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**Field visits**

## **Report of the field visit of the UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Executive Board to Uruguay from 11 to 15 December 2023**

### **I. Overview and summary of the visit**

The annual field visit of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS took place between December 11<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> in Uruguay. The delegation comprised of the following representatives:

- Ambassador Martin Kimani, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations and the President of the Executive Board.
- Ambassador Maritza Chan, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations and the Vice President of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries.
- Ambassador Muhammad Muhith, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations and the Vice President for the Asia Pacific Group.
- Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations and Vice President of the Eastern European Group.

Uruguay, with a population of approximately 3.5 million, and classified as a high-income country by the World Bank, stands out in Latin America for its high levels of social inclusion, robust democratic institutions, and a strong commitment to environmental sustainability, achieving nearly 97 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources. Despite these advancements, it grapples with development challenges like an aging population, one of the lowest fertility rates in the region, and the need to further diversify its economy to reduce dependence on agriculture and livestock exports. Engaging with the United Nations, Uruguay focuses on leveraging technological innovation and international cooperation to address these challenges, aiming to enhance its social protection systems, sustainable energy transition, and infrastructure development to maintain developmental gains and address demographic shifts. The purpose of the field visit was to understand how the United Nations, and UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS specifically, have been working to assist the government of Uruguay in meeting its long-term vision and strategic priorities for the country and what the United Nations can do better to facilitate this process. During the Executive Board field visit to Uruguay, discussions spanned social protection enhancements post-COVID-19, infrastructure development with a focus on transportation, and advancing decision-making through information systems, emphasizing the collaborative efforts of UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS with the Uruguayan government. Topics addressed

included innovative financing, demographic challenges, sustainable transportation, and the integration of advanced information systems for improved governance. The visit culminated in engagements on human rights, sexual and reproductive health, sustainable finance, and environmental sustainability, highlighting Uruguayan achievements in renewable energy and exploring future cooperation avenues to address inclusivity, technical capacity building, and the importance of maintaining a proactive approach to development challenges. This report details the engagements over the course of the field visit, focusing on outlining the key points from each engagement followed by a reflection of the delegations administered through a daily debrief.

## II. Report of 12 December 2023

The December 12 field visit to Uruguay of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board delegation to Uruguay comprised the following substantive meetings:

- Meeting with the United Nations Country Team.
- Meeting with the Director of the Uruguayan International Cooperation Agency, Mr. Mariano Berro y Claudia Romano.
- Meeting with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nicolas Albertoni.
- Lunch with renown personalities.
- Briefing by UNDP, showcasing its role on anticipatory governance and information systems.

The report will be segmented by days and structured according to a summary of each engagement and the responses to a pre-determined questionnaire (Annex 1).

### Key points from key engagements

#### A. Meeting with Director of the Uruguayan International Cooperation Agency, Mr. Mariano Berro y Claudia Romano

##### *Background*

The Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI) was created in December 2010. It operates under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic and has a Board of Directors and an Executive Director appointed by the President of the Republic. The tasks of AUCI include planning, design, supervision, administration, coordination, execution, evaluation, monitoring and dissemination of activities, projects and programmes of international cooperation, received and granted by Uruguay, to comply with the national development priorities.

##### *Presentation by AUCI*

- Mr. Mariano Berro emphasized that Uruguay's strategic priorities are for multiple actors and not just the United Nations. United Nations agencies are key partners that enable the government to act quicker than otherwise, particularly in areas where the government does not have the requisite technical expertise, knowledge, and capacity.
- The support of the United Nations to the government in achieving national priorities in the context of health, the care economy, and reproductive healthcare was emphasized.
- Uruguay maintains a particular focus on triangular cooperation for sustained social cohesion and the importance of long-term planning and vision.
- Building trust between the United Nations and the government highlighted as crucial for collaborative transformational change.
- Identified key areas of interest for Uruguay, including education, renewable energy, sustainable transportation, reducing the carbon footprint of food production, and inclusivity of the work sector.
- Stressed the importance of data-based planning, strategic priorities, and long-term plans developed with civil society, youth, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

- Lastly, Mr. Berro expressed appreciation for the Office of the Resident Coordinator, which enables the effective coordination of the agencies on behalf of the government and helps them differentiate between the amount of money used for programs and the quality delivered.

*Interventions from the delegation*

- Delegations expressed interest in learning more about Uruguay's strong planning and vision through an empowered, stable, and efficient civil service.
- AUC responded that its mandate is rooted in legislation, ensuring permanence of civil servants despite political appointments. He further emphasized that the technical expertise of public servants is the foundation of trust within the system.
- The delegation further noted the seemingly long-term involvement of the United Nations in Uruguay compared to project-based approaches in other countries. Which has empowered the United Nations to closely collaborate with the government to facilitate transformational change.

**B. Meeting with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nicolas Albertoni**

*Interventions from the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs*

- Vice Minister Nicolas Albertoni expressed appreciation of Board interest in Uruguay and acknowledges the crucial role of the United Nations in supporting government development objectives.
- He emphasized the role of Uruguay as a key defender of multilateral values and the importance of United Nations agencies identifying challenges and opportunities for the government.
- Importance and value of flexibility by United Nations agencies was highlighted as key for building trust and deepening cooperation.
- In response to a question by the delegation members on the emergency and crisis response capabilities of the government of Uruguay especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister identified key elements that contribute to an efficient crisis response strategy.
- Key scientific and technical experts.
- Built social capital and trust in institutions.
- Investment in social safeguards such as a well-equipped healthcare system, access to information, digitization, and quality education.
- Social stability is a factor of the dual elements of freedom and responsibility. Public health and education, including for vulnerable groups like migrants, and open channels of constructive dialogue across political lines are seen as crucial for maintaining social stability.

