

Empowering Youth in the Americas and the Caribbean: Innovation, Connectivity, and Action for a Sustainable Future. Featuring experiences and insights from regional and international experts.

11 July 2025 Barranquilla, Colombia

About our us

The Biennial of the Americas creates connections, builds community and inspires change across the Americas. We are building a deep network of leaders from across the Americas to foster shared insights, innovations, and creativity.

In 2017, a partnership between the Biennial of the Americas and the Nature Conservancy launched the Youth Congress for Sustainable Americas (YCSA) as a means to connect young leaders working towards sustainable goals across the Americas, stimulating and fomenting Climate Action Initiatives.

Description

Youth are the changemakers of today and the innovators of tomorrow. Their active participation in local development not only addresses urgent social, economic, and environmental challenges but also contributes to a more inclusive, sustainable future. This event will explore the critical role that youth play in driving transformative change, particularly through leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

We aim to highlight the power of youth-led initiatives and their potential to influence local development policies and practices. Through the active involvement of delegates from the Youth Congress for Sustainable Americas (YCSA), we will bring forward fresh perspectives, ideas, and solutions that can serve as models for other regions. The event will emphasize the importance of connecting young leaders with key stakeholders across sectors (government, business, civil society) to foster long-term collaborations, ideas, and networks that will shape the future of local development.

Objectives:

- Showcase youth leadership: Demonstrate how youth-led initiatives are addressing local development challenges with innovative solutions.
- Foster intergenerational and intersectoral connections: Encourage collaborations between youth, governments, private sector, and civil society organizations to generate impactful solutions.
- Provide a platform for new ideas: Create a space for young leaders to share their vision, insights, and strategies for transforming their communities and the future.
- Strengthen networks for collective action: Highlight the importance of networking and partnerships to build sustainable, inclusive, and resilient local economies.



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Panel 1: "Empowering Youth: Leadership, Innovation, and Connectivity for Sustainable Local Development"

This panel will explore how young leaders can effectively influence public policies and decision-making at local and regional levels, featuring real-world examples of youth-driven policy change. Experts will discuss strategies to overcome common challenges such as limited funding and institutional support, as well as ways to build sustainable partnerships with public and private sectors. The conversation will highlight how innovation and technology empower youth to tackle complex social and environmental issues, showcasing impactful youth-led solutions. Additionally, panelists will examine emerging leadership models that can drive equitable and sustainable development in the Americas.

Panel 2: "Youth in Action: Networking, Innovation, and Collaboration for a Brighter Future"

Focused on the power of cross-sector collaboration, this panel will examine how partnerships between youth, governments, and civil society can accelerate progress toward social and environmental goals. Speakers will share successful examples of strategic alliances that amplified the reach of youth initiatives, along with insights on leveraging digital platforms for global networking and collective action. The discussion will also address policy frameworks that enable meaningful youth participation in decision-making and explore practical steps to ensure the long-term scalability and sustainability of youth-led projects.

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Alexandra Moreno García General Program Manager Hanns Seidel Stiftung Colombia



She holds a Bachelor's degree in Philology and Languages from the National University of Colombia and a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Westminster in the United Kingdom. She has extensive experience in international and governmental organizations, primarily in the education sector, including the Ministry of National Education, Fulbright Colombia, Colfuturo, and the Academia, among others. Since 2014, within Hanns Seidel Stiftung, she has been responsible for overseeing all project management with partner organizations, with the opportunity to design and co-create youth leadership training processes across the country—especially those focused on political, social, and environmental advocacy. In her role as Project Manager at Hanns Seidel Colombia, she has led partnerships with international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States, as well as with state institutions and civil society organizations. These collaborations have strengthened youth initiatives and collective leadership efforts throughout the country, enabling greater impact in various spaces of the national agenda. Most recently, she participated in the United Nations Summit of the Future as part of the signing of the Pact for the Future, engaging with over 500 young leaders from more than 80 countries, and showcasing the impact of Colombian leadership on a global stage.

Lucia Cusmano Head of the SMEs and Entrepreneurship Division OCDE



Lucia Cusmano is Head of the SMEs and Entrepreneurship Division and Head of the Unit on SME and Entrepreneurship Transformation at the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE). She coordinates the development of the OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Strategy and leads work on SME digitalisation and green transition. She has authored OECD reports on SME financing, innovation and sustainability, and benchmarking of SME and entrepreneurship policy. Ms. Cusmano has a PhD in Economics from the University of Pavia (Italy) and has completed a Master of Science in Economics at Warwick University (UK). She has published in international journals on SMEs, entrepreneurship, innovation, globalisation, structural change and economic development.



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Emel Alejandro Rodriguez Padilla Director sede Barranquilla TECHO - Colombia

Social and community psychologist with experience in territorial development projects, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas of Colombia. I have worked on the design and implementation of educational strategies, participatory methodologies, and intervention models that promote youth leadership, community self-management, and organizational strengthening. I have led training workshops for volunteers and communities on topics such as identity, networking, participation, and educational infrastructure, as well as creative processes like the creation of cultural spaces and community fairs. My approach focuses on collaborative work, the development of community leadership, and the creation of replicable tools that respond to local realities, with an emphasis on horizontal dialogue and the recognition of local knowledge.

Steven Perez Vera CEO Movimiento Juvenil Solidario Internacional

Steven Pérez Vera is a Colombian biologist and chemist, with a specialization in Public Management and a Master's degree in Social Enterprise Management and Development. A passionate youth advocate, environmental defender, and activist for political participation, Steven is currently training as a youthologist. He is the CEO of the Movimiento Juvenil Solidario Internacional and serves as a national delegate for Colombia in the Youth Congress for Sustainable Americas (YCSA), a program of the Biennial of the Americas.

