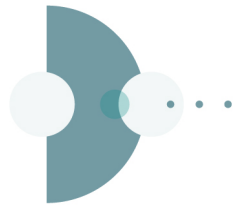# 3M REGIONAL GOVERNANCE: TOWARDS CONVERGING MULTILATERALISM IN LATIN AMERICA DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

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Colabora.Lat

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought us into uncharted territory. It represents a crisis with health, economic, social, and also political dimensions. Besides, it has exacerbated the inequalities and exclusion suffered by sectors living under conditions of vulnerability. It represents a crisis that has given rise to additional concerns, due to the likely deepening of political discontent and the consolidation of authoritarian practices through the expansion of the Executive Branch's powers and the restrictions of civil rights in a post-Covid-19 scenario.

This reality has shown us that the pandemic poses a challenge to which we cannot respond unilaterally, from the one-sided perspective of a single government or specific community. This is a global challenge with profound impacts on several dimensions of society, as well as differential impacts on the different women and sectors living under more vulnerable conditions. Therefore, it is a challenge that requires a multidimensional solution with an intersectional approach — a solution that is not yet available to us.

This is why we need political practices that promote collective intelligence-oriented collaboration as a way of finding solutions to public challenges, such as the one posed by the pandemic. The premise behind collective intelligence is, precisely, that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something. Translating this fact to the way in which decisions are made in a society represents a significant challenge, and requires collaborative mechanisms involving a variety of actors. It specifically requires collaborative governance.

For this reason, the *Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19* project aims at studying and making recommendations on the governance models that have the greatest potential to respond to convoluted crises such as the

Covid-19 pandemic. By collecting quantitative and qualitative data in several Latin American countries, we seek to generate diagnostic and prospective information about the impact of collaboration on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the responses developed to address the numerous problems that have emerged during the pandemic, especially in vulnerable communities.

The project is grounded in the conviction that defining a framework of good practices in governance, inclusion and gender parity will lay the foundations for a new long-term democratic agreement in Latin America.

Antonella Perini, Jennifer Cyr, and Matías Bianchi

Colabora.Lat is driven by an Implementation Council comprising universities and think tanks with experience in research and territorial anchoring in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Member institutions:

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3M REGIONAL GOVERNANCE: TOWARDS CONVERGING MULTILATERALISM IN LATIN AMERICA DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

Matías Bianchi e Ignacio Lara

Covid-19 as a "super wicked" problem

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global challenge, a "super wicked" problem[1] determined by four converging factors: the need to find an urgent solution; an overlap between those causing the problem and those who wish to solve it; the existence of a weak authority above the parties in order to handle the issue, or lack of said authority altogether; and the potential of current actions to engender ensuing problems in the future.

While the effects of the pandemic heightened the negative and differential impacts both among and within countries, access to treatment, medicines and — especially — vaccines to immunize the population in different countries became an ensuing problem or, in the words of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Director-General, *a moral catastrophic failure*.

Latin America has been hard hit by this crisis, and yet has been unable to provide a coordinated and sustained response. The challenge lies, then, in shedding light on the

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[1]Levin, Kelly; Cashore, Benjamin; Bernstein, Steven; and Auld, Graeme (2012). "Overcoming the tragedy of super wicked problems: constraining our future selves to ameliorate global climate change." *Policy Sciences*, Volume 45 (2), pp. 123-152.

conditions and the format of a regional governance which pursues three goals: to legitimize the actions of the affected democracies, to strengthen the bonds of collaboration within the region, and to (re)position Latin America in the worldwide picture.

A context of international (dis)order

The lack or shortage of global responses to address the pandemic, along with the increase of unilateral measures by the different states, revealed a change in the world order as we have known it for much of the 20th century and up until now. The current world (dis)order can be understood as stemming from two mutually reinforcing processes: the slow (but progressive) decline of liberal multilateralism, and the mounting geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China.

