



▲ **Favelas and science: how to do
▼ research in peripheral territories**

**PESQUISA
VACINA
MATERÉ**



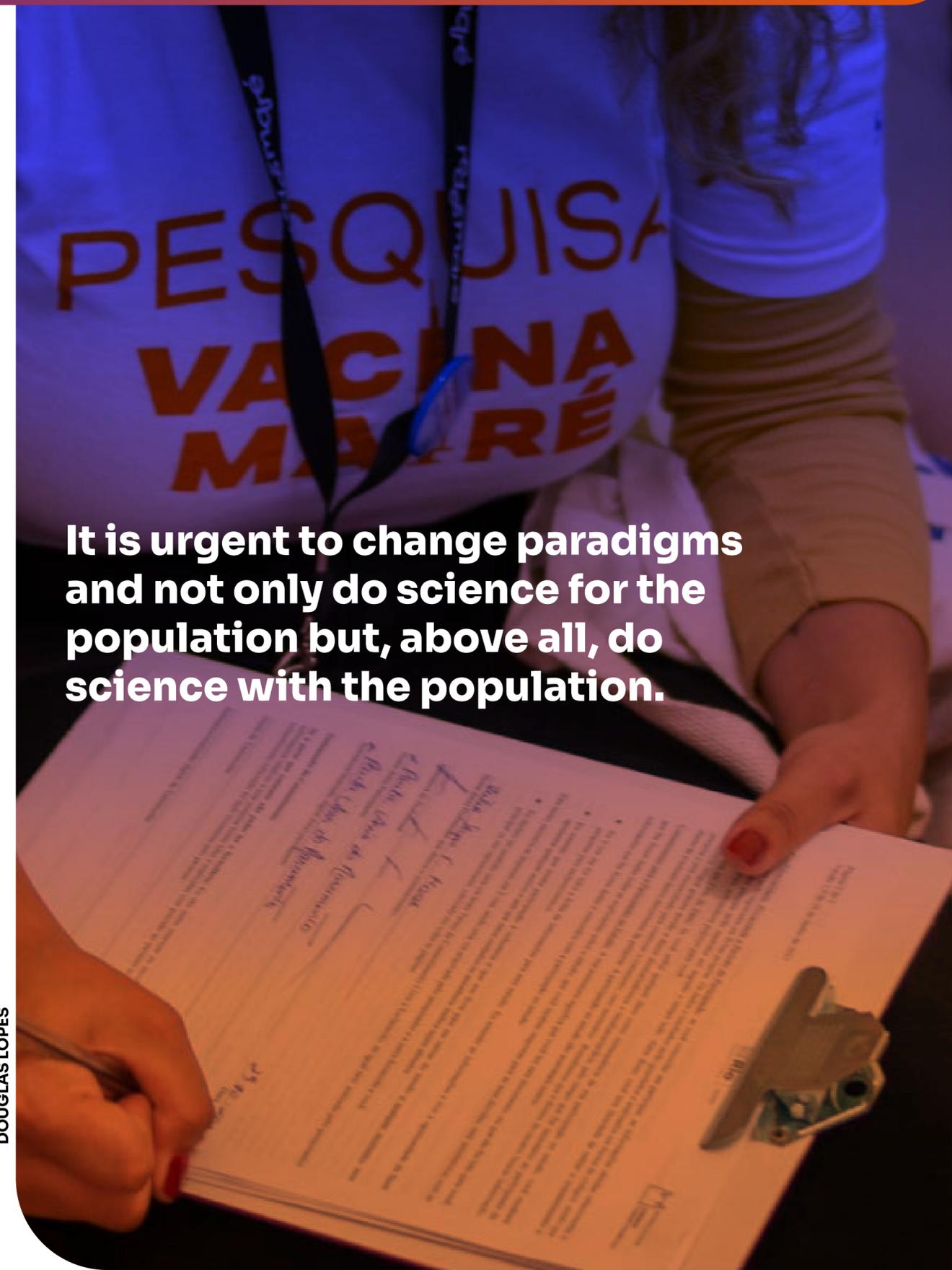
The aim of this material is to share tools, insights, and practical tips about the experience of implementing Vacina Maré Research in the 16 slums constituting the territory of Maré.

