



SCORCHED LANDS OF JOURNALISM IN THE AMAZON

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FOREWORD

THE CLIMATE-JOURNALISM EMERGENCY

The Amazon is currently one of the world's regions most directly affected by the climate crisis. The urgent need to act is in direct conflict with economic interests, leading to disastrous consequences. The crisis facing this vast region is likely to worsen over the next few years, which is a risk for the rainforest, for Brazil, and for the world.

To understand what's going on, we need reliable information that comes directly from the source. The fight for free, plural and independent local journalism is closely linked to the climate crisis. Unfortunately, journalists in the region suffer from a glaring absence of infrastructure (transportation and Internet access, for example) and a lack of financial and human resources. When covering environmental news, journalists in the Brazilian Amazon face threats and violence on a daily basis, due to the polarised and unstable political landscape. Added to this are economic pressures and many intimidation strategies that come directly from the authorities and private-sector players.

In October 2021, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), together with over 60 environmental journalists from various countries, launched an appeal for the right to report on environmental issues. In the face of intensifying challenges, this new report demonstrates the scale of attacks on press freedom in the Brazilian Amazon. But the report also highlights the organisational measures the media and local journalists are putting in place to deal with the issue. Their work is a reminder of the urgent need for ambitious public policies that would create a safe environment for journalism in the Amazon.

MAP OF PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS

From 30 June 2022 to 30 June 2023, RSF recorded 66 press freedom violations in the Brazilian Amazon's nine states: Amazonas, Pará, Mato Grosso, Rondônia, Roraima, Tocantins, Maranhão, Amapá and Acre.

The violations include cases of physical attacks, harassment, threats. The data was collected by a group of monitors set up by RSF that includes media professionals and civil society organisations.



THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

Covers **5 million** square kilometres = **61%** of Brazil's territory

Has **30 million** inhabitants = **14.7%** of the total population

Manaus and **Belém**, the two biggest cities in the Amazon, were the sites of the largest number of attacks against journalists during the period analysed.



A helicopter and plane fly over the Homoxi region in the Yanomami Indigenous Land. © Bruno Kelly / Amazônia Real

1 | A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

In an area covering more than 5 million km², with some of the greatest natural resources in the world, decimated by intensive livestock farming and the spread of agricultural land and mining, the political and economic powers in the Brazilian Amazon have for decades favoured violence and applied pressure on those who oppose their interests. Preserving the forest and local cultures is still seen as an obstacle to development by many city councillors and their regional and international accomplices. Journalists from other parts of Brazil and the world are confronted with the immensity of the area and the complexity of the economic and political balance of power.

1/ THE CHALLENGES OF THE REGION'S GEOGRAPHY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Covering 61% of the national territory, the Brazilian Amazon stretches across nine states. Over such a large area, travel is particularly expensive. Some areas are only accessible by plane or boat, after many hours. "No journalist has ever set foot in, for example, Riozinho, in the state of Acre," says **Alana Manchineri**, head of communications at the Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB). "To get there from Manaus, you have to take a plane, drive seven hours and take a boat for over four hours."

Elaíze Farias, the co-founder and editor-in-chief of the *Amazônia Real* news outlet, based in Manaus, one of the two main urban centres in the Brazilian Amazon along with Belém, knows this problem well. To document her coverage of the advance of mining, deforestation and the possession of indigenous lands by private companies, she regularly needs to go in the field. The complexity of travel, which often involves transport by land, water, and air, results in considerable costs. Elaíze cites as an example flights arranged by *Amazônia Real* in 2021 for the investigative report "Ouro do Sangue Yanomami", produced in partnership with media outlet *Repórter Brasil*. In some places, a one-hour flight can cost almost 4,000 euros. "Sometimes pilots will charge more for the service when they realise that the journalist is going to report on illegal activities", laments Elaíze.

The director of the Brazilian Amazon news magazine *Cenarium*, **Paula Li-taiff**, agrees: "It's not easy, as a local media outlet, to maintain your independence and travel to places that are difficult to access." Also based in Manaus, this media outlet regularly reports on environmental crimes committed in remote areas.

"When it's not possible to go to certain areas, we try to carry out interviews by telephone or WhatsApp", continues **Elaíze Farias**, who was quick to point out the other challenge inherent in this vast wooded region: the lack of Internet connection and phone network. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 73.9% of Brazilian Amazon households have high-speed Internet access, compared with a national average of 80%. It is precisely in areas that are difficult to access, far from the eyes of the state and the press, that conflicts tend to be more violent. Many stories are left untold, due to a lack of resources to launch or pursue a journalistic investigation in this immense territory.



Elaíze Farias and Kátia Brasil, the founders of the Amazônia Real agency. © Alberto César Araújo / Amazônia Real

2/ POLITICAL INTERFERENCE AND CONCENTRATION OF MEDIA OUTLETS

1 Politicians who own major media outlet groups

Journalists in the Brazilian Amazon also work in an area where media outlets are concentrated, with strong interference by political groups and oligarchs¹ in the content broadcast by newspapers, television channels and radio stations.

One in five television channels are owned by politicians and their relatives. The situation is particularly worrying in the easternmost state of the country, Maranhão, where they own 81% of the television channels. This is also the case in the state of Pará, where the family of the current governor, Helder Barbalho, controls two television stations, four radio stations and a printed newspaper. Another state, Roraima, has the same issue: the family of Romero Jucá, a former senator and minister sacked in 2016 for corruption, dominated two television channels, a radio station and a news website until 2022. The same is true in the state of Mato Grosso, where the concentration of the media in the hands of major political families is just as high. One need only observe Diógenes Fagundes, son of senator Wellington Fagundes and husband of deputy Janaina Riva: he is a member of the board of directors of the media group *Agora de Comunicação*, which owns three television channels, three radio stations and one of the most visited news sites in the state.

1 The proliferation of opinion blogs serving candidates

In addition to owning many of the existing media outlets, political figures are also involved in the growth of opinion blogs that they finance directly. The northern region of Brazil, which covers most of the Brazilian Amazon, is the main breeding ground. In this area, 189 of the 450 towns have no local news outlets. And although, between 2022 and 2023, several municipalities came out of this "information drought"², it does not mean that residents have access to reliable information. Many of the blogs listed as "media outlets" are in fact relays for press releases from the local authorities and only publish articles that are favourable to the interests of those that fund them, thus becoming spokespeople for local authorities.

1 The problem of media concentration in Brazil has been explored in depth in other RSF studies published over the past ten years: "Brazil, the country of thirty Berlusconi" (2013); "Media: when oligarchs go shopping" (2016); and "Monitoramento da Propriedade de Mídia" (2017).

2 News Atlas (2023). Institute for the Development of Journalism and Volt Data Lab. Available here: <https://www.atlas.jor.br/>. The region saw a 30% reduction in the number of municipalities classified as information droughts between 2022 and 2023.

“It's not easy, as a local media outlet, to maintain your independence and travel to places that are difficult to access.”

