

ORIENTAL REPUBLIC OF URUGUAY

NATIONAL PRELIMINARY REPORT

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION OF STRUGGLE AGAINST  
DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

Prepared by: National Environment Direction. Ministry of Housing, Land  
Management and Environment.

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## Executive Summary

The Oriental Republic of Uruguay is situated in the mild region of the Southeastern part of South America. The borders are: Federative Republic of Brazil at North and East, Argentinian Republic at West, the River Plate at South and the Atlantic Ocean at East.

The territory is politically divided into 19 departments. Spanish is the official language of the country.

The population of the country, according to the last census (1996) is 3.200.000 people distributed as follows: 48% males, 52% females with regional heterogeneity. The increase of the annual rate of the population is 0,64% corresponding to the period 1985-1996.

Important urban centers can be found lengthwise the coast. Among them Montevideo, in the Northern bank of the River Plate is the capital of the country.

The coast area houses approximately a 70% of the total population.

Uruguay is not free from the emigration process country/city which has been seen in the continent, existing a remarkable macrocephalism in the urban centers which house a 90% of the population.

Uruguay has a republican, democratic and presidentialist government. The official educative system gives secular, free and obligatory teaching. Besides there is private teaching at different levels: primary, high school and university.

In spite of the fact that there is freedom of worship, the Catholic religion prevails in the population.

The agricultural sector plays an important role in the national economy and there is an important part of the country involved in its activities establishing a sector of historical and economical significance.

Wheat, rice and barley are the principle cultivations of the country. The management of the land is done by the means of rotation of crops with pastures for bovine cattle and sheep. Uruguayan meat and wool production, recognized all over the world for its excellent level of quality, is performed by natural pastures with slightest supply of rations.

The weather is mild, prevailing the winds from the Northeast with defined periods : Winter and Summer and intermediate seasons. Rainfalls are irregular and changeable during the year. The natural risks are related to climatic events (droughts, floods, freezes).

Uruguay, together with Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, makes up the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR). The 48% of exports of the country

and 44% of 1996 imports, were made within this common market. The subregional integration goes beyond the financial and commercial aspects because the unification includes education, justice, energy, environment, social security, labor affairs, health and migration too.

Desertification is considered a complicated process in Uruguay, which appears in the whole ecosystem. Due to different natural and/or anthropic causes lose productivity. The final result are decreasing levels in the biological potential of the ecosystem with the resulting deterioration in the life quality of different social groups related to its exploitation.

The land degradation takes place in the more fertile ones where the agricultural activity is concentrated and where erosion can be the first step in a virtually irreversible desertification process.

The principle consequences of these degradation processes are represented by the loss of productivity of the land, impoverishment of medium and small rural producers, rural depopulation and land abandoning. As an example the areas with bigger problems of erosion show the highest rates of rural emigration (Northeast of Canelones).

The erosion of soils is considered one of the most serious problems related to natural resources in Uruguay. There is a considerable evidence of this phenomenon, based on the studies of magnitude and location. A 30% of the national territory and more than the 80% of the arable soil, are being affected by different stages of erosion.

The principle causes of soil degradation in the country are related to the land possession problem (temporary possession), dimension of the farms (high number of medium and small producers), bad management of the resource (monoculture, overshepherding, inadequate plowing). The regulation of the Law for the Preservation of Soils and Waters (law 15.239) has been a very important step to control erosion. This law establishes the technical rules for preservation of soils and waters with agricultural purposes and the recovery of eroded soils, entrusting the General Direction of Renewable Natural Resources of the Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries, the coordination and direction of activities for the use and preservation of soils.