More than 140,000 people reside there, in roughly 47,000 households located in an area of less than four square kilometers. The neighborhood ranks as the ninth most populous in the city of Rio de Janeiro and is larger than 96% of the municipalities in Brazil.

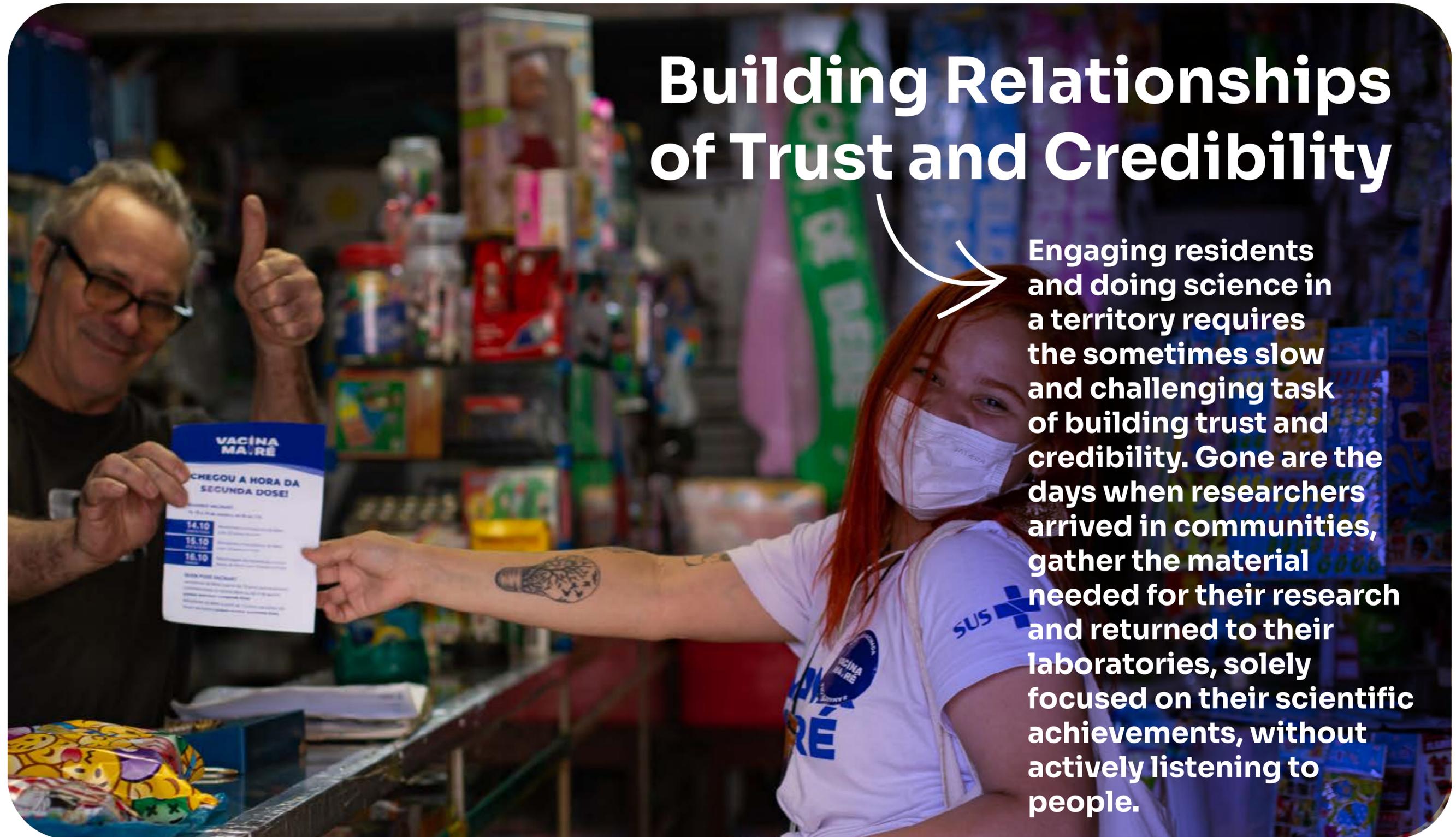
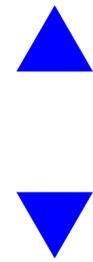
Engaging and experiencing scientific research in a real territory, together with volunteer residents, over an extended period of time, is not only a challenge but a necessary innovation for the current times.

It is no longer possible to do science without engaging in combating the inequalities and injustices that characterize the 21st century on our planet. It is urgent to change paradigms and not only do science for the population but, above all, do science with the population.

This material was prepared with the aim of sharing our experience, including the mistakes and successes of this journey, which began during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are no ready-made formulas, as each territory has its own beauties, singularities, and challenges. Yet it's an inspiration for many new projects to emerge, both in Brazil and around the world.

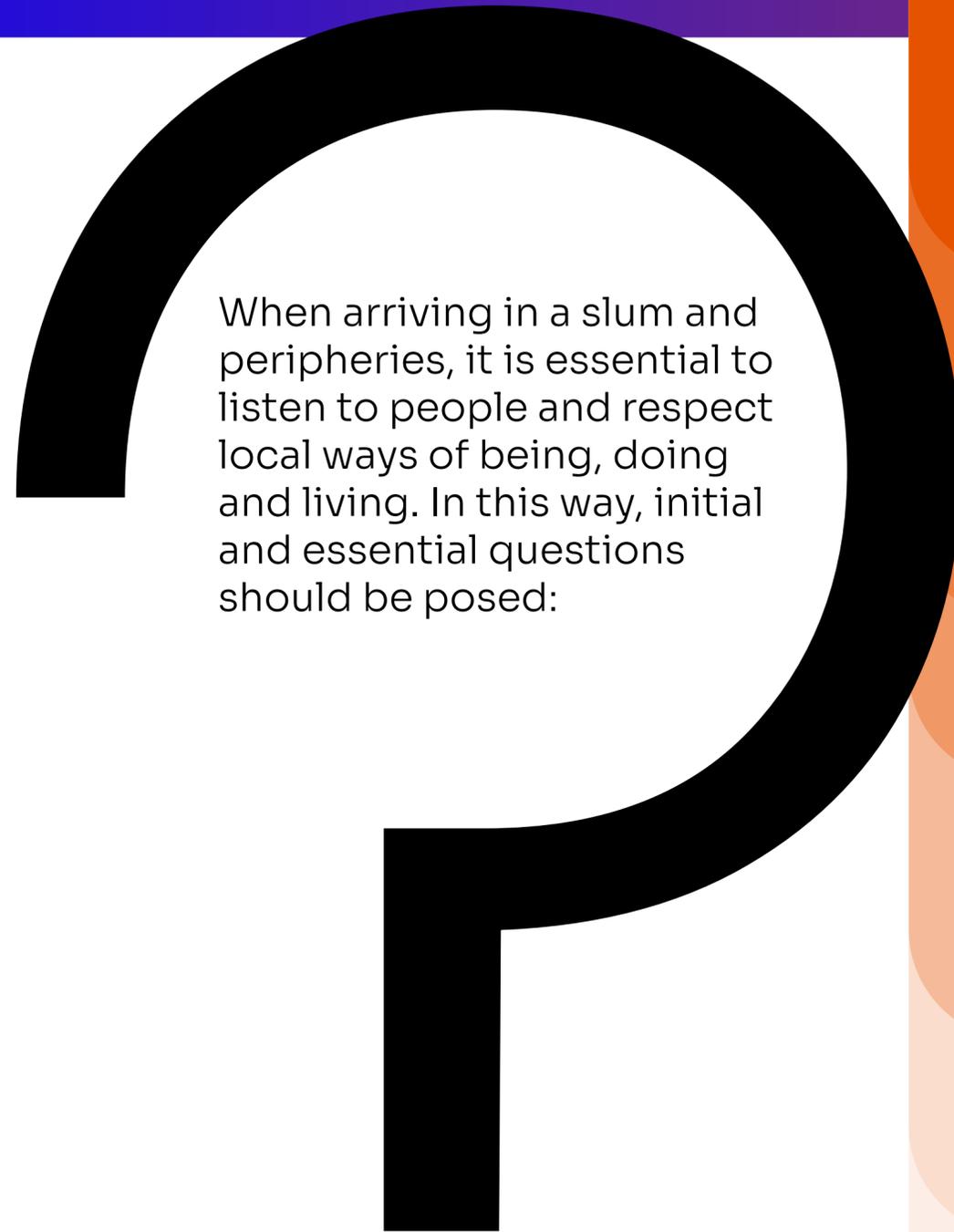


It is urgent to change paradigms and not only do science for the population but, above all, do science with the population.



Building Relationships of Trust and Credibility

Engaging residents and doing science in a territory requires the sometimes slow and challenging task of building trust and credibility. Gone are the days when researchers arrived in communities, gather the material needed for their research and returned to their laboratories, solely focused on their scientific achievements, without actively listening to people.



When arriving in a slum and peripheries, it is essential to listen to people and respect local ways of being, doing and living. In this way, initial and essential questions should be posed:

How are things done here? What can I learn?

What is the purpose of my work in this community?

Who am I proposing to do it for?

Am I welcome here?

Does my communication style align with local knowledge and practices?

What is the impact of this research on this territory?

What partnerships do I need to establish to operate in this territory?



In the case of the Vacina Maré Research, the partnership between Fiocruz – a center of excellence in scientific health research – and Redes da Maré, a community-based organization that has been operating in the territory for more than two decades and has a deep understanding of the area’s strengths and challenges, was essential from the outset.

Throughout the entire journey, strategies were jointly developed, respecting the expertise of each party involved. It is a collective process that requires a lot of dialogue and openness to different ways of seeing and solving problems.

DOUGLAS LOPES



LESSONS LEARNED



Understanding the local way of being and doing is the first step. Active listening is paramount.



Establishment of local partnerships with organizations rooted in the territory.



Availability for dialogue and openness to non-standard solutions.