“To get there from Manaus, you have to take a plane, drive seven hours and take a boat for over four hours. But the river is sometimes too low to navigate, so you need to push the canoe.”

“We are surrounded by land-grabbers, armed farmers and rural militias. We have to be careful about what we write. Those who live here know that they are targets.”

3/ THE INFLUENCE OF PRIVATE-SECTOR PLAYERS

In the nine states of the Brazilian Amazon, the main perpetrators of attacks on press freedom are private-sector players, whether they be members of criminal organisations, farmers, private security agents, or representatives of mining, food processing or tourism companies. They are the source of 57% of the violence committed against information professionals in the region between 30 June 2022 and 30 June 2023. In some areas, far from any public and state services, “rules comparable to those of the ‘Wild West’ prevail”, laid down by private-sector players in line with their own interests, explains journalist and researcher Ivânia Vieira, a professor at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM).

While the states of Pará and Amazonas have the highest number of press freedom violations, Roraima has the highest per capita rate. The situation is also worrying in the state of Rondônia. “We are surrounded by land-grabbers, armed farmers and rural militias. We have to be careful about what we write. Those who live here know that they are targets”, explains freelance journalist **Francisco Costa**, who works in Porto Velho, a metropolis of over 460,000 inhabitants. As a contributor to several media outlets, including TV channels *TV Globo*, *Rede TV*, *Canal Futura*, *TV Cultura* and *TV Bandeirantes*, news websites specialising in socio-environmental issues such as *Amazônia Real* and newspapers such as *Folha de S. Paulo*³, he investigates issues such as intensive cattle farming, where the infrastructure eats away at natural vegetation and the territories of traditional communities.

4/ TABOO TOPICS

Reporting on topics relating to the expropriation of indigenous land and intensive farming systematically exposes journalists to intimidation. Between June 2022 and June 2023, more than half of the attacks on press freedom in the Brazilian Amazon were linked to reporting of political issues. Of the 66 press freedom violations recorded by RSF in one year, ten were directly linked to reporting related to agribusiness, mining and Indigenous people. Even when it is not the central subject of the reports, the environment is present in a large proportion of the political subjects covered in the Amazon.



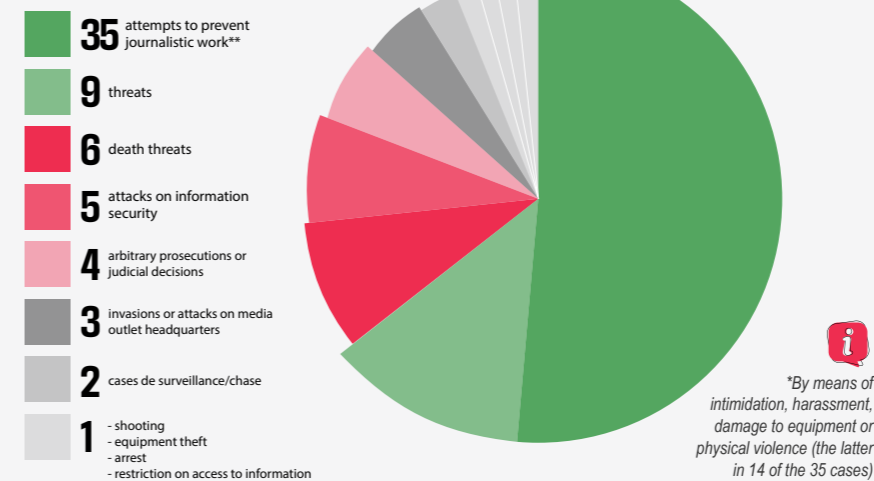
³ National print newspaper with the fourth largest circulation in Brazil, based in São Paulo, in southeastern Brazil, outside the Brazilian Amazon.

“Gold panning is one of the topics that requires the most attention. We’re not free to say what we want, especially when it comes to denouncing something illegal. We also try not to come into conflict with the municipalities where [Indigenous] journalists’ relatives work, to avoid reprisals”, explains Indigenous podcast producer **Cláudia Ferraz**, from the Wanano people. She works for the *Wayuri Network*, a leading indigenous media outlet launched in 2017 in the state of Amazonas. The network operates in the municipalities of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Santa Isabel do Rio Negro and Barcelos, where there are approximately 750 communities of people from 23 different ethnic groups.



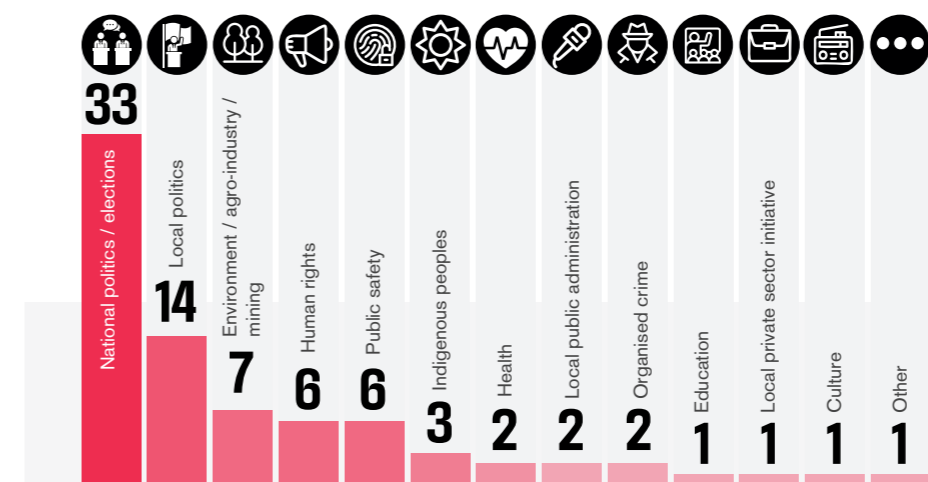
The Wayuri Network’s Cláudia Ferraz (with the microphone) hosts a debate organised by RSF in 2022 on journalism in the Amazon. © Fran Silva Caranguejo-Uçá / Pajor – RSF

TYPES OF VIOLATIONS



“We’re not free to say what we want, especially when it comes to denouncing something illegal. We also try not to come into conflict with the municipalities where [Indigenous] journalists’ relatives work, to avoid reprisals.”

TABOO TOPICS



A recorded incident may be included in more than one category. Thus, the total is greater than 66, which was the total number of recorded incidents.

2 | "A TARGET ON THEIR BACK"

Assassinations, death threats, malicious legal proceedings, cyber harassment: private- and public-sector players who are "put out" by the work of information professionals use various methods to silence them.

1/ DAILY PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND THREATS

| The horrible assassination of Dom Phillips

The brutal murder, in June 2022, of journalist **Dom Phillips** and of Indigenous people expert Bruno Araújo Pereira is one of the most shocking cases. This crime reveals the extent of the violence in the Amazon. Dom Phillips, who worked for British and American media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and the *Financial Times*, had been living in Brazil since 2007. He was conducting interviews with Bruno Araújo Pereira with a view to writing a book entitled *How to Save the Amazon?* when they both were shot at in the Javari Valley, the second largest indigenous territory in Brazil, near the border with Peru. It was only after a ten-day search that their remains were found hidden in the forest, dismembered and burnt.

