

## **1. Contextual Framework**

Uruguay is a small country with a population of just over 3 million inhabitants. It is considered a medium income country although 46.4% of children under 6 years live under the line of poverty (INE: 2006).

From 2005 onwards the country has experienced significant political and economic changes that have had impacts on the lives of children and adolescents.

In 2004, a coalition of left-wing parties (Encuentro Progresista/Frente Amplio/Nueva Mayoría) won the national elections and changed the government politics applied by the traditional parties that had ruled since 1830. The new government -inaugurated in March of 2005- set as a priority to reduce the high levels of poverty, to increase the public expenditure in key areas (like education) and to work within the human rights framework.

2005 was a turning point since the 2002 economic crisis. For the first time in six years there was a reduction in Uruguay's poverty and extreme poverty rates in the overall population, and there was also a slight improvement in the income distribution. In 2006, the Uruguayan poor population fell to 25%. However the forecasts of economic growth for the coming years will not be enough to increase the household income significantly and to definitely revert the economic deterioration of several sectors of the society. Although the social policies have greatly contributed to improve the situation, the structural problems that affect children are far from being solved.

Uruguay is the second country in the region in terms of Public Social Expenditure (PSE). However, the percentage destined to children and adolescents is still relatively low. Grau (2005) said that the PSE distribution shows an adult bias, since children and adolescents only receive 20% of it. According to ECLAC, almost 70% of the social expenditure is destined to social security, especially pension funds.

In August 2004, a new "Child and Adolescent Code" (CAC) was approved with a number of improvements concerning legislation, but the CAC still contains some provisions and regulations that are in contradiction with the CRC. This process began with the enactment of the Code of Childhood and Adolescence by law 17823, of September of 2004. However, this process should be intensified to reach not only national laws but also lower-ranking legislation that rules different aspects of the lives of children in the country. The legal basis for an integrated system of protection of the rights of the child have been established. However it should make some observations to the Code because some provisions contradict the Principles of Non Discrimination and of Participation included in Chapter 1.

## **2. Trends**

Children and adolescents have been historically the worst affected by poverty. Although rates have decreased in the last years, this reduction was higher among adults than among children and adolescents. While in 2006 only 7.2% of the population over 65 years old lived under the poverty line, there are currently 46.4% of children under 6 years of age living in that situation, as well as 43.5% of children between 6 and 12 years old, and 38.1% adolescents between 13 and 17. It is concerning that almost half of the children and adolescents of the country live in households that cannot meet their basic needs.

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<sup>1</sup> MTR UNICEF Document, 2007/ UNICEF Annual Report 2007

The inclusion in the 'public agenda' of the right of any child to have access to preschool education has been quite recent in Uruguay. The last data available (2005) shows the attendance is 87.8%, and that the public sector represents 80.4%. Primary school education is almost universal. While access to primary education has become almost universal, the situation in secondary education indicates serious problems. According to a study based on a group of students from public high schools, only 40% of students enrolled in the first year finish the basic cycle on time, while many do not finish secondary school. As a result, only one in every three 20-year old Uruguayans graduates from high school. The high drop-out rates represent one of the worst problems the country needs to face if it wants to ensure development.

While a further reduction in IMR (from 15 in 2002 to 12 per 1,000 live births in 2006) and the setting of clear health care goals for children and mothers in the current reform of the health care system are positive developments, half of the country's children still spend their infancy under adverse health conditions. This is reflected by a worrying nutritional status, with undernutrition standing at 11.3% and obesity at 8.5%. HIV/AIDS prevalence is largely concentrated in high risk populations and stands at 0.8%.

In terms of the children and adolescents judicial system, there are evident inconsistencies between practice and legislation. The Judicial Observatory recently developed by UNICEF, showed that a significant number of proceedings are not carried out under the provisions of the Code of Childhood and Adolescence, therefore violating the guarantees of protection to which children and adolescents are entitled to.