*Interventions from the delegation*

- The delegation was interested in understanding insights from the experience of Uruguay in the key drivers of transformational change and how the United Nations is able to align its skills and mandate to the aims of the government.
- They noted that the United Nations must understand better the challenges faced by middle-income countries, namely the “middle-income trap.” This is particularly important in the context of limited official development assistance (ODA) flows and need to address vital issues such as ageing populations and low fertility rates, which is the case in both Uruguay and Costa Rica.
- The importance of learning from countries in the region and sharing good practices was also emphasized.
- The delegation also emphasized the importance of understanding how the United Nations is perceived and often assessed on its ability to meet immediate needs, such as for example, in the context of conflict, and the inability of the United Nations to address these immediate needs renders its being perceived as inefficient. It is therefore important to understand the role of the United Nations in facilitating long term stability in the region.

- The delegation was also keen to understand the sustainability elements in achieving economic growth, for example the green bonds initiative the government was developing to finance the energy transition was highlighted as an example that other countries could also learn from and emulate in their own energy transitions.

### **C. Summary of responses during the 12 December debrief**

#### *Meeting content and relevance*

The delegation provided key insights into Uruguay's profile and the United Nations role in supporting government priorities. Uruguay received praise for its strong institutions, a robust civil service, and a history of stability free from conflict, establishing a solid foundation for development. Participants emphasized the successful integration of the United Nations and the multilateral system into the country's framework, a critical factor given the unique challenges faced by middle-income countries that demand agile and diverse development approaches. Positive examples cited included the UNDP initiative on Artificial Intelligence and UNFPA programme addressing ultra-low fertility, which align with government strategic objectives.

The delegation, however, identified issues of marginalization and exclusion within Uruguay. Gender equality emerged as a concern, with a low representation of women in parliament (20 per cent) raising eyebrows. Moreover, the delegation expressed concern over bleak prospects for legislation calling for gender parity in the short-term.

Of note was the striking lack of representation of the African-descendant population in positions of power and influence within both the government and the United Nations country team. Participants expressed surprise that none of the meeting participants were of Afro-descent, despite this group comprising 10 per cent of Uruguay's population. Additionally, the delegation observed a noticeable absence of discussion and strategy regarding the challenges posed by ageing populations, signaling an area that requires attention and planning.

#### *Engagement and collaboration*

Delegations expressed overall satisfaction with the collaborative efforts demonstrated by United Nations agencies and the Resident Coordinator during the meetings. However, concerns were raised about the existence of a pervasive macho culture negatively impacting women's participation in discussions. This issue highlighted the need for addressing gender dynamics to ensure inclusive and equitable participation.

Another delegation brought up a hypothetical concern regarding the comfort and ethnic composition of United Nations country teams (UNCT). The observation was made that UNCTs, predominantly of Spanish heritage or from Latin America, might face limitations in fully integrating into local political discussions and challenging the status quo. While this concern was raised as a possibility, it underscores the importance of diverse and inclusive teams for effective engagement in diverse cultural contexts.

Delegations acknowledged strong collaboration between UNDP, UNFPA, and the Resident Coordinator, particularly in the areas of population and statistics. The UNFPA focus on census data, and UNDP emphasis, on the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) showcased a cohesive approach.

#### *Showcasing effectiveness of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS*

In the debrief, delegations offered concise feedback on the effectiveness of presentations and identified areas for improvement. Acknowledging a good level of articulation in the presentations, concerns were raised about the perceived impact of a macho culture, where women seemingly had less time to speak or were interrupted during their presentations. One delegation proposed a corrective intentional measure, suggesting that women be allowed to speak first to address this imbalance.

Regarding substance, a delegation emphasized the importance of conveying a better understanding of multi-dimensional development challenges in the Uruguayan context during engagements. This understanding is crucial for assessing the needed interventions and evaluating the effectiveness of United Nations

interventions in meeting these requirements. Additionally, another delegation pointed out a perceived lack of impressiveness in the presentation delivered in Parliament, indicating the need for enhancements in presentation quality and impact.

#### *Perceptions of challenges and opportunities*

Participant perceptions of challenges and opportunities aligns with the aforementioned points in the previous three sections. Challenges identified include the marginalization of minorities, a lack of gender equality, and issues of equity amongst the United Nations agencies. The first two challenges offer distinct perspectives through which the Uruguayan country context and United Nations interventions can be examined. Questions arise about the implications of being an upper-middle-income country striving for high-income status while significant segments of the population remain underserved and underrepresented. This prompts a critical examination of how the United Nations country team in Uruguay, through its composition and engagements, addresses these issues, revealing some of the contradictions within the United Nations development system. Addressing these questions is crucial for contextualizing and operationalizing development when key constituents are excluded from the process.

In terms of opportunities, closely related to concerns about marginalization, there is a need to broaden the United Nations focus to include different population demographics and shift away from a concentration of projects in urban areas. This emphasizes the potential for the United Nations to create more inclusive and comprehensive development strategies that address the diverse needs of various population groups and geographic locations within Uruguay.

### **III. Report of 13 December 2023**

The December 13 field visit to Uruguay of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board comprised the following substantive meetings:

- Briefing by UNDP and UNFPA, showcasing their role in social protection.
- Lunch with personalities and officials focused on the issue of low fertility and ageing in Uruguay and the United Nations development system response.
- Briefing organized by UNOPS with the Ministry of Transport and Public Works.
- Briefing by UNFPA and UNDP, showcasing their roles in the information systems for decision-making on census operation, registered based census, thematic surveys on use of time, gender and generations and youth, and integration of administrative records from the perinatal information system (MoH) and the information system on social assistance (MIDES), multidimensional poverty index, digitalization, and citizen participation.

#### **Key points from key engagements**

##### **A. Briefing by UNDP and UNFPA showcasing their role in social protection**

###### *Background*

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Social Development supported the most vulnerable sectors of the country through social protection measures such as the provision of family allowances and Uruguayan Social Cards.

UNFPA is a strategic partner in assisting the government to address issues of low fertility and ageing, the feminization and infantilization of poverty, which constitute major obstacles in the road to development. UNFPA maintains programmatic lines with MIDES in several key directions: monetary transfers geared towards women, children, youth welfare, care systems, surveys, and gender-based violence.

###### *Interventions from the delegation*

- The delegation was interested in understanding how the work of the United Nations aligns with the government and how the United Nations has been able to support the government and learn from its knowledge and experience.
- The President of the Board was interested in understanding the key competencies required by a government to be able to deliver innovative financing for social impact, such as through social impact bonds, and how these could be scaled up and sustained over a long period of time. The president was also interested in the long-term vision of the country to address the growing ageing population, which will be dependent on state welfare and the upliftment of minorities including people of afro descent.
- The Vice President (GRULAC) was interested in the shared challenges of middle-income countries with low fertility and ageing populations and the structural factors that contributed to this.
- The Vice President (Asia Pacific) was interested in understanding how the United Nations could assist the country with social economic development. The Vice President (EEG) was interested in understanding the implications of data collection on the privacy of individuals.

## **B. Briefing organized by UNOPS with the Ministry of Transport and Public Works**

### *Background*

The Ministry of Transport and Public Works (MTPW) is implementing the largest investment in road works in Uruguayan history (\$2.5 billion US dollars). UNOPS is playing a strategic role in accompanying and advising MTPW throughout the lifecycle of these projects, including thorough collaboration on more than 7,500 km of roads and more than 150 bridges.

### *Interventions from MTPW*

- Representatives from MTPW described the infrastructure plan, implemented with the assistance of UNOPS, as the most ambitious investment in the history of Uruguay.
- The ministry lauded the technical expertise of UNOPS, which assisted the government in delivering the project.
- The Minister further noted that the strategic vision of the country goes beyond road infrastructure and its plans include the modernization of the railway system as well, for which it appreciated the potential of UNOPS as a key collaborator in providing high quality technical services.

### *Interventions from the delegation*

- The delegation was interested in understanding complementary aspects of the work of the government and the work of UNOPS, and how this aligns with strategic priorities and the long-term vision for the country.
- The President of the Board was interested in learning about the role of the transportation sector in facilitating the energy transition and how UNOPS could help support a more sustainable transportation system. The minister noted that Uruguay is working on the energy transition and the decarbonization of the transportation sector which is a key issue in the context of regional collaboration and knowledge sharing as well, especially for the GRULAC group of countries. Road transportation, aviation, railways and the maritime sector were identified as key areas of focus for the decarbonization agenda and that UNOPS would be able to assist the government as a key collaborator in this context.
- The Vice President (EEG) was interested in learning more about the examples of transatlantic cooperation, specifically with the European Union. The minister reflected on the long history of collaboration with the European Union and emphasized the need to continue and maintain this strong regional and transatlantic collaboration.
- The Vice President (Asia Pacific) noted that investment in infrastructure is an important driver of social advancement and economic growth and could act as a catalyst to enhance the overall GDP of the country. He was interested in understanding comparisons of time and cost savings through the

engagement of the United Nations and continuation of technical support and capacity building after the completion of the project. The minister and representatives from the ministry noted the long history of assessing the social and economic benefits of infrastructure projects within Uruguay, and through evaluations and studies undertaken after the completion of the project, it continues to build on and share knowledge and expertise.

**C. Briefing by UNFPA and UNDP showcasing its role in the information systems for decision-making on census operation, registered based census, thematic surveys on use of time, gender and generations and youth, and integration of administrative records from the perinatal information system (MoH) and the information system on social assistance (MIDES), MPI, digitalization, and citizen participation.**

*Background*

UNFPA has been crucial in executing surveys by Uruguay's National Institute for Statistics (INE), including the National Youth Survey, Time-use Survey, Reproductive Behavior Surveys, and Gender-Based Violence and Generations Survey. INE has supported questionnaire design, fieldwork strategies, data consolidation, analysis, and advocacy efforts derived from these surveys.

INE is developing a new multidimensional poverty indicator, with significant support from UNDP through the technical assistance of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at the University of Oxford.

*Interventions from the government*

- Government representatives highlighted the importance of reliable and accurate data in developing robust policies. Key issues discussed included the protections of data privacy which were incorporated within the legal framework of Uruguay.

*Interventions from the delegation*

- The delegation was interested in understanding progress made by the government on the regulation of artificial intelligence, which was still in its nascent stages.
- The President of the Board highlighted the importance of digital sovereignty and the ability of the government to regulate both data sharing and artificial intelligence within its jurisdiction.
- The government representatives agreed with this but also noted the importance of simultaneous protections of human rights, free speech and privacy.
- The president noted the importance of investing in and developing localized knowledge and skills in the context of artificial intelligence, in a manner that aligns with the national priorities of the country.

**D. Summary of responses during the 13 December debrief**

*Meeting content and relevance*

The delegation highlighted several key takeaways related to the substance of the meetings. One notable concern was the general confusion regarding Ministry of Transportation expectations from the United Nations. Participants expressed uncertainty about the specific expectations from United Nations agencies, especially regarding financial support for the Ministry of Transportation, which is not a typical form of assistance provided by the United Nations. Additionally, there was a call for clarity concerning the care sector, with a civil society representative advocating for involvement. However, the precise role and impact of this involvement remained unclear to the participants.

