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Current perceptions on climate change in Uruguay: Actors and visions with focus on the Northeast region

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Abstract

The change of government in Uruguay in March 2020 led to some modifications of the country's environmental and climate institutions, including the creation of the new Ministry of Environment and the transfer of the National Climate Change Response System (SNRCC by its acronym in Spanish) to that orbit. The departmental elections of September 2020 brought also some changes in the Northeast region of Uruguay (departments of Rivera, Tacuarembó and Cerro Largo). Considering this context, this work assumes a theoretical perspective of multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance, adopting a qualitative methodological strategy. The objective here is to analyze the current perception of national and territorial actors regarding the policies and mechanisms of climate governance in Uruguay and the region. Consequently, it examines diverse articulations at different levels of government, as well as different dynamics of participation with a focus on climate issues at the national as well as within the territory analyzed. Doing so, the paper aims at evaluating some progress and challenges in this area, in order to contribute to the design and implementation of assertive policies on climate change.

Keywords: sustainable development. Climate change. Governance. Northeast region of Uruguay.

Percepciones actuales sobre el cambio climático en el Uruguay: Actores y visiones con foco en la región Noreste

Resumen

El cambio de gobierno en Uruguay en marzo de 2020 conllevó algunas modificaciones de la institucionalidad medioambiental y climática del país, incluida la creación del nuevo Ministerio de Ambiente y el traslado del Sistema Nacional de Respuesta al Cambio Climático (SNRCC) a esa órbita. Asimismo, las elecciones departamentales de septiembre de ese 2020 trajeron algunos cambios a nivel de la región Noreste del Uruguay (departamentos de Rivera, Tacuarembó y Cerro Largo). Considerando ese contexto, este trabajo asume una perspectiva teórica de gobernanza multinivel y multiactoral, adoptando una estrategia metodológica de corte cualitativo. El objetivo que se plantea es analizar la percepción actual de los actores nacionales y territoriales respecto a las políticas y mecanismos de la gobernanza climática del Uruguay y de la región. Consecuentemente, se indaga acerca de diversas articulaciones en los distintos niveles gubernamentales, así como diferentes dinámicas de participación con foco en materia climática a nivel del país y del territorio analizado. De esa forma se apunta a

una evaluación de los avances y desafíos en esta temática, para efectuar un aporte al diseño e implementación de políticas asertivas en materia de cambio climático.

Palabras clave: desarrollo sostenible. Cambio climático. Gobernanza. Región Noreste del Uruguay

Percepções atuais sobre as mudanças climáticas no Uruguai: Atores e visões com foco na região Nordeste

Resumo

A mudança de governo no Uruguai, em março de 2020, levou a algumas modificações das instituições ambientais e climáticas do país, incluindo a criação do novo Ministério do Meio Ambiente e a transferência do Sistema Nacional de Resposta às Mudanças Climáticas (SNRCC) para essa órbita. Da mesma forma, as eleições departamentais de setembro de 2020 trouxeram algumas mudanças no nível da região Nordeste do Uruguai (departamentos de Rivera, Tacuarembó e Cerro Largo). Considerando esse contexto, este trabalho assume uma perspectiva teórica de governança multinível e multi-stakeholder, adotando uma estratégia metodológica qualitativa. O objetivo é analisar a percepção atual dos atores nacionais e territoriais quanto às políticas e mecanismos de governança climática no Uruguai e região. Por conseguinte, investiga diversas articulações nos diferentes níveis de governo, bem como diferentes dinâmicas de participação com foco nas questões climáticas no nível do país e do território analisado. Dessa forma, visa-se a uma avaliação dos avanços e desafios nessa área, para contribuir com a concepção e implementação de políticas assertivas sobre mudanças climáticas.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento sustentável. mudanças climáticas. Governança. Região Nordeste do Uruguai

1 Introduction

In November 2021, the international community was confronted with evidence on the extent of the global climate crisis at the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Recent studies by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) indicate that despite the decrease in CO₂ emissions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, global emissions would cause the world's average temperature to rise by more than 3°C this century. These values are clearly above the 2015 Paris Agreement goal of limiting the temperature increase to well below 2°C, and the even more ambitious goal of limiting the temperature increase below 1.5°C (UNEP, 2020).

At the same time, a report released by the United Nations in February 2021 warns us that by 2030, global emissions will remain the same as they are today (FCCC/PA/CMA, 2021). In this context, it is significant that the COP 26 programming included the so-called "Fork to Farm Dialogues", aimed at bringing together representatives of diverse farming communities, cities, states and regions, facilitating a space for constructive dialogue on food and climate change to improve mutual understanding of each other's aspirations and circumstances, and to create new networks and partnerships. The express inclusion of agricultural activity and food production in the COP 26 programming is relevant for Latin America, which faces a fundamental asymmetry in climate matters: although historically its contribution to climate change is less than that of other regions of the world, the effects of the climate phenomenon render it particularly vulnerable (CELAC, 2014: 9). Current debates highlight the challenges of Latin America's integration into the

global economy, which requires reviewing aspects of environmental governance in a context where the contribution to climate change of certain types of agricultural production is increasingly questioned. This implies possible impacts for some export sectors that are especially significant for Latin American countries. In addition, the current pandemic is seen in the debates as a warning of the growing presence and invasion of humans into the planet's ecosystems: the resulting zoonoses are indicative of the negative implications of the increasing human pressure on nature, with the increase in agricultural and forestry activities and the resulting degradation of various ecosystems (CELAC, 2020).

All of the above has clear implications for a country with an economic-productive and agro-exporting profile such as Uruguay. In March 2020, this country experienced a change of government that ushered the arrival to power of a “multicolor” center-right coalition led by the National Party (“White” in the popular meaning), joined by the Colorado Party (PC - “Red”), the Independent Party (PI), Cabildo Abierto (CA) and the People's Party (Partido de la Gente). This change of direction after fifteen years of government by the center-left coalition of the Frente Amplio (FA) also implied some changes to the national organizational chart, with the creation of a new Ministry of Environment (MA), under whose orbit the National Climate Change Response System (SNRCC), created in 2009 was placed, and which until now had been housed at the Ministry of Housing, Land Management and Environment (MVOTMA, by its Spanish acronym). Also in September 2020, Departmental and Municipal elections (second and third levels of government in Uruguay) took place, with some organizational reconfigurations in some municipalities, as well as the assumption of new authorities.

Considering these changes as well as the global debates on climate issues, this paper aims to analyze the evolution of the perception of national and territorial actors linked to the Northeast region of the country (Departments of Rivera, Tacuarembó and Cerro Largo), regarding policies and mechanisms of climate governance in Uruguay and the dynamics in the territory. In this survey, issues such as the articulation between different levels of government by various types of key-players are especially taken into account. This analysis seeks to elucidate to what extent the climate change issue is effectively visualized, and how this affects the capacity of the analyzed territories to converge with national efforts in terms of adaptive or mitigation strategies. From a multi-stakeholder governance perspective, it is also worth considering the participation formats of non-governmental players (private sector, academia, civil society).

Following this introduction, the first section of this paper elaborates on the analytical framework regarding the challenges of multilevel and multiactor governance. The second section presents the central characteristics of the institutional structure and mechanisms for climate issues established in the country, which provide the framework for action by the different actors involved at both the national and local/territorial levels. The third section presents the qualitative methodology, and the fourth section describes the empirical evidence findings. In the conclusions, we discuss the results and present some suggestions.

2 Analytical frameworks

This paper seeks to elucidate some implications of the climate change phenomenon for a country like Uruguay, with a social and economic-productive profile that is a strong recipient of climatic variability. This multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance approach aims to gather the perceptions and visions of national and territorial key players, focusing on a region lagging in its relative development, such as the Northeast of the country. In this territory, with a strong agricultural and livestock production profile, there is a clear incidence of climate effects, which can have an impact on development processes in the medium and long term, while generating challenges in terms of inclusive climate governance.

The 1992 Rio Declaration specified the need to recognize the fundamental role of local communities in environmental management and the promotion of sustainable development. Both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed in 2015, and the 2030 Agenda underline the importance of a multilevel approach, including the territorial dimension. The latest Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) asserts the beginning of the new geological era called the "Anthropocene", given the eminently anthropogenic nature of the risks facing the planet, among which climate change stands out, and where territorial levels and local communities acquire particular importance in the search for solutions (UNDP, 2020: 33-34; 36). Several recent works underline the convenience of developing strategies expressly considering the 2030 Agenda to achieve articulations for the transformation of socioeconomic, territorial, environmental and urban models, stressing the importance of an adequate governance that ensures planning and management in accordance with the general interest and environmental sustainability, as well as the necessary adaptation to climate change (FARINÓS DASÍ ET AL., 2020). Considering that globalization represented a vector that promoted complexity, the lack of coherent and effective responses from the international system to climate change, and more recently to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the growing challenge of addressing complex global problems, where issues quickly transcend national borders, overflowing local, national, regional and global institutional and political capacities (HAAS and WESTERN, 2020: 55).