Arrival in the Territory: How Will I Be Seen and Recognized?

Having established clear objectives and relevant partnerships, the time has come to communicate what is being done. The first step is to adopt an easy-to-understand name that resonates with the territory and the subject of the research. In the case of the Vacina Maré Research, whose name was originated from the action carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, volunteers were registered during the campaign that immunized 96% of Maré's adult residents with the first dose of the vaccine in just three days.



Subsequently, a logo and visual identity were created with the potential for variations and applications, considering that the Research has a long-term presence in the territory and requires a non-repetitive form of communication.

PESQUISA VACINA MARÉ



Creating materials to mark the project's presence in the territory was the next step. Uniforms for the team, informative brochures and posters, institutional video, social media profiles and a website were all part of this stage.

Treats for Research participants (ecobags, stickers, fridge magnets and hand sanitizer) proved to be a successful strategy in engaging volunteers. In the case of the Vacina Maré Research, the ecobag was a high-demand item and made it easier to convince people to join the research and spare their time to answer the questionnaire and provide the blood sample.

Partnerships with local newspapers, community radio stations and digital influencers also expanded the project's presence and credibility in the territory and helped to clarify concepts and promote the services offered. In the case of the Vacina Maré Research, partnerships were established with Maré de Notícias newspaper – which has a significant reach in the territory – and with digital influencers, such as Raphael Vicente, a Maré native with hundreds of thousands of followers on social media.



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Unifying key narratives and messages is another crucial step – especially when anti-science fake news is systematically spread. Translating scientific and health research concepts for the field team, understanding that they also act as territorial communicators in interactions with residents, healthcare professionals, and local institutions, is strategic for the smooth running of the project.

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LESSONS LEARNED



Communication is strategic and should be at the heart of the project's decisions and action plans from the outset.



Creating a simple and impactful brand is essential for the project to be recognized in the territory.



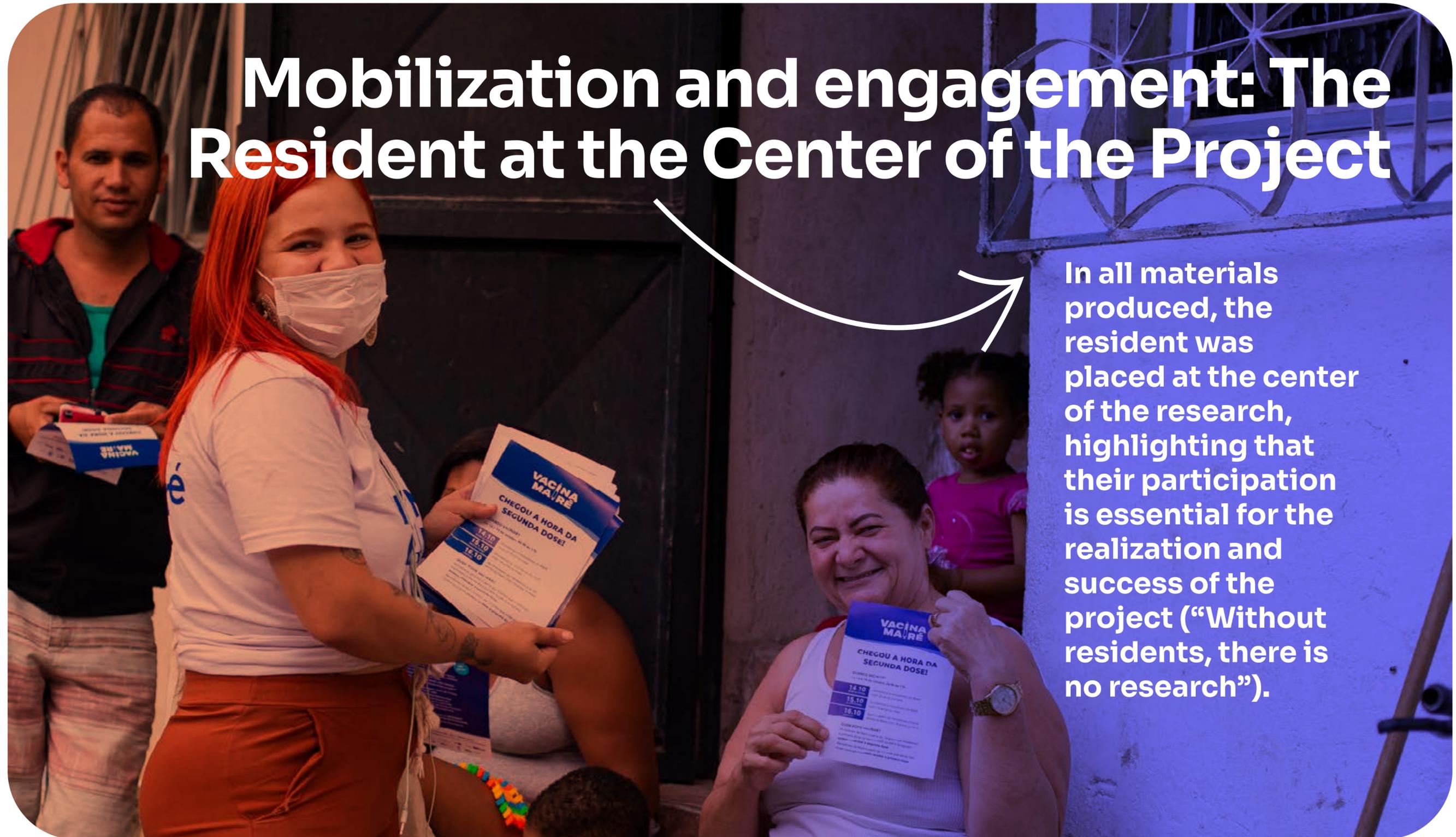
It is important to assess which communication channels work for each case: brochures, sound cars, videos, social networks, website, community vehicles and even megaphones can be used.



Treats for volunteers are items that support engagement and assist articulators in the process of convincing residents.