With over 12 years of experience in social leadership, Steven has founded more than 30 social organizations, 28 of them fully youth-led—focused on environmental awareness, civic engagement, and inclusive development. He served as Youth Coordinator for the Department of Atlántico (2015–2022), leading public youth policy implementation across 22 municipalities.

Steven has been nationally and regionally recognized for his community work, earning two national awards and distinctions in 12 different territories. He has also contributed to academic research on youth participation and has been referenced in several official development plans and publications.

With a transformative vision, Steven leads projects that promote youth leadership, peacebuilding, environmental action, and public space development using recycled materials. He firmly believes that youth have the power to change the world and end senseless wars through collective action and environmental responsibility.



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Clara Ligia Solano Gutierrez Directora ejecutiva Fundacion Natura

Clara Ligia Solano is the current Executive Director of Fundación Natura, a position she has held since 2019 after serving for 13 years as the organization's Deputy Director of Conservation and Research. She is a biologist by profession, with 28 years of experience in management, planning, and sustainable development aimed at improving the quality of life in rural and urban communities, as well as conserving biodiversity. Her work also includes the management of environmental organizations, programs, and projects as a strategy to address the global and national environmental crisis—by influencing decision-makers and tackling the challenge of scaling successful actions to achieve greater impact across territories.

Lina Margarita Torres Programs Director Movilizadorio

Lina is a partner and Project Director at Movilizadorio, where she leads research and methodological development. With 12 years of experience, her passion for innovation and social impact has driven her to design and evaluate public policies for entities such as ICBF and the Unit for Victims, as well as to conduct research for UN agencies. She has also developed communication and training strategies for rural communities and ethnic groups around the world. At Movilizadorio, Lina has designed projects, developed the El Avispero platform, and created content and social mobilization strategies in collaboration with various partners. She holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from Columbia University, and a dual Bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Political Science, along with a specialization in Economics from Universidad de los Andes. She speaks English and Spanish.



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Nathalie Gerbasi Director of Institutional Development and Training Banco de Desarrollo de America Latina y el Caribe

Director of Institutional Development and Training at CAF. Journalist by training, with experience in multilateral banking as well as in the public and private sectors across the region. She has worked in the field of strategic communication and institutional strengthening, with a particular focus on designing and implementing capacity-building programs for those with a vocation for public service—especially individuals in public management and young leaders.



Dra. Karen Lorena Bruges General Director Mujeres violeta

Dra. Karen Bruges is a distinguished professional with over 20 years of experience, including 11 years in the corporate sector across various industries and business associations, and the past 8 years in the Oil & Gas sector, where she has led Social Responsibility initiatives in different regions of Colombia.

She is the Founder and General Director of Mi Partner – Mujeres Violeta, where she has spearheaded innovations focused on equity, inclusion, and technology, such as Violeta HUB, Violeta Film Fest, MujeresVioleta.TV, and Academia Violeta. She also serves as President of the global NGO HungreeFreeWorld, active in the U.S. and Nigeria, and leads the global mission G100 Zero Hunger. Additionally, she was Director of the Women Economic Forum (WEF) in California and President of WEF Colombia (2021–2024).

Karen has been internationally recognized with awards such as Woman of the Decade (London, 2023) and Leader of Excellence (India, 2021), and holds an Honorary Doctorate from Jharkhand Rai University (India). As an international speaker, she has participated in renowned forums such as the Paris Peace Forum, the Latin American Impact Forum at the United Nations, and the Harvard Women Leaders Forum.

Karen is a mother, social leader, and tireless advocate for equitable development. Her life purpose is to build bridges that connect people to their highest potential, promoting social transformation through empathy and collective action.



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John Akinboyewa

Founder & CEO

The HungreeApp and HungreeFreeWorld

John Akinboyewa is a licensed engineer, innovator, and social entrepreneur, founder of The HungreeApp, a tech platform tackling food insecurity and food waste through community-based sharing solutions. With over 15 years of experience in the energy sector and software development, he has worked across the U.S., Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, leading high-level projects in reservoir engineering and digital transformation.

Originally from Nigeria and now based in the U.S., John is also the founder of HungreeFreeWorld, a nonprofit advancing the app's mission globally. His work is deeply inspired by his early experiences with community resilience, and he is passionate about connecting technology with social impact. Through The HungreeApp, John promotes sustainability, circular economy, and stronger community networks.



Lina Gineth Rodríguez Chitiva

Environmental Advisor / Co-Founder

Departamento del Meta / Youth Congress for Sustainable Americas (YCSA)

MPlainswoman, mother, Environmental Engineer, and Master in Sustainable Development Management, with over 20 years of experience in social processes and more than 10 years in the public sector. Throughout her career, she has shown a strong commitment to sustainability and conservation, focusing mainly on strengthening environmental governance and restoring strategic ecosystems. As a delegate of Colombia and founder of the Youth Congress for Sustainable Americas (YCSA), she has led key initiatives in the conservation and restoration of protected areas and has played a crucial role in restructuring the departmental environmental system in her region. Her work includes the development of the restoration portfolio and manual for the Orinoquia region, as well as supporting more than 20 municipalities in strengthening their environmental governance.



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Our Allies:



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Hosted by:



YOUTH CONGRESS
FOR SUSTAINABLE AMERICAS

a initiative of:



The Nature
Conservancy 



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free in-person event.

Not in Barranquilla? Join our
livestream.