Before Dom Phillips, two journalists had already been murdered in the Brazilian Amazon in 2018. Director of an online news website, the *Jornal de Rondônia*, based in Cacoal, a town in the east of the state of Rondônia, **Ueliton Bayer Brizon** regularly spoke out against the corruption of local politicians. [He was shot dead on 16 January 2018](#) by unidentified individuals. Journalist and host of *Rádio Pérola FM*, **Jairo Sousa**, [was killed on 26 June](#) of the same year, after receiving a series of threats following his broadcasts condemning public administration corruption in the municipalities of the state of Pará.

| Stories of daily violence

In a context of structural violence linked to the economic and political interests mentioned above, it's not necessary to directly attack or threaten journalists for them to fear for their lives. Over the past ten years, of the 300 environmental defenders murdered in Brazil for reasons linked to ecological issues, the vast majority (eight out of ten) lived in an Amazonian state⁴.

"It is impossible to report in the Amazon without experiencing some form of threat, intimidation or persecution. As journalists, we always have a target on our backs", laments freelance journalist **Francisco Costa**. *"When we're reporting, we sometimes hear noises in the forest and we don't know*



Leaders of the Union of Javari Valley Indigenous Peoples (Univaja) help the federal government with its investigation into growing violence in the northern region. In the background, a poster demands justice for Dom Phillips and Bruno Araújo Pereira. © Roberto Stuckert Filho / Agência Senado

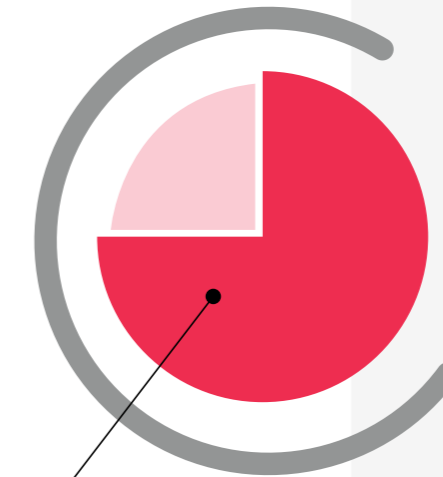
4 The Amazon accounts for 77% of deaths due to rural conflicts that have occurred in the country in the last ten years. UOL, 11/06/2022. <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/carlos-madeiro/2022/06/11/amazonia-concentra-77-de-mortes-por-conflito-no-campo-em-10-anos-no-pais.htm>

if it's an animal or an armed man chasing us, watching us." Francisco Costa has been working on human rights and environmental issues since 1996. He is also one of the coordinators of the Network for the Protection of Journalists⁵.

Over the past two years, **Marcos Wesley Pedroso** has also come under pressure in various ways. In 2019, this grandson of trade union leaders, who witnessed the agribusiness attacks on Indigenous people at a very early age, co-founded the *Tapajós de Fato* media outlet. In addition to maintaining a news website, this team of 19 people, based in Santarém in the west of the state of Pará, produces newsletters and three weekly podcasts aimed at rural workers. Marcos Wesley Pedroso remembers being followed through the streets of Santarém, the state's third most populous city with around 330,000 inhabitants. But that's not all: the tyres on his car were slashed several times and he even found a cattle head in the backyard of his house, accompanied by an anonymous intimidating letter. Members of *Tapajós de Fato* had equipment stolen and a journalist was attacked at knifepoint a few metres from the headquarters of this independent media outlet. Their broadcasts on climate justice and the spread of soy monoculture and large-scale mining in the region "aroused", recalls Marcos Wesley Pedroso, "anger of the other camp", the other camp being resource extraction companies and the local politicians who support them. For safety reasons, the media outlet director had to leave Santarém at the beginning of 2023.

In the state of Roraima, **Felipe Medeiros**, a freelance journalist based in Boa Vista, is also used to working under pressure. A former television reporter, he says he has already had to face gold panners armed with sticks. It was at the end of 2019, during a live broadcast on *Rede Amazônica*, a subsidiary of *TV Globo*, when he was covering a demonstration against mining in protected areas of the Amazon.

PROFILE OF VICTIMS



75% were victims of rights violations while reporting in the field.

i The 66 violations had a total of 74 victims.



Elaíze Farias reporting in the Javari Valley Indigenous Land in March 2023 © Bruno Kelly / Amazônia Real

5 See page 19 Case Report: "3 initiatives for protection, journalism training and recording attacks".

In the state of Rondônia, journalist **Edirceu Lima**, known for his reporting on crimes committed in the micro-region of Ariquemes, saw his car and house targeted by gunfire in February 2023.

| Legal harassment

It is not new that those holding political or economic power, particularly those who commit environmental crimes, attempt to silence journalists in the Brazilian Amazon through legal proceedings.

One of the emblematic examples is that of journalist **Lúcio Flávio Pinto**, editor-in-chief of the *Jornal Pessoal* in Belém. He has been the subject of more than 30 legal proceedings in the space of two decades, between 1992 and 2012, for his work on environmental crimes. In one of these proceedings, the journalist was ordered to pay 8,000 reals (around 1,500 euros) to the family of a businessman who was involved in a scandal of grabbing five million hectares of land in the state of Pará.

Cenarium magazine was also the target of legal action brought by different companies, after making public that they had financed anti-democratic movements during the 2022 election period. The magazine was also censored by judicial decision in February 2023 for mentioning an accusation of paedophilia⁶ against a member of parliament from the state of Amazonas.

The *Amazônia Real* news outlet, for its part, was the subject of five legal proceedings and was forced to withdraw a report from its site by a court ruling in July 2022, even though the information it divulged, implicating a member of parliament, turned out to be true.

In addition to various demands for the removal of content and reparations for moral injury, journalists of the Amazon interviewed by RSF report that they are frequently threatened with legal action for alleged crimes of attack on honour. The difficulty of paying compensation and legal costs, in a context of economic strangulation, can lead to self-censorship, particularly for small media outlets.

| Endangered or dangerous sources

Protecting sources is a major challenge in the Brazilian Amazon. While threats from public- and private-sector players are particularly strong for journalists living close to areas of tension and who follow land conflicts on a day-to-day basis, their sources are also under attack, and sometimes threatened with death.

6 For further information about this case: <https://revistacenarium.com.br/abracji-repudia-censura-de-juiza-contra-materia-jornalistica-da-revista-cenarium-deci-sao-inadequada/>

“Journalists must be careful not to expose people”, insists the editor of the *Amazônia Real* news outlet, **Elaize Faria**. “The important thing is not just to come here and talk about the Amazon: it’s the way you talk about it, the way you approach your sources. The first step is to find out whether they are comfortable granting an interview. You have to approach them humbly, not only on indigenous land and in the quilombolas⁷, but also in the cities.”