Mobilization and engagement: The Resident at the Center of the Project



In all materials produced, the resident was placed at the center of the research, highlighting that their participation is essential for the realization and success of the project (“Without residents, there is no research”).



As part of the strategy to engage volunteer residents, the slogan “I’m part of the Vacina Maré Research!” was created, fostering a sense of pride and importance in being part of a worldwide action to combat a potentially lethal disease that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

Throughout the process, the mobilization and engagement team of the Vacina Maré Research – made up primarily of residents of the territory – worked hand in hand with communication, prioritizing feedback on how materials and narratives were raising awareness and enlightening people to the objectives of the research.

In this regard, simple and creative solutions – such as the production of a customized “note”, with informal language and direct contact with the mobilizer responsible for the area, which was placed under the doors of residents who could not be found during visiting hours – were proved to be effective and easily solved with the approach of the communication and mobilization teams.

LESSONS LEARNED



Creating and permanently integrating communication and mobilization teams is crucial to getting the message across and engaging residents in the project.



Permanently testing the materials and narratives, with feedback on how the residents are (or not) understanding the messages, is essential.



Less is more. It is more important to have few enlightening and assertive materials than to produce a large volume of pieces that do not communicate or are not distributed assertively to the target audience.



How to Perform Scientific Communication in Slums?

This is, perhaps, one of the greatest challenges of the project. Once the residents have been sensitized and engaged about the importance of the research, they need to receive feedback on their participation and understand what their contribution has done.



Therefore, how to translate data and results, often accessible only to the scientists themselves, to the general population and, more specifically, to people who volunteer for research that can take years to complete?

In the case of the Vacina Maré Research, Redes da Maré's expertise in producing knowledge from and for the territory, using data produced to devise concrete strategies and actions, made all the difference.

And, once again, a disruptive vision of what it means to do science in popular territories is crucial. Firstly, it is necessary to constantly return the results to the territory and not just "at the end" of the study. It does not mean that unfinished scientific results will be releases, but rather that data and information can be generated and added to the process – including helping to produce new strategies and developments for the project itself.

One example was the Vacina Maré Research Meeting: Celebrating achievements with an eye on the future, with the presence of residents participating in the research, healthcare professionals from the territory, weavers from Redes da Maré and partner institutions - totaling more than 120 people willing to debate and talk about health and science in Maré. The meeting featured discussions with narratives on the experience and data sharing, providing clear feedback on the results to the territory, based on data generated in the territory itself.

LESSONS LEARNED



The feedback of results to the population must be seen as a central part of the research, by producing and spreading information throughout the process.



Data is strategic information that can help create public policies, such as vaccination campaigns, disease prevention actions and strengthening public health.



It is possible to translate numbers, data, results into simple, visual information that is understood by the general population and helps to demystify scientific practice.



The Maré Vaccine Research Meeting :: Celebrating achievements with an eye on the future, it was attended by residents participating in the research, health professionals from the territory, weavers from Redes da Maré and partner institutions.

There were conversation circles, reports on the experience and sharing of data, returning results to the territory, based on data generated in the territory itself.



Shared Governance: Nobody Does It Alone

Sharing the leadership of the project, with its mistakes, successes, challenges, and virtues, on an equal footing between partners and recognizing existing knowledge and leadership in the territory, is undoubtedly one of the greatest innovations of the Vacina Maré Research.



In this governance model, the knowledge and expertise of each entity is valued and shared in favor of the project's success – always aiming at improving the living conditions of the territory's population. For this purpose, mutual trust and respect for the unique and non-transferable knowledge of each individual are fundamental.

The dynamism of the territory, with its specific characteristics – in the case of Maré, from constant police operations to cultural and socioeconomic differences among the 16 slums that compose it – require quick responses to nearly ever urgent issues. Therefore, another aspect was fundamental to the project's success: the agility in detecting errors and seeking creative and innovative solutions.

This point requires openness to “outside the box” solutions, experimentation, respect for the experience acquired inside and outside the project, and detachment from pre-established certainties. Having a dedicated and committed team that embraces new ways of doing science makes all the difference in this aspect. In the case of the Vacina Maré Research, there is a commitment to training a new generation of researchers under new paradigms.

