

CAF & OEI - Project to Articulate Innovation Ecosystems in Latin America (2020-2022)

Closing Event: San José, Costa Rica | 23 March 2023

1. Background & Project Scope

In 2020, CAF-development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean-and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) launched a three-year Project for the Promotion and Articulation of Innovation Ecosystems in Latin America. The initiative targeted universities, SMEs and innovation agencies across seven countries (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay) with technical-cooperation resources from CAF and co-financing by OEI and national partners.

2. Objectives

- Strengthen collaboration between academia and business to tackle real-world innovation challenges.
- Build human capital and institutional capacities for open innovation in emerging ecosystems.
- Design scalable learning experiences that can be replicated region-wide.

3. Implementation Highlights (2020-2022)

- 15 editions of the Innovation Challenges course delivered (2021-2022).
- Polytechnic University of Valencia designed and certified the training process.
- Partnership with SENA (Colombia) to co-finance pilot cohorts.
- International meeting hosted in Costa Rica for cross-country peer exchange.

4. Key Achievements

- 1,600+ participants trained (500 university faculty & students; ~1,000 SME representatives).
- 18 universities from seven countries participated, building faculty innovation capacities.
- 661 companies received training support.
- 427 innovation challenges formulated; several obtained national science-agency funding.

5. Lessons Learned & Stakeholder Reflections

"Co-creation between academia and SMEs was essential to tailor innovation tools to local realities" (Rene Orellana, CAF).

"The main barrier is distrust; this project showed how to build confidence through joint problem-solving" (Patricio Montesinos, OEI).

6. Outcomes & Next Steps

- Consolidated a regional network of universities and SMEs committed to ongoing collaboration.
- Participants will replicate the training model to widen indirect beneficiaries.
- CAF and OEI exploring a second phase focused on scaling successful innovation challenges.

7. Sources & Further Reading

- CAF news release (EN):
<https://www.caf.com/en/currently/news/caf-and-oei-conclude-project-to-articulate-innovative-ecosystems-in-latin-america/>
- CAF noticia (ES):
<https://www.caf.com/es/actualidad/noticias/caf-y-oei-concluyen-el-proyecto-de-articulacion-de-ecosistemas-innovadores-en-america-latina/>
- Cooperation agreement (2021):
<https://www.caf.com/en/currently/news/caf-and-oei-to-promote-and-articulate-innovation-in-latin-america/>