Regarding the former, the liberal international order that emerged after the Second World War and the institutional structure on which it stood — provided largely by the United States and its main allies — already exhibited clear signs of being on its last legs since as far back as the 2008 crisis, although those signs did not necessarily point to its demise.[2]

At the same time, neoliberalism and the way in which it defined the contours of globalization have been identified as one of the main reasons for the prevailing discontent with liberal democracies and the entrenchment of autocratic demagogues and ultranationalist groups — both of whom see and share the existing discontent with the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few at the expense of the

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[2] Ikenberry, G. John (2018). "The end of liberal international order?". *International Affairs*, Volume 94 (1), pp. 7-23.

development possibilities of the majority of the world population.[3]

On the other hand, the conflict between China and the United States — which has existed long before Covid-19 was even in the picture — reached a critical point. In spite of the fact that these States have come closer at times, and despite the ebb and flow of its international projection, China has not ceased to increase its economic, military, technological innovation, and international projection capacities. The Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping's main diplomatic strategy to (re)position China as a world power, is proof of that.

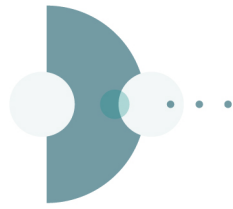## The pandemic and the role of the World Health Organization

Notwithstanding the broad consensus over the fact that there are no global problems which can be effectively addressed single-handedly by any one party, around the world there prevailed unilateral and uncoordinated actions.

On top of this, there were the geopolitical tensions, which became manifest through different processes depending on the stage of the pandemic: first came the race for supplies and technical equipment, then followed China's so-called "mask diplomacy," and last — already into 2021 — we saw vaccine nationalism.[4] In this respect, around February 2021 — i.e. two months after the start of vaccination worldwide — 3 out of 4 vaccines administered around the world were concentrated in 10 — developed —

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[3]Stiglitz, Joseph (2018). *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited: Anti-Globalization in the Era of Trump*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
[4]More information on the matter can be found on the Bureau of Investigative Journalism available at: https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2021-02-06/the-next-covid-crisis-a-vaccine-apartheid-endangering-us-all

countries, while 130 nations had not yet received a single dose.[5]

On the other hand, multilateral organizations failed to lead a process of systematic collaboration, information and resources exchange, and global and effective measures, which would permit a better handling of the pandemic for the number of states that make up the international community.

WHO attracted attention — and criticism — for the manner in which it handled Covid-19, especially for the shortcomings of its International Health Regulations. However, what has also become evident is the reluctance of certain states to share information with WHO, the competition that exists for access to key Covid-19 prevention and treatment supplies, and the political pressure WHO has had to endure.[6]

Funding is another sensitive issue, given that the lack of financial support from key actors — such as the United States during the Trump administration — meant a significant loss of independence by WHO. During the 2018-2019 biennium, its budget was 5,623 million dollars, a figure which is below that of the health budget in Peru in 2017.[7] With the pandemic already in place, the budget for the 2020-2021 biennium rose to 7,969 billion dollars.

The ten main actors that provide financial support to fund WHO programs represent 61.34% of the total. It should be highlighted that its main funder is the philanthropic Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which represents 11.8% of WHO's total budget. Sixth in place is Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance — which plays a key role in the

[5]Further information can be consulted at: https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/02/1488202
[6]Bump, Jesse; Friberg, Peter; and Harper, David (2021). "International collaboration and Covid-19: what are we doing and where are we going?" *BMJ*, 372:n189, pp. 1-4
[7]For a comparative chart of health budgets, go to: https://datosmacro.expansion.com/estado/gasto/salud

COVAX Facility — at whose board the Gates Foundation holds a permanent seat.

In spite of all this, the leading multilateral collaboration effort is the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, which was implemented in April 2020 by WHO, the European Commission, France, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and which also comprises governments, different kinds of organizations, and the private sector. COVAX is the vaccines pillar of the ACT Accelerator, and the one among the four pillars which has captured the greatest attention around the globe. COVAX is co-led by Gavi and two vaccine advocacy groups: the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO. According to estimates, during 2021 the facility will have given over 2,000 million doses, 70% of which will have been delivered to the 92 poorest countries in the program under the Advance Market Commitment mechanism, with the aim of immunizing 20% of their population. The remaining doses will be distributed according to the countries' self-funding schedules.

However, the mechanism is far from its goal of equitable distribution. What has prevailed are bilateral agreements, whereby wealthy countries have reserved most of the doses. The largest pharmaceutical companies, on the other hand, have prioritized distribution to rich countries, and the COVAX Facility started distributing doses three months after the main countries had started vaccination.

The unfolding and impact of the pandemic in Latin America

Before the arrival of the pandemic, support for democracy and citizen trust in public institutions had already been decreasing in the region. On top of going through a wave of intense social protests in 2019, the country has evinced a tear in its social fabric and a crisis in political intermediation , which were characterized by

unprecedented political and social violence, intensifying xenophobic sentiment, and the emergence of anti-politics and of anti-rights political proposals, among other situations.[8]

Moreover, also before the arrival of Covid-19, Latin America was in a highly vulnerable economic situation, the last decade having seen the lowest economic growth in a century, which in the region had gone hand in hand with a steady increase in poverty (from 27.8% to 30.8%) and in extreme poverty (from 7.8% to 11.5%) between 2014 and 2019.[9]

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Latin America is the region where the pandemic has struck like nowhere else in the world: despite representing slightly less than 9% of the world's population, by the end of 2020 the region had accounted for 20% of infections and 30.5% of deaths due to Covid-19 worldwide.[10].

Generally speaking, the measures adopted by the governments of the region to respond to the pandemic were the same but with different levels of intensity and duration. These governments have acted combining, on the one hand, a renewed nationalism, treating the pandemic as a threat to safety — which meant that they had to "defend their own citizens" — while on the other end there were presidents in countries such as Brazil and Mexico who disbelieved the severity of the threat.[11]

Without assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of government measures in the

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[8]Bianchi, Matías and Lara, Ignacio (2020). *Remar a contracorriente: juventudes y participación política en contextos de violencia y vulnerabilidad* (1st ed.). La Plata: EDULP.
[9]Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (2019). *Panorama Social de América Latina*. (LC/PUB.2019/22-P/Rev. 1), Santiago.
[10]For more information, go to: https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/es/home/presscenter/director-s-graph-for-thought/what-we-knew-then--what-we-know-now--looking-back-on-covid-19-in.html
[11]Riggirozzi, Pía (2020). Coronavirus y el desafío para la gobernanza regional en América Latina. Análisis Carolina, 12/2020.

context of the pandemic, what did become strongly evident was that governments had prioritized the adoption of measures at the national level, without finding incentives for action through a regional pandemic-response program.

The fragility of Latin American multilateralism

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no initiative on the part of Latin American regional institutions to effectively lead governance in health-related issues. In the Inter-American system, the Organization of American States has fallen into serious disrepute — to a large extent, as a result of the views of its Secretary General — and the Pan American Health Organization — though considerably proactive — has limits similar to those of WHO.

Following the dissolution of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the subsequent disappearance of the South American Institute of Government in Health — linked with the UNASUR Council of Health — no alternative regional authority was set up, because the virtual meetings promoted by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Forum for the Progress of South America (PROSUR) did not yield any concrete results. Mercosur was no exception to this reality, even when in the past it had shown a potential that, in a context of a pandemic, would have been remarkably useful.

Moving on to other integrationist schemes, the Andean Community of Nations, the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the Caribbean Community have shown some initiatives for concerted work by their member states, but these have not been enough to "pull" other regional authorities towards more comprehensive spaces for collaboration.

It is worth considering that the centrifugal dynamics of regionalization processes in the world are not an exclusive prerogative of Latin America, but also of other regions, such as Africa and the Middle East.[12] In addition to this, as stated by the authors, the region shows a considerable drop in the degree of diplomatic coordination between its countries, as evidenced by the lack of dialog and concerted action between Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico at the heart of the G20. In this regard, it is possible to identify the internal causes in the region (aggravated by the pandemic) of what is called *the emptying of Latin America*,[13] characterized as a "deliberate absence of collective action in the region" which, if persistent over time, could reinforce the above-mentioned loss of Latin America's international influence.

Nevertheless, the fact that there has been no coordinated and systematic action at the regional level does not imply that there have not been cases of collaboration between different states in the region. For example, there was an agreement between Chile and Peru according to which the former undertook to donate 40 tons of oxygen per week to the latter, in view of the pressing situation that the Andean country was going through in early 2021;[14] oxygen tanks were sent from Venezuela to Amazonas (the hardest hit Brazilian state in terms of deaths in the country), despite Bolsonaro's disregard of the action;[15] and the Argentine government shared the information it had on the Russian vaccine Sputnik V, as well as the good contacts with Moscow in this

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[12]Schenoni, Luis and Malamud, Andrés (2021). "Sobre la creciente irrelevancia de Estados Unidos." *Revista Nueva Sociedad*, No. 291, pp. 66-79.