A member of the delegation pointed out a consistent revisiting of what the Uruguayan government is doing, diverting the discussions from the intended focus on United Nations involvement. This repeated shift in focus led to confusion and lack of clear communication about specific projects and needs related to UNDP and

UNFPA. Furthermore, concerns were raised about the overall clarity of the presentation, particularly in addressing challenges and showcasing specific areas of work, indicating the need for more precise and focused communication during the meetings.

#### *Engagement and collaboration*

A concern was raised about the lack of specific details regarding the practical involvement of the United Nations in Uruguay. Despite government officials praising UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS, the delegation member noted a lack of concrete examples demonstrating successful cooperation. It was suggested that the value addition of the United Nations in Uruguay might be serving as a laboratory for good practices that could be exported to other countries, potentially forming the basis for triangular cooperation with two other developing nations with lower income statuses.

Another delegation member pointed out a perceived disconnect between the work of the United Nations agencies in Montevideo and their offices in New York. Specifically, concerns were raised about the misalignment between Uruguay's initiatives, particularly in artificial intelligence and digital efforts, and the broader activities of the United Nations such as the Global Digital Compact and the High-Level Advisory Board on Artificial Intelligence. This lack of coordination raised questions about the effectiveness of United Nations involvement in supporting advanced projects in Uruguay.

#### *Showcasing effectiveness of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS*

In the debrief, delegations offered brief comments on the effectiveness of the presentations and areas for improvement. One member highlighted a perceived disconnect between the discussions during the day and real examples of United Nations contributions, suggesting the need for more structured briefings before meetings. Clarity issues in presentations, especially in addressing challenges and showcasing specific areas of work, were noted as areas requiring improvement. Additionally, the lack of citizen participation or effective engagement of civil society in proceedings was identified as counterproductive in providing the delegation with a comprehensive understanding of United Nations added value to the citizenry.

#### *Perceptions of challenges and opportunities.*

The delegation identified several challenges with United Nations work in Uruguay, including the perception that the country has outgrown current development interventions. There is a concern that the United Nations is struggling to adapt to new challenges, reflected in the absence of transformative projects during the field visit. Another highlighted challenge was the perceived disconnect between Montevideo and New York, particularly in processes like the Global Digital Compact and intergovernmental discussions on Artificial Intelligence. In both processes, there are important discussions held at the country level that have not echoed in New York.

On the flip side, opportunities were recognized, such as Uruguay potentially serving as a hub for triangular cooperation with developing countries. This would involve sharing best practices with other nations, providing a basis for continued engagement. The evolving context of Uruguay also presents an opportunity for the United Nations to redefine its value proposition for countries with higher income statuses. Additionally, specific projects, like the UNOPS road network, were seen as opportunities to foster regional integration by enhancing connectivity with border countries.

## **IV. Report of 14 December 2023**

The December 14 field visit to Uruguay of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board comprised the following substantive meetings:

- Meeting with the National Institute of Human Rights, the Disabilities Division of the Ministry of Social Development, the Honorary Commission on Disabilities and the Supreme Court of Justice.



- Meeting to Showcase UNFPA work on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Gender Based Violence, and Comprehensive Sexual Education policies and commodities procurement with the Ministry of Public Health, the State Health Services Administration (ASSE), the Attorney General’s Office, and the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP).
- Lunch with women leaders from various backgrounds and political viewpoints (women in politics, civil society, communicators) personalities and officials focused on the issue of low fertility and ageing in Uruguay and the development system response.
- Meeting with Ms. Azucena Arbeleche, the Minister of Economy and Finance, and Herman Kamil, Director of Debt Management Unit and briefing by UNDP showcasing its role on financing for development.
- Briefing by UNDP, showcasing its role on enabling youth leadership and participation in democratic institutions and processes, and its engagement on an inclusive public sphere.

### Key points from key engagements

#### A. Meeting with the National Institute of Human Rights, Disabilities Division of the Ministry of Social Development, the Honorary Commission on Disabilities, and the Supreme Court of Justice

##### *Background*

- Uruguay adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008, incorporating it into its legal framework, but has faced challenges in fully adapting regulations to meet CRPD standards.
- Key issues for people living with disabilities include legal capacity for decision-making, respect for personal preferences, universal accessibility, and rights concerning family formation and parenthood.
- Following 2016 feedback on CRPD implementation, experts identified discriminatory legal provisions affecting the legal capacity of individuals living with disabilities.
- Since 2020, Uruguay has initiated research, engaged with civil society, consulted experts, and conducted awareness campaigns to draft legislation and policies for ensuring equal rights and citizenship for persons with disabilities in all life aspects.

##### *Presentation*

The Ministry of Social Development presented a bill geared towards facilitating the inclusion of persons with disabilities through facilitating better access to information, accurate data and focused interventions that were tailored to the unique needs of the beneficiaries.

- A representative of persons with disabilities made a provocative point during the meeting: “It is not us who are vulnerable; it is the laws and regulations that are. The fact of the matter is that we are **all** vulnerable if excluded and oppressed by the state, laws and socio-economic conditions.”

##### *Interventions from the delegation*

- The President of the Board reflected on the need to understand how United Nations agencies can be more effective in meeting the needs of the government. In response, the government representative emphasized the importance of the role of the United Nations in conducting scientific evidence-based studies, conducting surveys, bringing together diverse stakeholders from civil society, NGOs, the private sector creating innovative good practices and leveraging collective information gathered towards catalysing progress.
- Although the delegation reflected on positive interventions of the United Nations, they also noted, and the President of the Board was concerned about, the lack of inclusion, specifically individuals of afro-descent within United Nations agencies. He noted this was a key focus of the anti-racism mandate and United Nations agencies needed to do better in terms of incorporating a diversity of

voices and committing to diversity, equity and inclusion, and the mandate of leaving no one behind in a deeper and more holistic manner.