However, perpetrators of threats or violence can also be sources of information. While he had already witnessed violence against the media by gold miners, freelance journalist Felipe Medeiros says that some may have been valuable sources for his reports. The whole point, he explains, is, in this complex context where all these actors coexist, to remain “cautious”. “My editors always ask me to go ‘as far as possible’, because we don’t know who we’re really dealing with.”



The Amazonian News Network produces and distributes a daily broadcast based on news reports provided by 20 broadcasters in the region. © Daniel Giovanaz / RSF

2/ CYBER HARASSMENT AND DISINFORMATION

Beyond physical threats, journalists are targeted during huge campaigns of denigration and disinformation, organised by various economic and political players. They aim is to discredit journalists who report on Indigenous peoples and social movements in the area. The spread of this hate speech has coincided with the rise of disinformation in the Amazon⁸, which increased dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2022 presidential elections.

“The important thing is not just to come here and talk about the Amazon: it’s the way you talk about it, the way you approach your sources. The first step is to find out whether they are comfortable granting an interview. You have to approach them humbly.”



The Indigenous journalist Erick Terena holding his camera during a workshop on video journalism provided by *Amazônia Real* in 2019 in Manaus. © Alberto César Araújo / *Amazônia Real*

7 Communities founded by escaped slaves starting in the 17th century, some of which still exist today.

8 Further information in the report *Combating disinformation about the Brazilian Amazon and its defenders* (Intervozes, 2023): <https://app.rioz.org.br/index.php/s/ncgsaHS5y8gSSHZ>

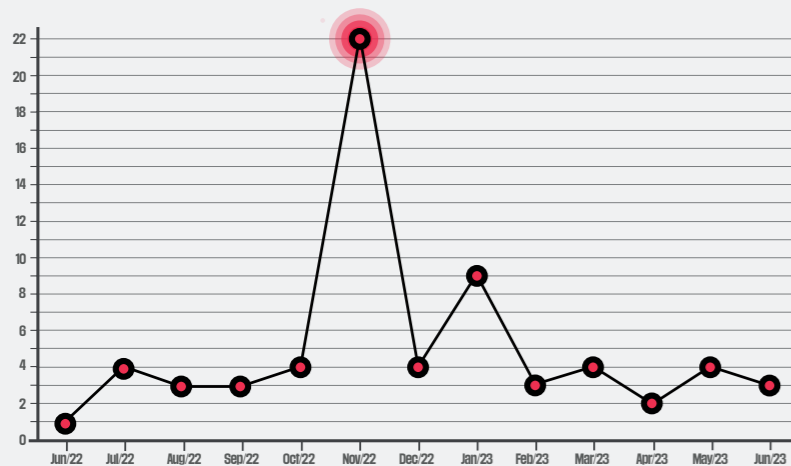


Spike in violence against media outlets: the 2022 presidential campaign

The 2022 presidential campaign gave rise to a large-scale media battle, resulting in violence against the media outlets themselves. November 2022 was the month in which RSF recorded the highest number of violations (22) against journalists. Following the election, supporters of outgoing President Jair Bolsonaro took to the streets to question the results of the vote and launched a number of attacks on the press, which they considered to be “pro-Lula”. Most episodes were attempts to prevent media coverage, through hostilities, physical aggression, theft or destruction of equipment. Two of the most serious episodes occurred in the state of Rondônia: a shooting at the editorial offices of the news outlet *Rondônia Ao Vivo* and an arson attack on the premises of *Rádio Nova FM*.

| NUMBER OF VIOLATIONS

The month by month tally shows a spike in the number of cases in the period immediately after the elections in November 2022



NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

The types of reporters most often encountered in the Amazon: freelance journalists, reporters for national media outlets, foreign correspondents, and civil society representatives. They report the news from or about the Brazilian Amazon.

Regional general news media: News media based in the Brazilian Amazon. They depend on public funding and/or financing from large companies. Because of conflicts of interest and because investors and advertisers often interfere in their editorial policies, it is difficult for them to regularly cover topics such as the environment and land conflicts. They must deal with the region's geographical challenges and security risks. Examples: *Jornal A Crítica* and *TV Imperial*.

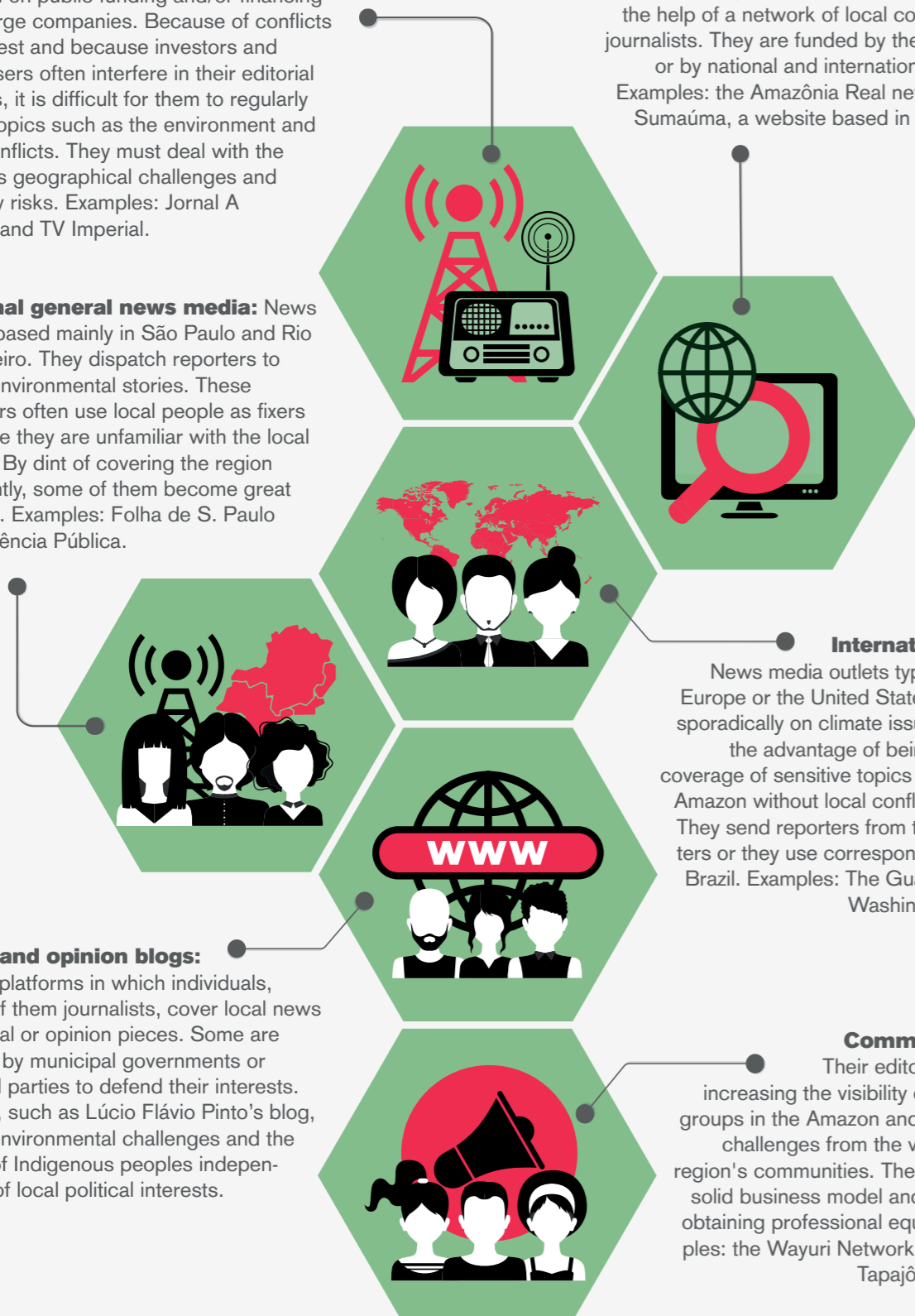
National general news media: News media based mainly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. They dispatch reporters to cover environmental stories. These reporters often use local people as fixers because they are unfamiliar with the local terrain. By dint of covering the region frequently, some of them become great experts. Examples: *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Agência Pública*.

News and opinion blogs: Online platforms in which individuals, some of them journalists, cover local news in factual or opinion pieces. Some are funded by municipal governments or political parties to defend their interests. Others, such as *Lúcio Flávio Pinto's* blog, cover environmental challenges and the rights of Indigenous peoples independently of local political interests.

Specialised regional media: News media specialising in human rights and environmental challenges. They produce long-form reporting with the help of a network of local collaborators and journalists. They are funded by their own readers or by national and international foundations. Examples: the *Amazônia Real* news agency and *Sumaúma*, a website based in Altamira, in the state of Pará.

International media: News media outlets typically based in Europe or the United States. They report sporadically on climate issues. They have the advantage of being able to fund coverage of sensitive topics in the Brazilian Amazon without local conflicts of interest. They send reporters from their headquarters or they use correspondents based in Brazil. Examples: *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, etc.

Community media: Their editorial focus is on increasing the visibility of marginalised groups in the Amazon and environmental challenges from the viewpoint of the region's communities. They usually lack a solid business model and have difficulty obtaining professional equipment. Examples: the *Wayuri Network* and the *Jovem Tapajônico* collective.



Around this time, in November 2022, **Ívina Garcia**, a journalist with the magazine *Cenarium*, was targeted following a report on the financial support of supporters of former president Jair Bolsonaro, who had set up a camp in Manaus, in the state of Amazonas, to call for a military takeover. "My photo was posted in far-right groups on social media all over the country. I received threats of physical violence on Twitter and Facebook. Some people said they knew my address", she recounts, her stomach churning. "Before long, the comments stopped being related to my work and became misogynistic."

The editor-in-chief of the *Amazônia Real* agency, **Elaíze Farias**, also has to deal with virtual attacks on a daily basis. "We have a comments section on the website", she explains. "Through this, we receive regular racist attacks. These insults have increased significantly over the past two to three years. We don't publish them because they go against all our ethical guidelines."

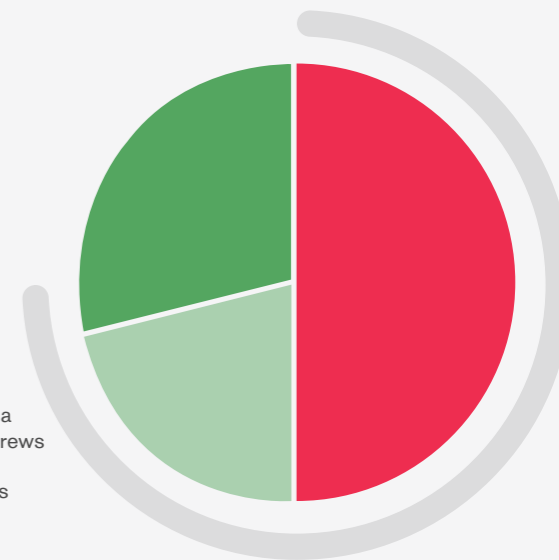
The phenomenon is amplified in certain states of the Brazilian Amazon, where local media outlets exist only on social networks and where Internet access is restricted. "Reliable information arrives through the same channel as disinformation", says Indigenous blogger **Walter Kumaruara**, who lives in a village in the west of the state of Pará. "Often someone receives information on WhatsApp, comments on it with everyone else, and it's only the next day that they learn that it's not true. But by that time the person has already broadcast the information and the news has spread."

PROFILE OF VICTIMS BY GENDER

 **33** Men

 **14** Women

 **19** Entire media outlets or crews
(in 7 of the 19 cases, the crews included women)



3/ ECONOMIC PRESSURE

Producing reliable, independent information is a constant challenge for the media in the Brazilian Amazon. Many media directors in the region who regularly cover crimes committed against the environment testify to a need to diversify funding sources to avoid pressure from local advertisers. Large companies favor those who cover news from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where their main advertisers and advertising markets are located. A director of a media outlet partly financed by public advertisers says she must constantly point out that their funding isn't a "gift" but public money, which shouldn't lead to compromises on the editorial front. Other media directors and journalists in the area revealed to RSF the existence of editorial pressure and interference from financiers. For fear of reprisals, they prefer to remain anonymous.

According to several sources, when companies choose to buy advertising inserts in local media, they increasingly take advantage of the economic fragility of the media in the Amazon. Information becomes a currency, traded for advertising revenue. "A mining company that had advertised on my blog for ten years, withdrew in April after I published for the first time an interview criticising its activities", explains **Jeso Carneiro**, a



Walter Kumaruara, founder of the *Jovem Tapajônico* collective and motivator of the *Mocoronga Network for Communication*. © Daniel Giovanaz / RSF



Indigenous people pay tribute during the wake for Bruno Araújo Pereira, who was murdered with Dom Phillips in 2022. © Arnaldo Sete / Marco Zero Conteúdo

“A mining company that had advertised on my blog for ten years, withdrew in April after I published for the first time an interview criticising its activities.”

blogger in the west of the state of Pará. “I gave the company the opportunity to present its point of view, but they didn’t want to hear anything.”

In this context, international cooperation and funding from philanthropic foundations play an increasingly important role in the sustainability of different media that seek to balance financial needs and editorial independence from political and economic interests of local authorities.

4/ STATE INERTIA IN PROTECTING JOURNALISTS AND PUNISHING THEIR ATTACKERS

Faced with threats and attacks of all kinds, turning to the police is not really an option, local journalists explained to RSF. With an insufficient number of officers for a territory covering more than 5 million km², the police are unable to prevent and investigate all criminal group activity. They also point out that the purely repressive behaviour of the police contributes to the increased death toll in the region. Between 2018 and 2021, homicides committed by police officers rose by 5.1% in the Amazon states, while they fell by 4.2% in the rest of the states.