[13]Gonzalez, Guadalupe; Hirst, Mónica; Luján, Carlos; Romero, Carlos; and Tokatlián, Juan Gabriel (2021). "Coyuntura crítica, transición de poder y vaciamiento latinoamericano." *Revista Nueva Sociedad*, No. 291, pp. 49-65

[14]For more information, go to: https://peru.as.com/peru/2021/02/14/actualidad/1613319712_453105.html

[15]For more information, go to: https://www.pagina12.com.ar/318664-venezuela-envia-tubos-de-oxigeno-al-estado-de-amazonas-en-br

regard, and with the governments of Mexico, Bolivia, Uruguay and Peru.[16]

Towards a regional (collaborative) governance agenda

It is essential to identify new global collaborative schemes and to strengthen existing ones, not only for Covid-19, but also for climate change and non-communicable diseases, in order to break down the barriers to collective action that hinder prevention and control efforts for these kinds of problems.[17]

Faced with a global multilateralism that is failing and a globalization (especially in financial terms) that speaks more to crises than to possibility, there is an opportunity to envisage new schemes, perhaps less universalist ones — which does not mean involving fewer participants. In this regard, it might be worth considering mini-multilateral schemes, in which the binding factor is regional proximity or theme — in relation to topics such as the environment, migration or transnational organized crime — on the part of the countries that comprise it. At the same time, it has become undeniable that we need to strengthen the connection between the challenges and the measures to be adopted at different levels, both within and between states (from the local to the national spheres). In other words, there needs to be a greater two-way flow in multilateral governance schemes — no longer based on the top-down model — in which information and decisions are coordinated, coherent and mutually agreed upon. Finally, and closely related to the above, this strategy must be based on a multi-stakeholder approach, in which the states bring together various types of

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[16]For more information, go to: https://elpais.com/sociedad/2021-02-03/la-conexion-mexico-buenos-aires-moscu-asi-se-disparo-la-sputnik-v-en-america-latina.html

[17]Bump, Jesse; Friberg, Peter; and Harper, David (2021). "International collaboration and Covid-19: what are we doing and where are we going?" *BMJ*, 372: No. 189, pp. 1-4; Lipscy, Phillip (2020). "COVID-19 and the Politics of Crisis," *International Organization*, 74 Supplement, pp. E98-E127.

organizations and — especially — the private sector, which comfortably moves around the international setting. Incidentally, this is the reason why it is so difficult (and essential) to bring said private sector to the negotiation and decision-making processes.

In this proposed *3M — multilateral, multilevel and multistakeholder — governance* scheme, Latin America is presented with a historic opportunity to play a proactive role, by providing a collaborative space for dialog and action, in which it has learned from past regional experiences, brings together current processes without making the same mistakes, and includes stakeholders besides the states. Moreover, a long-term multilateral collaborative framework at the Latin American level — that is, one that is not subject to the electoral contingencies of each country — would contribute to democratic governance at the national and (consequently) regional level.

Regardless of its scope or what it is called, Latin American regional convergence could begin by tackling some of the necessary issues for the region to reactivate its regional profile "through actions that reflect common, tangible, and feasible interests with a focus on the most urgent matters,"[18] including the following:

- intergovernmental coordination for the management of Covid-19 (in health and socioeconomic terms);
- multistakeholder concerted action for a peaceful and consensus-based solution to the Venezuelan crisis;
- support for the peace process in Colombia and the 2016 Peace Agreement;
- follow-up of the humanitarian situation of migrants across the entire continent;
- revitalization of the institutional infrastructure of the Inter-American system.

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[18]Gonzalez, Guadalupe; Hirst, Mónica; Luján, Carlos; Romero, Carlos; and Tokatlián, Juan Gabriel (2021). "Coyuntura crítica, transición de poder y vaciamiento latinoamericano." Revista Nueva Sociedad, No. 291, p. 65.

A positive experience in this regard could provide the necessary incentives to move forward in the management of other shared concerns, such as climate change and the necessary energy transition, migration, extractive activities, and organized crime, among others. Despite the fact that global procrastination regarding these issues is what has brought us to where we are, and resting on the assumption that impacts such as those of the current pandemic must be prevented, the agenda for dialog and concerted action remains open for those who seek to equally take advantage of and accept responsibility for the 21st century world.