**B. Meeting to showcase UNFPA work on sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and comprehensive sexual education policies and commodities procurement with the Ministry of Public Health, State Health Services Administration (ASSE), Attorney General's Office, and the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP)**

*Background*

- Uruguay is a pioneer in developing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) policies, driven by international commitments and strong civil society advocacy, especially from the women's movement.
- The country has a low maternal mortality rate and no deaths from unsafe abortions, thanks to UNFPA support. There's notable success in family planning, with only 8.9 per cent unmet need for contraception amongst women aged 15 to 45, aided by UNFPA promotion of contraception rights and new methods.
- A focused strategy on adolescent pregnancy has reduced adolescent fertility rates from 60 per cent in 2014 to 22.3 per cent in 2022 with UNFPA supporting health, education, and social protection measures.
- Despite progress made, Uruguay faces challenges with gender-based violence, ranking fourth in Latin America for femicide. UNFPA is involved in prevention, working with the sexual education programme of ANEP and collaborating with the Attorney General's Office.
- Since 2006, Uruguay has upheld a comprehensive sexual education policy, with UNFPA playing a crucial role in generating evidence, advocacy, and developing educational content and courses, reflecting a commitment to comprehensive sexual education.

*Interventions from the delegation*

- The delegation was interested in understanding how the United Nations could help the ministry and work with the government to address key national priorities in the context of access to health.
- The delegation appreciated the support UNFPA provided to the government in the context of data collection and development of protocols on HIV, adolescent pregnancy and reproductive health.
- They noted, however, the need for disaggregated data that considers inclusion, equity and diversity that is also cognizant of cross-cultural approaches to health.

**C. Meeting with Ms. Azucena Arbeleche, Minister of Economy and Finance, and Herman Kamil, Director of Debt Management Unit, and briefing by UNDP, showcasing its role on financing for development**

*Background*

- UNDP played a crucial role in spearheading sustainable finance initiatives in Uruguay through various strategic interventions.
- UNDP collaborated with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to assist Uruguay in launching a \$1.5 billion US dollar sustainability-linked sovereign bond, with UNDP verifying key performance indicators (KPIs) for transparency. The first report was published in May 2023.
- Moreover, UNDP acted as “delivery partner” to prepare a \$1 million US dollar proposal for the Green Climate Fund, focusing on sustainable finance with involvement from Uruguayan key ministries and central bank, targeting submission by end of 2023.
- UNDP co-structured a \$350 million US dollar loan to support national environmental goals, with UNDP as the external verifier, highlighting a continued commitment to sustainable finance.

*Presentation*

- Minister Azucena explained how the government, with the support of UNDP, designed innovative financial tools aligned with national environmental commitments and obligations under the Paris Agreement. Incentivizing meeting environmental obligations through market-based mechanisms was thought to be an important opportunity for raising the level of ambition and environmental commitments of the country. Minister Azucena highlighted that close coordination with other ministries (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining, and the Ministry of Foreign Relations) enabled the development of innovative and impactful financial instruments.
- The Ministry of Economy and Finance expressed interested in scaling up the initiatives and working with the United Nations to share the lessons learned and best practices for similar initiatives in other developing countries.

#### *Interventions from the delegation*

- Members of the Executive Board pointed out that the experiences and lessons learned through this initiative were important for other countries to learn from and facilitate further cooperation and knowledge sharing, including via a South-South context.
- The delegation was also interested in understanding how the development of this instrument contributed to closer collaboration with the private sector and European Union. Executive Board members noted the importance of preventing any conflicts of interest and to ensure transparency and accountability at every stage of the process.

#### **D. Briefing by UNDP, showcasing its role on enabling youth leadership and participation in democratic institutions and processes, and engagement on an inclusive public sphere**

##### *Background*

- According to the latest Uruguayan Youth Survey, Uruguay's political scene is aging with limited opportunities for youth engagement, as evidenced by only 5.2 per cent of young people aged 14 to 29 participating in political spaces.
- UNDP is facilitating dialogues with young political party members on the 50th anniversary of Uruguay's institutional breakdown, and eve of upcoming general elections in October 2024 X, to discuss democratic challenges and envision a better future.
- Dialogues focus on fostering youth leadership, encouraging inter-party collaboration, and deliberating on ways to strengthen democracy.
- Emphasized during the event was the importance of political participation, inclusion of marginalized groups, and gender mainstreaming, urging youth from different parties to collaborate towards shared objectives.

#### **E. Summary of responses during the December 14 debrief**

A debrief was not conducted on this day.

## **V. Report of 15 December 2023**

The December 15 field visit to Uruguay for the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board comprised the following substantive meetings:

- Meeting to showcase the UNDP role in the first energy transition and sustainable mobility.
- Workshop showcasing the UNDP role in climate change, biodiversity, waste management/ circular economy, and risk reduction.

#### **Key points from engagements**

##### **A. Meeting to showcase the UNDP role in the first energy transition and sustainable mobility**

*Background*

- Uruguay now sources 97 per cent of its electricity from renewable energy, marking a significant achievement in its energy transition.
- UNDP has been pivotal in supporting Uruguay's renewable energy strategies, especially in overcoming barriers to wind energy investment, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable energy.
- Given the success of its initial phase, Uruguay, with UNDP support, is focusing on decarbonizing its transport sector, particularly promoting electric mobility. The Movilidad Eficiente y Sostenible (MOVÉS) project (2018-2022) played a key role in this effort, aiming for efficient, inclusive, and low-carbon mobility solutions.

*Interventions from the Ministry of Industry and Energy*

- The Minister of Industry, Energy, and Mining, Ms. Elisa Facio, presented an overview of Uruguay's energy policy, emphasizing alignment with the goals of the Paris Agreement.
- Currently, 97 per cent of the country's electricity is sourced from clean energy, encompassing hydroelectricity, solar energy, and biomass. Uruguay is poised for a second energy transition, with a focus on decarbonizing transportation and industrial infrastructure, prioritizing electrification and sustainability in road transport. The energy strategy includes investments in wind energy, green hydrogen batteries, and the development of a circular economy with a gender mainstreaming perspective.
- Notably, electric mobility holds a central position in government priorities. The goal is to improve energy efficiency and sustainability in the transportation sector, necessitating support from the United Nations in terms of training, capacity building, and technical assistance. The Ministry of Transport and Public Works is actively involved in facilitating the regulatory framework essential for the successful implementation of this transition. The government vision extends beyond energy policy, encompassing broader sustainability goals and commitment to advancing gender mainstreaming in the evolving energy landscape.

*Interventions from the delegation*

- The President of the Board was interested in understanding the socioeconomic impact of the energy transition, in particular the modalities and channels undertaken by the government for fostering popular support for the decarbonisation agenda and the policies of the energy transition. He was interested in government insights into driving the decarbonization agenda beyond finance and technology, but also political engineering key to driving this forward.
- In response, the Minister noted that Uruguay does not produce oil and gas and has a long history of relying on renewable energy, with many dams built in the last century. This explains why the transition to clean energy was almost natural and did not require significant political engineering. Relying on renewables, such as hydroelectricity and water, were well received by society. The only oil imports are conducted by a state-owned company that only imports refined oil, the majority of which is used in the transportation sector. Notably, 99 per cent of the population is electrified with clean energy. However, the focus of the government is to reduce carbon emissions in the transportation sector.
- Reducing carbon emissions has been broadly supported by the population and through the creation of “innovation hubs” where the government has been able to foster spaces for multiple stakeholders from academia, state agencies and civil society to exchange knowledge and ideas to move the decarbonization agenda forward. The decarbonization of meat production and reducing methane emissions through innovative interventions have also been contemplated by the government.
- The President of the Board expressed interest in understanding what additional support the United Nations could provide to assist Uruguay in its second energy transition and advance the decarbonization agenda for a transformative shift in the country. He emphasized the importance of

- gathering insights to convey to leadership in New York, enabling them to empower their teams on the ground and enhance long-term collaboration as a partner to the Government of Uruguay.
- The Minister expressed gratitude for United Nations support in government decarbonization efforts. She highlighted the necessity for United Nations collaboration to boost Uruguay's technical capacity and capabilities for a transformative leap forward. The Minister provided an example of the United Nations role in procuring consultants and experts who could quickly integrate into the government, offering unique expertise, training, and capacity building. The government relies on the United Nations for enhancing implementation capacity through technical assistance, skill-building, and training. Moreover, she emphasized United Nations agencies have a pivotal role in communicating Uruguay's priorities and agenda in the global decarbonization context, attracting international technical assistance and support for the transformative change.
  - The Vice-President (EEG) inquired about the government's long-term vision for enhancing public transport infrastructure, highlighting the absence of a subway or railway system despite 90 per cent urbanization in the country.
  - The Minister acknowledged that scaling up public infrastructure is a government priority, facilitated by the Ministry of Transportation and Public Works. She mentioned the significant investment in road infrastructure, focusing on roads and bridges with technical support from UNOPS. The Minister outlined the ministry's long-term vision, which involves developing infrastructure for an electric trolley/train system across the country, a project already in the planning and authorization stage.
  - The Vice-President (Asia-Pacific) inquired about the mechanisms of knowledge sharing and information exchange in the regional context, with a focus on south-south cooperation, and sought insights into the government's energy efficiency policies.
  - The Minister expressed the government's strong interest in fostering knowledge sharing and collaboration, particularly in South-South cooperation. She cited an example of a hydroelectric power project involving the construction of a bi-national dam, which enhanced cooperation with Argentina and Brazil. The Minister highlighted the government's recognition of the importance of energy efficiency, outlining investments in awareness campaigns, public education through schools and households, and technological support to promote energy efficiency initiatives.
  - The Vice President (GRULAC) inquired about incentives for electric vehicles, specifically in terms of taxes.
  - The Minister highlighted that 100 per cent electric vehicles are exempt from carbon taxes, and hybrid models receive varying tax cuts. She also mentioned a programme with the Ministry of Economy, where a portion of tax revenue from oil and gas is allocated to finance energy efficiency initiatives. This is complemented by certifications and rewards for improved energy efficiency. Additionally, the issuance of green bonds serves as an economic incentive for the decarbonization agenda. The government's focus extends to developing regulations, fostering a cultural shift within communities, and actively participating in international knowledge-sharing programs for insights into transitioning towards a circular and green economy.

## **B. Workshop with the Minister of Environment to showcase the UNDP role in climate change, biodiversity, waste management/circular economy, and risk reduction**

### *Background*

#### *Biodiversity and sustainable production*

- Uruguay is implementing its National System of Protected Areas (SNAP) with 17 areas added since 2005. UNDP assists on five GEF-financed projects to promote sustainable use of natural resources, enhance SNAP, and craft a national biodiversity strategy, including funding mechanisms via the Biodiversity Finance (BIOFIN) initiative.

*Climate action*

- Uruguay prioritizes climate resilience, renewable energy, and ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs). For over three decades, UNDP has backed Uruguay in fulfilling United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) obligations and crafting its National Climate Change Policy and NDC. In collaboration with IDB, UNDP supported the issuance of a sustainability-linked sovereign bond.

*Disaster risk reduction*

- UNDP has worked with Uruguay's National Emergency System (SINAE) since 2003 on six projects. The 2019-developed Monitor Integral de Riesgo y Afectaciones (MIRA) system with SINAE improves emergency response, communication, and monitoring. UNDP also assisted on post-disaster recovery assessments, including adjustments for COVID-19 impacts on education and tourism, and leads United Nations Emergency Team (UNETE) for emergency preparedness and recovery.

*Circular economy and waste management*

- UNDP has helped advance Uruguay's waste policy and the 'Uruguay + Circular' strategy, supporting the Ministry of Environment in formulating the National Waste Management Plan and laws to promote a circular economy. Through two GEF-8 projects, UNDP works towards transitioning Uruguay to zero-waste cities by enhancing recycling and waste reduction efforts.
- Mr. Robert Bouvier, the Minister of Environment presented this information with no direct interaction with the delegation members.

## VI. Debrief of the field visit

Following the conclusion of field visit activities, a debriefing meeting was held with the delegation, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the three agency representatives on 15th December. The purpose of this meeting was to understand the views of the delegation following the visit and key takeaways. The below reflections are for the entirety of the trip.

### Meeting content and relevance

Overall, the visit was considered successful and there was a notable appreciation for the high-pressure nature of organizing such an event for the country team. A consensus emerged that the programme of engagements was well-planned, with a responsive planning team addressing logistic concerns. Meetings were substantive, engaging partners effectively. It was acknowledged that gaining a comprehensive understanding of United Nations activities in a country within a few days has its limits, but interactions provided insights into UNCT prioritization and incentives, enhancing understanding of its work.

Secretariat support was commended, with well-arranged logistics, smooth transfers between meetings, and adherence to scheduled timings, respecting the lengths of working days. Special thanks were extended to individuals from UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS for their preparation efforts, along with appreciation for the Resident Coordinator. The delegation highlighted the importance of multi-dimensional poverty issues and expressed ongoing support for initiatives addressing disabilities, the feminization of poverty, and emphasizing women's roles in decision-making.

While Uruguay's significant role in multilateralism was acknowledged, there was an expectation for more specific insights into the Sustainable Development Goals. The delegation called for continued efforts on transformative issues and applauded UN Women and the Resident Coordinator for advocating gender parity. The role of United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in transitioning Uruguay from an economy to a society of care was acknowledged, along with positive exchanges of best practices between Costa Rica and Uruguay. The Gender and Generations Survey (Encuesta

de género y generaciones) was recognized as a unique and useful tool in the region. The delegation suggested more focused conversations, emphasizing country programme documents and highlighting good practices. Meetings with two female ministers were appreciated and discussions on artificial intelligence were limited to aspects of good or anticipatory governance.

### **Engagement and collaboration**

The engagement and collaboration aspect of the visit yielded several key observations. United Nations agencies effectively met the expectations of the Board member regarding collaborative efforts, and this positive feedback will be conveyed to the United Nations Deputy-Secretary-General. Notably, there appears to be more synergy and cooperation within the country team, particularly with the Resident Coordinator, when compared to experiences in other countries such as Senegal. This has resulted in a more coherent country context, with United Nations entities operating harmoniously. Encouragingly, the trust and positive reputation that the United Nations enjoys in Uruguay were noted as valuable assets that can be further built upon.

The delegation observed clear synergies and convergences in the collaborative efforts of the United Nations system in Uruguay, emphasizing the effectiveness of ‘delivering as one’. The UNCT was notably successful in working together. Moreover, the United Nations Resident Coordinator was commended for being skilled and emotionally intelligent, with the delegation suggesting that the approach taken by this Resident Coordinator could serve as a model for others, considering inherent challenges and opportunities of the role.

While acknowledging good synergy with the host government, the delegation emphasized the risk of not being critical enough. Balancing a positive relationship with government partners while retaining the ability to offer constructive criticism was deemed important. The partnerships observed and learned about during the visit were found to be very satisfactory. The delegation cautioned against potential complacency arising from strong partnerships and stressed the need to maintain motivation and identify new opportunities. However, one delegation member underscored the role of the Resident Coordinator in addressing gender equality challenges that Uruguay faces in the media.

While appreciating United Nations advocacy, the delegation recognized certain areas where Uruguayans may prefer to pursue initiatives independently. One observed area of concern was that agency representatives occasionally dominated meetings with government officials, prompting a call to be mindful of these dynamics in future engagements.

### **Effectiveness of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS showcase**

Assessing the effectiveness of the agency showcase highlighted several key points. United Nations agencies were advised to maintain a laser focus on the development priorities for the country. Specific interest was expressed in the UNDP-supported sovereign sustainable linked bond, and it was suggested to connect key UNDP colleagues and partners in the Ministry of Economy and Finance with the Board membership in New York.

A recommendation was made for future engagements to incorporate simple and practical examples to enhance understanding. Delegation members observed instances where there might have been dominance by country representatives. For instance, during the meeting with the Ministry of Transportation, it was noted that while UNOPS colleagues could have engaged more in conversation there were missed opportunities to hear more from country representatives. There was a desire for a more in-depth understanding of UNOPS activities in Uruguay, as opposed to the well-represented demonstrations of impact by UNDP and UNFPA.

The collaboration showcased by UNDP with the Ministry of Economy and Finance was highlighted as impressive, reflecting significant change and transformation. The UNDP-supported green bond initiative was praised as a positive step and it was noted that UNDP Costa Rica is also working on a green bond, illustrating the significance of strong leadership in driving such initiatives.

The intellectual melding, curiosity, and exploration demonstrated by the UNCT was deemed impressive, allowing the United Nations to respond effectively to imperatives within the country.

### **Perceptions of challenges and opportunities**

The delegation suggested that incorporating more national diversity on the team could serve as a tool for enhanced checks and balances. It was further suggested that more discussions about putting women at the centre of decisions and democracy would prove beneficial. Addressing the inclusivity of Afro-descendants in Uruguay was underscored as a serious issue, calling for transformative change rather than merely relying on quotas. Similar to gender inclusion, Afro-inclusion was proposed as a way to bring about positive change in the national imagination.