The Dom Phillips affair: waiting for progress after political inertia

After the murder of journalist Dom Phillips and his guide and friend, Indigenous peoples expert Bruno Araújo Pereira, who were ambushed in June 2022 in the Javari Valley (Amazonas), the reaction of the Bolsonaro government, which treated the case as a “secondary matter”, was worrying.

Precautionary measures requested

While the police were searching for the bodies of Dom Phillips and Bruno Araújo Pereira, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued a request for precautionary measures on 11 June 2022, drafted by the NGO Article 19 and signed by RSF and six other civil society organisations. They urged the Brazilian government to do everything in its power to find the victims, to ensure that the facts were thoroughly investigated and to prevent the repetition of such human rights violations.

A request for protection measures was extended to defenders of the Amazon, who continued to suffer threats⁹ and whose removal the Brazilian government of Jair Bolsonaro requested, in vain, once the bodies were found on 15 June 2022. The latter stated that the case was closed.

The investigation progressed mainly thanks to Bruno Araújo Pereira’s colleagues, members of an indigenous patrol that he had formed as part of the Union of Indigenous Peoples of the Javari Valley (Univaja)¹⁰. This led to the arrest, in December 2022, of Rubén da Silva Villar, a poacher who was already under investigation for illegal fishing in indigenous territories and for drug trafficking. The federal police consider him to be the instigator of the murders. Fishermen Amarildo da Costa de Oliveira, Oseney da Costa de Oliveira and Jefferson da Silva Lima were also charged with double murder and concealment of a corpse. As of September 2023, the trial of the three men is ongoing in federal court in Tabatinga, a small town in the west of the state of Amazonas.

In May 2023, Marcelo Xavier, former president of the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI), and Alcir Amaral Teixeira, general coordinator of territorial surveillance and responsible for security of indigenous areas, were included in the list of people indicted for neglect. For the federal police, both of these men knew what was at stake, and, through their inaction in the Javari Valley, allowed such a crime to take place.

Insufficient protective measures

Nevertheless, more than a year after the murders of Dom Phillips and Bruno Araújo Pereira, the Brazilian state’s responses are still insufficient to prevent similar tragedies.

Further investigation is needed, particularly into the local politicians and businessmen who profited from the deaths of Dom Phillips and Bruno Araújo Pereira but were not prosecuted. As long as this criminal system, which threatens and kills defenders of the indigenous area of the Javari Valley with complete impunity, has not been dismantled, there will be neither justice nor security for journalists in the Amazon.

This is why, in August 2023, the IACHR announced the creation of a joint working group responsible for monitoring the investigations into the murder of journalist Dom Phillips and compliance with the measures requested of the Brazilian government to guarantee the protection of journalists and environmentalists in the Amazon. This working group is the result of a joint proposal by the Brazilian government, the beneficiaries of the protective measures and several civil society organisations, including RSF.

⁹ The IACHR granted the extension of the measures to 11 members of the Union of Indigenous Peoples of the Javari Valley (Univaja) in October 2022.

¹⁰ *Illegal fishing, the latest investigation by the journalist who wanted to ‘save the Brazilian Amazon’*, *Forbidden Stories*, 1 June 2023 <https://forbiddenstories.org/fr/la-peche-illegale-la-derniere-enquete-du-journaliste-qui-voulait-sauver-lamazonie/>

3 | REACTION IN THE FIELD

Faced with threats and violence from public and private bodies, media outlets in the Amazon have to be inventive to protect themselves and be able to report on the reality of the various isolated areas of this vast territory. Hence, international collaboration, as well as the strengthening of local networks, play a leading role.

1/ SELF-PROTECTION MEASURES

“The people from here are less protected”, says **Walter Kumaruara**, an Indigenous blogger based in the west of the state of Pará. During the international mobilisation following the assassination of Dom Phillips, he asked himself: *“If this had happened to an Indigenous journalist, what would the repercussions have been? People admire those who come from elsewhere, because they’ve stepped out of their comfort zone, but we don’t give the same visibility to those who were born fighting.”*

Although they are faced with threats and failed security measures for local journalists from the state and the police, journalists are not giving up. *“Before, we didn’t have this experience when it came to protection issues”,* explains **Isabelle Maciel**, co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Tapajós de Fato*. *“Over time, we realised that there were people who were our declared enemies. We have become more cautious.”* When media director **Marcos Wesley Pedrosa** had to leave Santarém at the beginning of 2023, she became the main target of intimidation in the town. The media outlet’s editorial offices are now equipped with surveillance cameras and an electric fence. The team, which has no other alternative than to develop its own protection protocols, is also looking to strengthen its digital security.



2/ THE CHALLENGE OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Financial independence is a key issue. In Boa Vista, in the state of Roraima, **Vanessa Vieira** and **João Pires** have used their personal resources to keep the *Correio do Lavrado* newspaper afloat for four years and continue to publish articles on human rights, the environment and migration issues. And there’s much to discuss, as the Roraima region borders Venezuela and in recent years has welcomed millions of people

The Tapajós de Fato newsroom in Santarém, in the state of Pará. © Daniel Giovanaz / RSF



FOCUS

Three initiatives for protection, journalism training and recording attacks

Formed in 2018, the **National Network for the Protection of Journalists and Bloggers**, is led by several organisations: the Vladimir Herzog Institute, Article 19, Intervozes and RSF. It has member journalists from every state in the Brazilian Amazon and a coordinator in the state of Rondônia. **Francisco Costa** is responsible for gathering rights violation cases, advising and suggesting protective measures for professionals in the northern region of Brazil. The network also organises meetings, workshops and courses for journalists on topics such as digital security, strategies for protecting yourself and guidelines for covering elections and demonstrations.

Another initiative is the **Abaré “informal school” of journalism**, founded in Manaus during the Covid-19 pandemic, by five journalists. Since 2020, through public events, courses and workshops, the school has sought to democratise access to investigative journalism tools and raise awareness of the importance of preventing and combating disinformation.

Awareness of the intensification of threats to press freedom in recent years has also prompted reactions from unions. Since 2021, the Union of Journalists of the State of Pará has had its own case monitoring system, and in February 2023 set up a **working group to prepare a report on cases of violence against journalists registered in the state**. For Vito Gemaque, the union’s president and a former journalist with *O Liberal*, one of the most widely circulated newspapers in northern Brazil, the main challenge is to combat the under-reporting of violations that hinder the right to inform. *“We must encourage our colleagues to file police reports, present evidence and demand action from the police. The year 2022 was the most violent year in history for journalists in the state of Pará, and we want the union to be a centre for studying, mapping, monitoring and repercussion of complaints.”*



fleeing the crisis in that country. Today, the newspaper is distributed sporadically, depending on funding. *“We receive very specific resources, through awards and public support. It’s not enough to cover all our costs”,* laments Vanessa Vieira, who was editor-in-chief of *Folha de Boa Vista*, the last printed newspaper in Roraima, whose daily edition ceased circulation in 2020 but now continues online. Despite the difficulties, she also refuses to receive public funding for *Correio do Lavrado*: *“We have already received proposals, but we feel that this would compromise our editorial line”.*

To overcome the lack of resources, journalists try as best they can to vary their sources of funding. With headquarters in Manaus, in the state of Amazonas, and journalists present in the other eight states, the investigative journalism agency *Amazônia Real* relies on subsidies from international institutions¹¹ and

“ We receive very specific resources, through awards and public support. It’s not enough to cover all our costs.”

