents in sustainability initiatives can provide lessons for policymakers elsewhere.

Mutirões

I attended a couple mutirões to understand how bottom-up sustainability functions. Mutirões are collective action events that bring people together to solve a problem, such as a cleanup, constructing a community garden, or building a sidewalk. In Morro de Salgueiro, a historic urban quilombola and favela in Zona Norte, I helped clear land for the construction of a community garden. I learned how favela residents use strong social infrastructure to foster sustainability initiatives provisionally even when resources are scarce. In Suruí, diverse fishing and indigenous communities came together to exchange knowledge, build a garden, and clean-up the beach. Participating in these events and interviewing residents themselves gave me the insights for my deliverable to CatComm, an article with insights for what policymakers worldwide can learn about bottom-up sustainability from the favelas.