In terms of opportunities, the delegation noted coordination in how agencies engage with each other but suggested exploring more coordination amongst systems. The Joint SDG Fund could serve as a system for integrating efforts at the national level, and closer collaboration could aid in integrating systems.

The COVID-19 impact on development progress in Uruguay highlighted the importance of pandemic preparedness in the future. Climate change issues related to livestock, particularly methane production from cows, were identified, suggesting the exploration of technologies to address this pollution.

Encouragement was expressed for expanding South-South cooperation initiatives in Uruguay. The missing link between the Futures Commission, Uruguay Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and discussions with United Nations entities in New York was acknowledged for future consideration.

The issue of low fertility requires a long-term policy due to its serious impact on the population. Conceptual leaps in demographic resilience by the UNCT were appreciated, with the suggestion to focus on population dynamics in a country context like Uruguay.

Despite high levels of trust with the government, and pride in being a high-income country, caution exists against complacency, which emphasizes the need for constructive discomfort to foster continued transformation and progress.

## **VII. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Executive Board field visit to Uruguay from December 11 to 15 was a comprehensive endeavor that illuminated Uruguayan development successes and ongoing challenges. The delegation, through extensive engagements, observed commendable advancements in social inclusion, democratic governance, environmental sustainability, and its strategic use of technology and innovation to tackle developmental challenges. Robust partnerships with United Nations agencies including UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS showcased collaborative efforts in areas such as social protection, infrastructure development, and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, amongst others. These partnerships underscore the Uruguayan national commitment to leverage international cooperation in order to enhance its social protection systems, sustainable energy transition, and infrastructure development, while ensuring close alignment with the Government's long-term vision and strategic priorities.

The visit also highlighted areas needing attention, such as inclusivity and representation of minority groups, gender equality, an aging population, and diversification of the economy. In line with the priorities articulated by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS are urged to intensify efforts to address the underrepresentation of people of African descent within United Nations teams, particularly in regions such as Uruguay which have a significant Afro-descendant population. This initiative should embrace targeted recruitment and promotion strategies, driving towards the goals of diversity, equity, and full inclusion in alignment with the Strategic Action Plan on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All at the United Nations Secretariat.

Delegation debriefs reflected on the importance of maintaining vigilance against complacency, enhancing the clarity and focus of presentations, and necessity for more structured briefings and inclusive engagement



with civil society. The delegation praised Uruguay's strong institutions and effective integration of the United Nations and multilateral systems into its developmental framework yet emphasized the critical need for addressing issues of marginalization and gender dynamics to ensure a more inclusive approach to development.

The field visit underscored the significance of innovative financing, potential of sustainable transportation systems, and importance of addressing demographic challenges through transatlantic cooperation and leveraging United Nations support for technical capacity building and global advocacy. Delegation engagements with government officials, civil society, and the private sector highlighted Uruguay's progressive stance on human rights and innovative approach to financing sustainable development, further emphasizing the country's role as a defender of multilateral values.

Recommendations from the visit call for continued focus on transformative and sustainable development strategies, emphasizing inclusivity, adaptability, and strategic alignment of United Nations support with national developmental goals. Delegation feedback suggests a path forward that involves broadening the United Nations focus to different demographics, decentralizing projects from urban areas, and exploring coordination amongst United Nations systems to address diversity and inclusivity comprehensively. By addressing these challenges and opportunities, Uruguay and the United Nations can work together to foster a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development trajectory, ensuring that no one is left behind.

The Executive Board field visit to Uruguay not only highlighted the country's developmental achievements, but also shed light on the nuanced challenges that lie ahead. Through constructive engagement and collaboration a promising pathway exists for Uruguay to continue its journey towards sustainable development, leveraging the strengths of its partnerships with the United Nations to address the evolving needs of its population and environment.

## Annex 1. Questionnaire

This report sought to outline responses to daily engagement by bureau members based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire broadly assesses alignment, engagement, and partnership effectiveness of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS with the Uruguayan government, its people, and various societal sectors. It was administered in the form of a daily debrief and sought to answer the below questions.

- I. Meeting content and relevance**
  - a. What were the key takeaways from the meeting in terms of content and relevance to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS objectives in Uruguay?
  - b. Did the meeting address the expected purpose and showcase the agencies' strategic alignment with the national priorities?
- II. Engagement and collaboration**
  - a. How would you rate the level of engagement and collaboration between the delegation and the host representatives during the meeting?
  - b. Were there notable opportunities identified for future collaboration or areas where stronger partnerships could be forged?
- III. Effectiveness of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS showcase**
  - a. In meetings where UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS showcased their roles, how effective were the presentations in conveying the agencies' contributions and impact in Uruguay?
  - b. Were there specific aspects that stood out positively or areas that could be improved for future presentations?
- IV. Perceptions of challenges and opportunities**
  - a. What were the main challenges highlighted during the meetings, especially in discussions with government officials and other stakeholders?
  - b. Were there notable opportunities identified that align with the agencies' capabilities and could be explored for further support and collaboration?

While the intention was to ask and receive responses to each question, suitability of the questions depends on the type and number of engagements per day.

## Annex 2. Delegation list

<b>EXECUTIVE BOARD FIELD VISIT DELEGATION</b>	
H.E. Mr. Martin Kimani	Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
H.E. Ms. Maritza Chan Valverde	Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Vice President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
H.E. Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya	Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, Vice President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
H.E. Mr. Muhammad Muhith	Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Vice President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
<b>REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD SECRETARIAT, UNFPA, UNOPS</b>	
Ms. Mahsa Jafari	Secretary of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
Ms. Dalita Balassanian	Deputy Secretary of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS
Mr. Horst Rutsch	Officer-in-Charge, Executive Board Branch, UNFPA
Ms. Tanvi Mani	Intergovernmental Affairs Specialist, UNOPS