

Concept Note

Fourth CAF–UNDP Conference on Governance for Development

**Democratic Institutions for the Future: Governing
Complexity and Renewing Trust**

High-Level Session on the margins of the 81st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Tuesday, 22 September, 11:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m. (Conference Room 7)

In-person event | United Nations Headquarters, New York

Context: The Democratic Paradox in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

LAC faces a democratic paradox. Although the region remains the most democratic among developing economies and has made significant progress in human development, the expansion of rights and poverty reduction, a growing share of the population lives in vulnerable conditions and questions the ability of public institutions to provide timely and effective responses to the challenges affecting their daily lives.

The rapid expansion of organized crime, the climate crisis, accelerating technological change, and the spread of disinformation and polarization are reshaping the environment in which public institutions operate. These interdependent and increasingly complex pressures are difficult to address through governance structures designed for a different reality. Today's context calls for new institutional capabilities, more adaptive governance models, and development strategies that place resilience at the heart of public action. In this context, institutional quality has become a determining factor in whether the region's democracies can sustain human development gains, strengthen resilience, and meet people's expectations while preserving and renewing public trust over the coming decades. Addressing this paradox requires more than new policies or additional resources. It requires strengthening and transforming institutions by equipping them with the capabilities and governance models needed to anticipate risks, manage uncertainty, coordinate complex responses, and deliver tangible results for people. Institutional transformation is not optional; it is a prerequisite for democracy and development to advance together and build public trust amid growing complexity and uncertainty.

What Do We Mean by Democratic Institutions for the Future?

Democratic institutions for the future are not necessarily new institutions. They are institutions that continuously strengthen and adapt their capabilities to operate in contexts of growing complexity and uncertainty, renewing their operating models to anticipate risks, coordinate responses, and deliver results. The challenges are already before us and form part of the public agenda; what is changing is their scale, speed, and interdependence. Conventional approaches to decision-making, coordination, facilitation, and implementation are no longer sufficient to address them.

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How can long-term investments in energy, water, infrastructure, or critical minerals be made when technological, climate, and price conditions may change radically before those investments yield results? How can governments respond to people who compare public services with the standards set by digital platforms and expect immediate, transparent, and personalized responses? How can challenges that do not fall within the remit of any single institution—such as organized crime, drought, migration flows, or the effects of automation on employment—be governed?

Responding effectively to these challenges requires institutional functions and capabilities that differ from those that have traditionally prevailed in the region. It requires embedding strategic foresight as a permanent function of government; harnessing artificial intelligence to redesign services and improve decision-making while safeguarding fundamental rights and freedoms; strengthening public communication, transparency, and accountability; and institutionalizing collaboration across sectors, levels of government, and non-State actors as a core function of democratic governance.

These capabilities, models, and instruments are not an abstract aspiration. The region already has long-term national strategies that extend beyond electoral cycles, parliamentary committees for the future, legal frameworks requiring consideration of multigenerational time horizons, and subnational governments that have institutionalized citizen deliberation. These experiences show that the region is not starting from scratch. The challenge is to turn dispersed innovations into sustained institutional capabilities that can be transferred and scaled. What is lacking is not innovation, but the scale and agility required for its adoption across institutions.

Objective and Expected Outcomes

The Fourth CAF–UNDP Conference on Governance for Development will bring together Heads of State, political leaders, subnational authorities, development partners, and leading academic voices to advance a regional institutional innovation agenda that strengthens the capacity of Latin American and Caribbean democracies to build trust, anticipate risks, and deliver development results while safeguarding people's rights and freedoms.

The Conference seeks to generate high-level inputs to deepen understanding of the importance of adapting institutions to current and future demands, and to explore how organizations such as CAF and UNDP can contribute to responding to this challenge.

The outcomes of the Conference will contribute to policy discussions and the development of public policy recommendations within the framework of the annual Governance and Development Dialogues, held at the subregional level for the fourth consecutive year as part of the two institutions' joint initiative.

Agenda

11:00–11:20 a.m. | Opening Segment

Democratic Institutions for the Future: Governing Complexity and Renewing Trust

- **Michelle Muschett**, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean
- **Sergio Díaz-Granados**, Executive President of CAF

11:20 – 11:35 a.m | Special Address

- **Rodrigo Paz**, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (TBC)

11:35 a.m.–11:55 p.m. | High-Level Segment: Transforming Institutions to Deliver Development Results

Moderator: *Isabel Saint Malo, Vice-president of Panama [2014-2019]*

- **Laura Chinchilla**, President of Costa Rica [2010-2014] (TBC)
- **Iván Duque**, President of Colombia [2018-2022]

11:55–12:25 p.m. | Dialogue: Innovating Governance to Renew Trust in Democracy

Moderator: *Isabel Saint Malo, Vice-president of Panama [2014-2019]*

- **Esther Dweck**, Minister of Management and Innovation in Public Services of Brazil (TBC)
- **Jon Clifton**, Chief Executive Officer of Gallup
- **Mariana Campos**, Executive Director of México Evalúa and participant in the CAF-UNDP dialogues on think tanks: “The role of think tanks in building democratic institutions for the future”

12:25–12:30 p.m. | Closing

- **Bettina Woll**, Deputy Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNDP