

The first year of the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Uruguay



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On April 8, 2021, the Accelerator Lab (AccLab) from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) was launched in Uruguay. A virtual event in a pandemic context that brought together more than 150 people motivated by the curiosity to know more about the AccLab and what the acceleration would mean. The fourteen virtual rooms were designed to foster dialogues and a proposal space to build around development challenges. The event closed with a social impact play based on improvisation and inputs generated in the workshop. A closure that opened our path to new challenges.

[Today we are pleased to share our first annual report.](#) Twelve months of work, that we outlined from the beginning with the motto "explore before explaining". For this reason, we decided to launch the AccLab after having gone through our first learning cycle: the challenges of the infodemic (abundance of information) in times of COVID-19. At that time the positive cases were growing daily, and there was uncertainty about how the population would behave to control the situation and the possible arrival of the first vaccines. In this way, we wanted to understand what aspects and strategies helped the population make informed decisions regarding vaccination in a context of rapid and massive dissemination of inaccurate information.

This is how we developed our first approach in the form of a portfolio of interventions, which would cover different dimensions of the complexity of the infodemic:

- [A behavioral study](#) to influence people's perception of care against COVID-19 at the end of the year. This initiative was published on the [United Nations Innovation portal](#).
- A [vaccine acceptance tracker](#) for COVID-19 vaccines to understand which factors were driving the acceptance and rejection of vaccination through a listening tool on the social network Twitter, which was also disseminated in the [press](#).
- [Question and answer sessions](#) with medical specialists, that generated more than 35,000 views on our YouTube channel.
- An [educational game](#) about herd immunity and vaccines that was available for all education and citizens through Plan Ceibal.

We went through the second learning cycle when activities were reactivated in our country, and therefore the circulation of people increased. However, we were detecting signs that access and participation in cities could be unequal in many spaces in this process. This is how we set out to discover, what kind of processes could help people access, enjoy and govern public spaces more equitably and sustainably? Through a collaborative process, we learned about the value of co-design and [tactical urbanism](#) to

collect learnings and new paths towards the development of inclusive and sustainable cities built-in communities.

Another of the lessons learned from the Coronavirus was that we cannot control nature and that there are no healthy populations without healthy ecosystems. Moreover, 2021 also represented the start of the [United Nations' decade for ecosystem restoration](#). For these reasons and to contribute towards a green recovery, we set out to mobilize people, groups, and organizations for the restoration of our native forest, promoting alternative finance for development. In this way, we carried out the first [crowdfunding campaign for sustainable development](#) in Uruguay. Thanks to the commitment of the local community, the collaboration of more than 150 people, five companies, and the organizations that are part of [Plantatón Uruguay](#), it was possible to exceed our goal of [planting 1,000 native trees](#), as well as promoting activities to control exotic invasive species, the native trees maintenance, and develop awareness activities, in a process that brought us together around our shared concern for our environment.

More than ever, collective action is necessary to overcome global challenges that impact locally. One of them is climate change. For this reason, and within the framework of the [Climate Promise](#), we embarked on a process where we learned, with 15 young activists and more than 200 adolescents from all over the country, how climate change affects us and how to involve the voice of youth. "[Tu Mirada Importa](#)" was a joint initiative with UNICEF and the Ministry of Environment. Furthermore, together with this Ministry and the National Agency for Research and Innovation, we launched the call "[Research for the climate](#)" to support research that contributes to the mitigation and adaptation of climate change and connect the academy with public policy to climate action.

Finally, we focused on how to contribute to economic and social integration between geographies and populations to transform inequality into opportunities for growth and social cohesion. This has led to experiences such as an [innovation marathon](#) to strengthen the resilience of Santa Clara de Olimar, promoting intergenerational exchange; collective intelligence workshops to recognize, connect and promote actions carried out in the territory towards Sustainable Development; and an intervention process on public habitat with neighbors from Barrio Los Bulevares.

In this first year, we have gone through the stages of the AccLab (sense, explore, test, and grow), learning from each one of them, connecting and sharing learning with counterparts, the global network of Laboratories, the Regional Bureau for America Latin America and the Caribbean, and the UNDP office in Uruguay. These synergies have been fundamental in making things happen.

Sometimes, we feel as we were using a particular language difficult to understand, for times naive, or even dreamers. However, we are still under construction, and in deconstruction, we are making decisions that are marking our path. Yes, we discovered some demands and difficulties to overcome, but we have never been alone, both inside and outside the organization. We are better understanding the context in which we operate, being able to identify signs of change that guide us towards opportunities for action that are often hidden or not very visible.

The challenge for 2022 is to continue accelerating towards other possible development scenarios, maturing as a Laboratory in terms of the structuring of activities, the relationship with colleagues, with counterparts, and with citizens. Continue developing the narratives about experimentation and public value, without losing the vital and provocative energy that distinguishes us.

In this way, the AccLab was created as a favorable environment to be able to promote, through collective intelligence, new forms of work and initiatives that would address

highly complex and uncertain challenges in an interconnected manner, together with civil society, the government, academia, and communities.

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