¹¹ The agency is supported by RSF, the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) and the Ford Foundation, and it has received one-off funding from the Google News Initiative, the Rainforest Journalism Fund - Pulitzer Centre and Open Society Foundations, among others.

donations from readers. The project was created ten years ago by journalists **Elaíze Farias** and **Kátia Brasil**, who decided not to receive any government funding, precisely to maintain their autonomy and preserve their independence. A finalist for the 2022 Press Freedom Prize awarded by RSF, *Amazônia Real* is, to date, the most accomplished example of independent journalism in the region. However, Elaíze Faria insists that “being a media outlet working on the Brazilian Amazon is a constant struggle.”

3/ COMBATING DISINFORMATION

Journalists in the Amazon region are particularly concerned about the avalanche of fake news that challenges free and independent journalism. A tool to combat disinformation, “Amazon, free of fakes”, is a project coordinated by the civil society organisation Inervozes, based in São Paulo, in partnership with educators, journalists, bloggers, researchers, members of rural, urban, indigenous and traditional communities across the country. Based on the investigation of pages and profiles that spread disinformation, the collective launched campaigns aimed at holding advertisers accountable and publicly naming them, to encourage them to withdraw from press companies that systematically produce fake news, such as *Portal Novo Norte* (Tocantins), *Terra Brasil Notícias* (Rio Grande do Norte) and *Vista Pátria* (Rio de Janeiro). Furthermore, a notification was sent in 2022 to the Superior Electoral Court and to YouTube, denouncing *Vista Pátria* for deliberately producing and disseminating false, misleading and harmful content to the electoral process.

Certain initiatives are recognized and rewarded. In 2022, the *Wayuri Network* of Indigenous Journalists received the Rule of Law Award from the World Justice Project (WJP), in the city of The Hague in the Netherlands, for its efforts to combat disinformation in the Brazilian Amazon. “They raised awareness and mobilised local people on issues relating to the pandemic, violence against women and a range of threats to the environment”, the organisation said. Thus the network contributes to alerting the indigenous population to the way in which their rights are threatened.

For its part, the *Amazônia Real* agency organises workshops on how to identify disinformation on social media, alongside training in podcast production, video recording, photography and writing for digital media.

4/ INNOVATIVE JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES WITH THE HELP OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Creating a network of Indigenous informants

If they depended solely on traditional media outlets, thousands of Indigenous peoples would never see stories about their daily lives and the struggles for their rights. According to journalist and researcher **Ivânia Vieira**, “in the most inaccessible areas, where the presence of the State is practically non-existent, the mainstream media only arrive after a tragedy or a crime, but do not cover the violations that occur on a daily basis.”

To overcome these difficulties, the Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) has been offering regular training since 2020 to 80 young indigenous peoples who share information and photos in WhatsApp groups. When COIAB’s communications team considers that certain information needs to be disseminated to a wider audience, it transmits it to trusted professional journalists, guaranteeing the confidentiality of sources when necessary. Even with the most rudimentary means at their disposal, it is the Indigenous peoples themselves, in the town of Riozinho for example, who are responsible for reporting what is happening in their area. In particular, they recount their 20-year struggle to have their land demarcated and the constant pressure they face from cattle breeders and land speculators linked to the carbon market.

Developing local media outlet networks

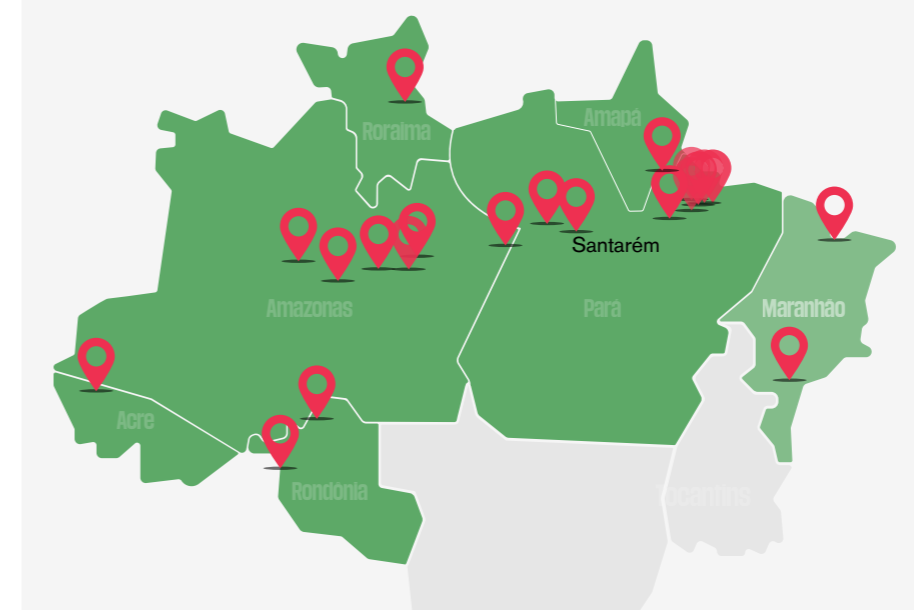
To meet the challenge of informing in this vast territory, with sporadic information despite shared issues, several radio stations and media outlets from the Brazilian Amazon have come together within the *Amazon Information Network (RNA)*. “Previously, each broadcaster worked in their own corner, isolated. At the same time, a flood of information on the Amazon region was being supplied from outside, showing a reality that was not ours”, recalls **Joelma Viana**, journalist and director of the *RNA*, created in 2008 to combat the criminalisation of social movements and the stereotypes reproduced by the mainstream media, in Santarém, in western Pará. Based on information sent in by its members, the *RNA* produces and broadcasts a daily bulletin on subjects relating to human rights, the environment and renewable energies, as well as a weekly thematic programme on the cultural diversity of the Amazon.

Every day, members of the network document the threats weighing on the integrity of the world’s largest tropical forest, the intimidation of Indigenous populations and farmers to grab their land, the environmental damage caused by the use of mercury by gold miners, and so on. The network is financed by monthly fees paid by the associated radio stations. Working as a group also offers advantages in terms of security. “We are trying to protect those on the ground. On one occasion, a journalist covered a case of forced labour in the state of Maranhão and preferred not to sign the article because she had been threatened. So, we signed it as if it had been produced here”, explains Joelma Viana.



Amazonian News Network director and reporter Joelma Viana in Santarém, in the state of Pará. © Daniel Giovanaz / RSF

ASSOCIATED BROADCASTERS OF AMAZONIAN INFORMATION NETWORK (RNA)



Amazônia Real has also created a network of journalists with paid professionals, thanks to reporting and photography grants, in the nine states of the Brazilian Amazon. More than 40 professionals are members today. They include experienced reporter Lúcio Flávio Pinto, from the state of Pará, and filmmaker and photographer Paulo Desana, from the Desana ethnic group, who lives on the banks of the Uapés river in the state of Amazonas, close to the border with Colombia. For *Amazônia Real*, Paulo Desana covered topics such as the impact of mining and the Covid-19 pandemic on indigenous lands.

Thanks to content sent in by 55 members of different ethnic groups, the *Wayuri Network* team, based in São Gabriel da Cachoeira (state of Amazonas), pro-

“ in the most inaccessible areas, where the presence of the State is practically non-existent, the mainstream media only arrive after a tragedy or a crime, but do not cover the violations that occur on a daily basis.”

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duces and broadcasts radio programmes in five different indigenous languages. With the support of associations, the network provides them with mobile phones, technical assistance and training.

I Involving local communities

In the neighbouring state, Walter Kumaruara founded the Jovem Tapajônico collective, which seeks to raise awareness of political, social and environmental issues among indigenous youth and members of traditional communities. “We condemn the crimes committed in the Amazon, while trying to communicate in a fun way. We started with a printed newspaper, but now we do almost everything via mobile phone, short films, podcasts, and parody videos and TikToks”, explains this Indigenous blogger from western Pará, who continues his professional activities even though in 2019 he had to move temporarily to São Paulo, 3,000 kilometres away, due to threats.

There are also initiatives launched by journalists who were not born in the Brazilian Amazon but have decided to settle in the region to permanently cover forest-related issues. The most recent and promising example is the *Sumaúma* news website, set up by award-winning journalist Eliane Brum. Originally from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, she settled in Altamira in the state of Pará in 2017. The editor-in-chief, Jon Watts, *The Guardian*'s climate editor, joined her in 2021. *Sumaúma*'s board of directors is made up mainly of Indigenous community leaders. Their objectives are to establish partnerships with foreign media outlets, to increase the circulation of reports, as well as to contribute to the training of local journalists.

“ We started with a printed newspaper, but now we do almost everything via mobile phone, short films, podcasts, and parody videos and TikToks.”



In 2020, members of the Wayuri Network provided the first entirely Indigenous coverage of a municipal election in Brazil. © Juliana Radler / ISA

4 | WHAT'S NEXT?

The strengthening of local, free, plural and independent journalism must be at the forefront of national and international discussions on strategies for preserving the Amazon.

Brazil, international organisations, cooperation and development agencies, philanthropic foundations and all institutions involved in the fight against the environmental crisis must also help consolidate a reliable and plural local media ecosystem.

Hence, RSF proposes five avenues for developing active policies that will contribute to a more favourable environment for journalists and the media concerned with climate challenges in the Amazon.

> 1. Defending reliable, independent and plural information must be at the heart of environmental defence programmes in the Amazon

The Brazilian government and world leaders fighting climate change must solidify declarations of good intentions with effective measures to protect press freedom in the Amazon, recognising independent journalists – in the same way indigenous populations, environmentalists and traditional communities are recognised – as key players in preserving the environment.

> 2. Developing prevention and protection policies for journalists working on sensitive issues in the region

The federal government must adopt urgent measures to strengthen the Programme for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (PPDDH). As the main policy for protecting journalists under threat in the country, this programme needs to be improved. Additional human and financial resources are necessary.

The joint working group, established in August 2023 by the Brazilian government, civil society organisations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), as part of the precautionary measures granted by the IACHR in the case of the murder of Dom Phillips and Bruno Araújo Pereira, is also an excellent opportunity to strengthen the state's capacity to implement measures aimed at guaranteeing the safety of journalists working in the Amazon region.

The Observatory on Violence against Journalists, created in 2023 as part of the Ministry of Justice, is also a space that can contribute to producing data to guide public policies in order to strengthen prevention and protection strategies.

> 3. Promoting a plural and financially sustainable media ecosystem

One of the biggest challenges identified by journalists interviewed for this report is the lack of financial resources to carry out journalistic projects related to the environment. Many of them report a lack of interest on the part of advertisers, or their editorial interference, and the concentration of philanthropic contributions in journalistic projects carried out in other parts of the country. In many respects, local journalism is not seen as a priority for private organisations or cooperation agencies, which tend to invest in projects of a different nature.

It is essential that there is greater financial aid to support local media organisations and help them grow, with particular attention given to initiatives led by Indigenous peoples and traditional communities. These initiatives could involve public funding (based on technical rather than political criteria), through calls for projects, prizes and other incentives from the federal government and state and municipal administrations – for example, the eligibility of journalistic projects in the framework of the Amazon Fund (Fundo Amazônia) – or even through private funding, with programmes from foundations and other philanthropic players aimed at creating initiatives in this area.

These initiatives can also be associated with support for administrative and management capacity building, fundraising, business model development and diversification of funding sources. The Journalism Support Programme (PAJOR), developed by RSF in June 2020 to strengthen local media ecosystems in Brazil, combines micro-financing with advisory and mentoring support in strategic areas of partner initiatives.

➤ **4. Strengthening media education efforts and the fight against disinformation in the Amazon**

With all the difficulties facing journalism in the region, the industry of disinformation regarding the protection of the forest and its people is free to flourish. Without reliable information, it will not be possible to protect the Amazon. Likewise, it is necessary to work towards the recognition and appreciation of journalistic work in the Amazon, given that, far from major centres, independent journalists and local media suffer from stigma and prejudice because they are not considered part of the press.

Beyond strengthening the work of journalists and the media, it is also fundamental to pro-

mote more training and research spaces in the region intended for different types of audiences. The government can launch initiatives within schools, with awareness-raising activities on journalism, the information market and the role of the media, or even in universities, with more investments in the field of journalism.

➤ **5. Extending RSF's monitoring of abuses against journalists in the Amazon**

This report is part of an observation project that will continue until July 2024. Next year, an evaluation of the methodology and strategies adopted will be carried out, seeking to reduce under-reporting cases. It will be essential, for example, to expand networks between journalists of different regions of the Amazon, in particular, the states of Maranhão, Acre and Tocantins, who will need to be made aware of the need to record and report violence.

RSF will continue to monitor cases of attacks on the press, focusing on the situation in the Brazilian Amazon, in order to mobilise public and private-sector players on the global relevance of the role of local journalists who are on the frontline of one of the greatest crises of our time and report essential information with little resources and recognition.



Indigenous reporter Moisés Baniwa interviews teacher Luís Laureano Baniwa about the elections. © Juliana Radler / ISA



Jeso Carneiro, a blogger in Santarém, in the state of Pará. © Daniel Giovanaz / RSF



Daniela Patrícia, a member of the Tukano Indigenous people and the Wayuri Network, interviews Joaquina Marques of the Dâw ethnic group during the elections in São Gabriel da Cachoeira. © Paulo Desana / Wayuri Network



REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS promotes and defends freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism throughout the world. Based in Paris, the organisation holds a consultative status at the United Nations and UNESCO and has fourteen international bureaux and correspondents in 130 countries.