There's also a need to be open to incorporating suggestions and perspectives from partners, both from inside and outside the territory, with the aim of leaving tangible legacies for the population. The research itself becomes an element in a broader process of strengthening public health policies that remain in the territory.

LESSONS LEARNED



It is necessary to step out of the comfort zone and venture into new solutions with agility.



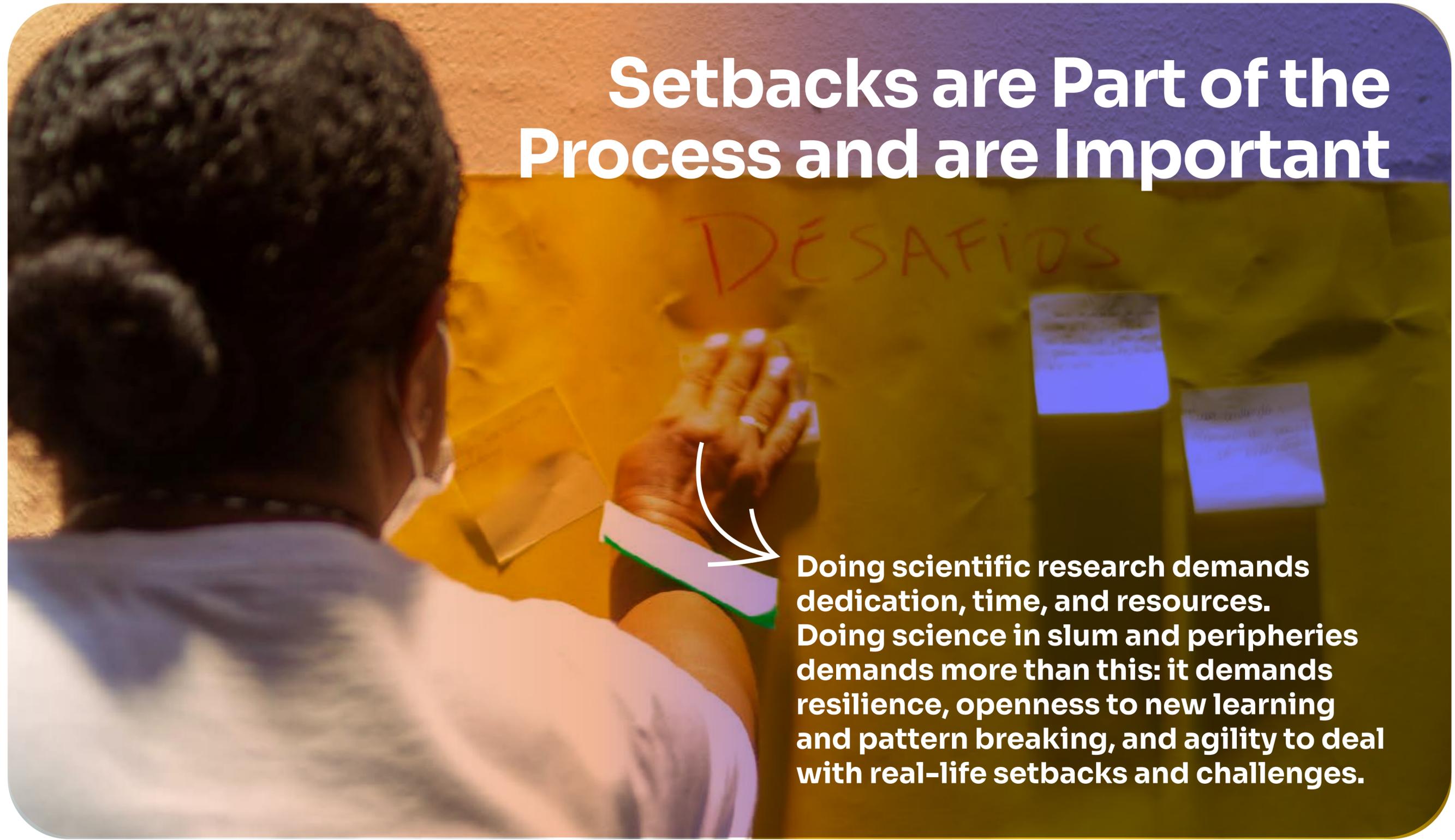
The objective is to leave a lasting legacy in the territory rather than just the results of the research itself.



The lessons learned from the process are just as important as the results of the research itself and can inspire new experiences.



Setbacks are Part of the Process and are Important



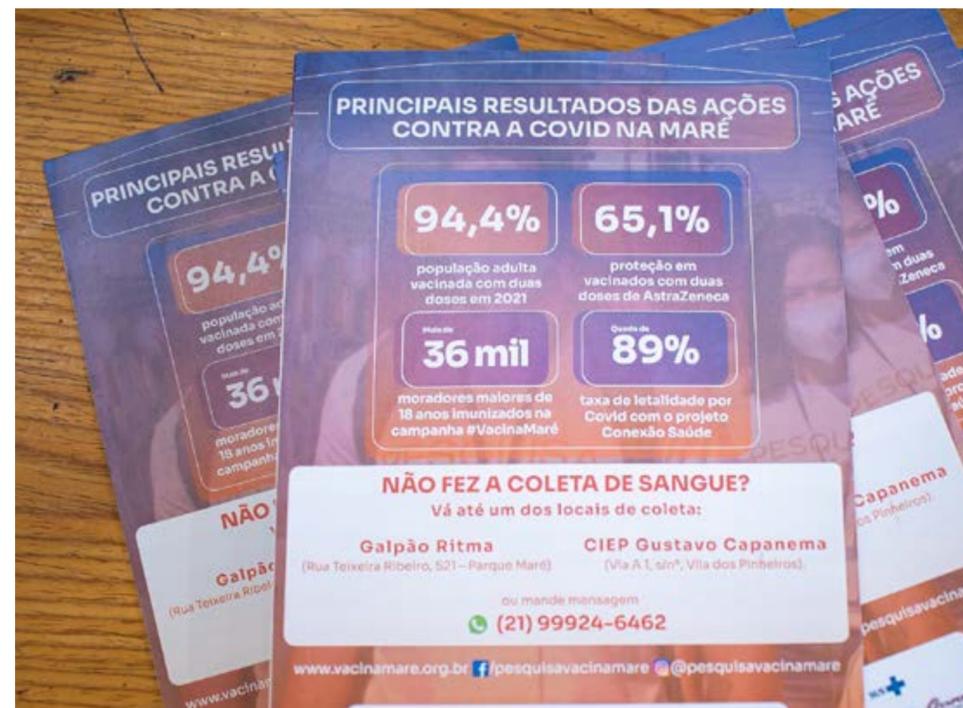
Doing scientific research demands dedication, time, and resources. Doing science in slum and peripheries demands more than this: it demands resilience, openness to new learning and pattern breaking, and agility to deal with real-life setbacks and challenges.



In the case of Maré, a territory that experiences inequalities and violence of all kinds in its daily life, the willingness to deal with the imposed reality (from police operations to the lack of basic structure in territory's facilities) is a reality that permeates the entire project experience.

As for communication, the lack of specific resources was a challenge for carrying out the actions needed to mobilize, engage, and enlighten people in the territory. Considering and incorporating financial and human resources into the communication area, from the beginning of the project, as an indispensable part of the team, is essential.

Another important challenge, which requires creative and permanent solutions, is to keep a healthy population, without the imminent threat of diseases – such as that experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic – engaged in scientific research, which has its own timing and methodologies, for an extended period of time. Regarding the Maré cohort, there are around two thousand families involved – a robust number of people who need to remain committed and engaged with the research.



LESSONS LEARNED



Challenges are heightened when doing science in a real territory, especially in slums and peripheries.



It is necessary to incorporate, from the beginning of the project, specific resources for communication, mobilization, and engagement.



There are no ready-made formulas. Each territory is unique and requires creative and innovative solutions for the emerging problems.



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Realization



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Partnership



Support