In juvenile justice, inconsistencies persist between legislation and application in practise. The Judicial Observatory, developed with UNICEF support, showed a significant number of proceedings not being carried out as per provisions by the Child and Adolescent Code. Moreover, the number of children and adolescents (3,163) living under direct control of the Institute of the Child and Adolescent (INAU) is extremely high when compared to other countries in Latin America. Violence also remains a challenge as one third of girls and 43% of boys report that they had been victims of physical and/or psychological abuse. As a response, the "Integral System of Protection of Childhood and Adolescence against Violence" was created in 2007 to coordinate and support national programmes and interventions dealing with the protection of children against all kinds of maltreatment, abuse or exploitation.

Adolescents do not have many chances to participate and their opinions are rarely taken into account when decisions are taken that affect them. They are usually associated with the social imagery of the increasing insecurity and violence in society. However, recent UNICEF-sponsored research shows the number of crimes committed by adolescents has remained stable in the recent years.

Poor children and adolescents in particular, are associated with crime. This can lead to approaches that are more focused on punishment than rehabilitation. A study of the media approach of violence-related issues conducted by UNICEF showed clearly that the media agenda of children and adolescents is focused on violence and dangerousness. As the study shows, the media agenda is not independent from the community that builds it. It feeds from it, and it is addressed to it.

In 2006 the Uruguayan State submitted its report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. This was the second report submitted since the country ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990.

### **3. Capacity Building efforts**

The Mid-Term Review process ratified the cooperation strategies defined in the programme signed in 2005. In this sense, the external evaluation revealed that the counterparts highlight the following actions as UNICEF's most significant interventions: firstly, the research and studies conducted by the technical teams of the organization or sponsored by it; secondly, the media campaigns; thirdly, coordination and advocacy activities; and lastly, the training of operators.

The generation of knowledge and the analysis of information have become basic strategies for UNICEF in Uruguay. The agency has sought to fill information gaps, stimulate public debate on key issues, and facilitate change in public policies with a view to implementing children's rights. During the consultations, Government counterparts, civil society and academic institutions underlined the importance of the role played by UNICEF in the production of new information, and requested that UNICEF continue performing this strategic function.

In the consultations, the counterparts highlighted the importance of the capacity to coordinate stakeholders and the advocacy efforts. They emphasized the value of UNICEF as a neutral meeting ground for the various stakeholders. Its impartiality, reliability and technical capability allow UNICEF to integrate the various existing views, generating spaces to reflect on public policies regarding childhood issues. This strategy is especially relevant for the work carried out by UNICEF in order to fulfill the work priorities in child investment, education, health and nutrition, protection: violence and abuse, youth penal justice and alternatives to deprivation of liberty.

Training has been a constant strategy to achieve the transformation of institutions towards making their practices respectful of the rights of boys, girls and adolescents. The value that this capacity-building has for the counterparts was made evident during the thematic meetings, where they recommended that this strategy be maintained and that it be strengthened by innovating through the introduction of tools such as: the systematization and dissemination of good practices, the generation of specific instruments that facilitate the work of the operators, and the sharing and circulation of international experiences.

The support to innovative experiences was one of the strategies emphasized during the thematic meetings. UNICEF plays a significant role in the systematization of small-scale projects with an impact that can be translated into public policies.

As one of the most important actions of 2008 stands out the support to the government given by UNICEF and the United Nations System in the beginning of a process of construction of a National Strategy of Childhood to year 2030. The discussion process was structured in three consecutive days, dedicated to the following subjects: Demographic Sustainability, Social Sustainability and Democratic Sustainability. For each one of the days a document was elaborated to guide the debate. At the moment a document summarizing the main agreements and discrepancies of the debates is being elaborated. The participants of the debates were representatives of the main governmental and nongovernmental organizations, academic and representatives of international cooperation organizations. In addition to the debates, a national consultation on children and adolescents was carried out the result of which will contribute to the elaboration of the national strategy.