In Uruguay's case, the background on climate governance allows us to affirm, on the one hand, that for more than a decade there has been a progressive awareness that the fight against the climate phenomenon must involve all actors and levels of decision making (LÓPEZ SALGADO, 2009: 3). On the other hand, it is to be expected that the possibilities of success of climate policies are linked to the perceptions of local players and their predisposition, resistance or indifference to strategies that have been strongly promoted and directed at the national level. The centralism of Uruguay's political-institutional organization is a historical conditioning factor, which generates a gap between the national level and the local and regional levels, which are crossed by different logics of action. In addition, there are significant differences in the economic-productive and socio-cultural evolution of the different territories, in a country marked by structural diversity.

In this context, this paper seeks to investigate the aspects of participation and articulation of the region analyzed in climatic terms, which affect the scope and effectiveness of the governance mechanisms promoted through the central and

territorial levels. Following Serra Borsatto, Antunes Junior and Ferreira Sousa-Esquerdo (2020), it can be stated that different institutional arrangements can coexist and act in a territory, each with its own agendas for development: It is therefore interesting to survey the relationships between public, private and social actors distributed in these specific arrangements to analyze territorial governance and, in particular, to distinguish their particularities in climate matters. As Schoon et al. (2021: 383) point out, the increasing scale and interlinkage of environmental challenges such as climate change have highlighted the need to collaborate across borders, giving rise to traditional top-down, sectoral approaches to governance focused on specific areas within particular social-ecological systems, limiting the potential for analytical contribution beyond a given jurisdiction. As a result, collaborative governance approaches have gained traction, examining the conditions under which such collaborative efforts achieve their intended outcomes. However, few studies have addressed how such successful outcomes vary depending on contextual factors.

Considering the above, this study considers recent debates on the need for new forms of territorial administration and management of development-oriented policies, i.e., new forms of governance. As Farinós Dasí (2015) points out, this implies both multilevel articulation (HOOGHE and MARKS, 2001; MARKS and HOOGHE, 2004), as well as sizeable participation at a horizontal level and its intersectoral coordination in such a way as to achieve coherence in the actions. Added to this is the emphasis on promoting participation in a deliberative format, to foster democratic values and achieve desirable levels of governance (FARINÓS DASÍ, 2015). Unlike a model focused on the concept of government (where the State power is visible in a network of hierarchical and bureaucratic relations), the idea of governance broadens the perspective to include a broader system of relations that expressly includes other non-traditional actors in the political arena. This would represent an alternative format that changes the management of public affairs (CARMONA, 2006; FARINÓS DASÍ, 2008). The novelty in these dynamics based on new formal and informal institutional frameworks within the various territorial spaces lies in the promotion of networks and spaces for public participation, with a strong element of trust among participants (KOOIMAN, 2003; MONCAYO, 2002).

However, critical views have also pointed out the need to avoid reductionist approaches to governance that may be functional to ideological foundations that promote a minimal State policy (ZURBRIGGEN, 2011; ROSAS FERRUSCA, CALDERÓN MAYA and CAMPOS ALANÍS, 2015). On the other hand, authors such as Dalla-Torre (2017) draw attention to the exploitation of the concept of governance as a 'gimmick' that contributes to the imposition of a territorial planning infused with a technical and rational logic that does not adequately consider symbolic components, values, cultures and local identities. Also, from a critical view Farinós Dasí (2015) points to the limitations of the contemporary concept of "good governance" proposed by some trends in political science, geography and economics, which consider it an intrinsic component of territorial and urban development and competitiveness. In contrast to these views, we stress the potential of the concept to promote a new development notion, which makes local characteristics visible and avoids the standardization and homogenization of territories.

Taking this conceptual framework as a starting point, the aim here is to survey the perceptions of national and territorial referents that have an impact on the

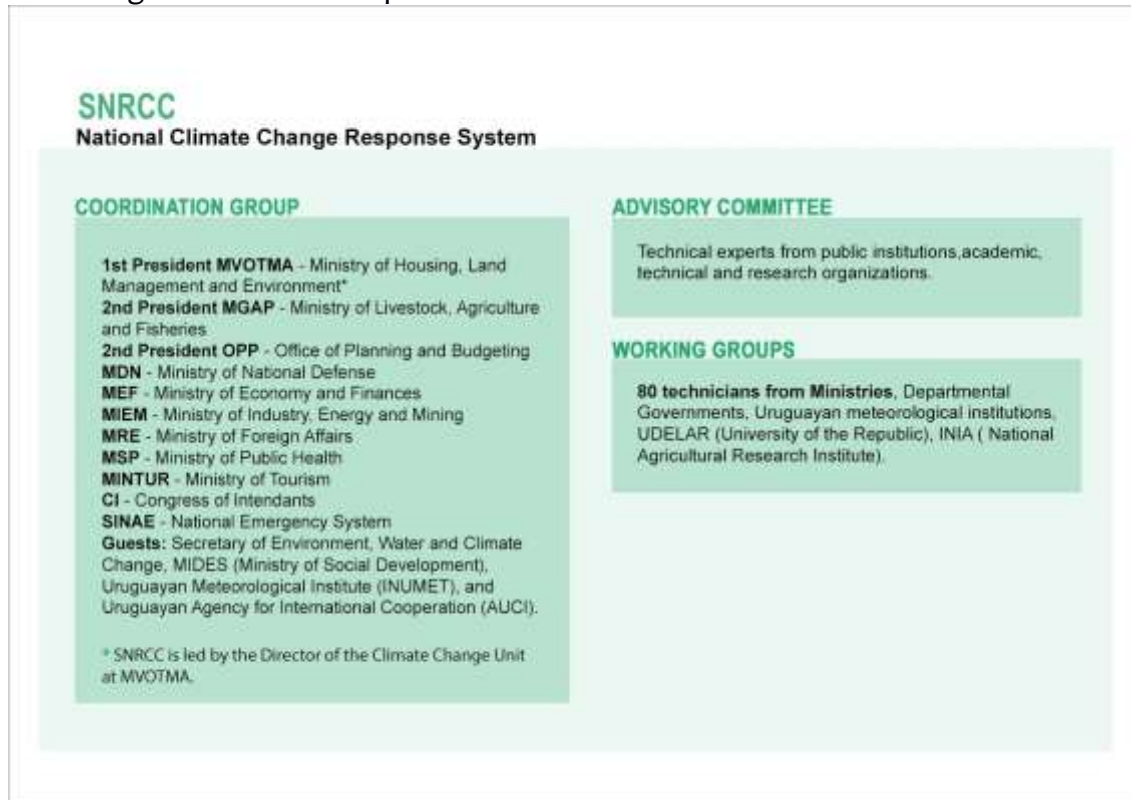
analyzed region in terms of climate, whose main policies are mainly defined at the national level. Two classic dimensions of the conceptualization of governance were selected here: on the one hand, the visions of different players regarding the articulation mechanisms between the different levels of government were considered, as well as the articulations that arise from within the territory on environmental and climate issues. On the other hand, assessments were focused on the level of participation, where it is interesting to differentiate the visions of players from the governmental sphere, as well as those of civil society in a broad neo-Weberian sense (which includes, for example, the Academia, small and large producers with their respective trade organizations, professionals and technicians, social organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3 Changes and continuities in the institutional structure for climate governance in Uruguay.

To contextualize recent changes in Uruguay, it should be recalled that the country ratified the 1992 UNFCCC through Law N° 16.517 (1994), as well as the 1997 Kyoto Protocol through Law N° 17.279 (2000). On the other hand, the 2000 General Environmental Protection Law (LGPA, for its Spanish acronym - No. 17.283) represents the legal framework for environmental actions, regulating in turn the first paragraph of 47th Article of the Constitution of the Republic, as amended in 1996. It establishes the principles of the national environmental policy, and its primary management tools. Thus, the concept of sustainable development is incorporated into Uruguayan law as a guideline for the development model that the State should promote (SNRCC, 2010: 30).

Regarding climate change and variability, a significant institutional innovation took place when, during Mr. Tabaré Vázquez's first presidency, the SNRCC was established in 2009, and coordinated by the Climate Change Unit of the MVOTMA. Thus, a multilevel and multi-stakeholder institutional design was established expressly including the territorial levels through the Congress of Mayors (CI) as an invited key player in the proposed scheme to promote the functioning of the country's climate governance. To implement its presence in this scheme, the CI defined three places for participation in the SNRCC, assigning them to three municipal governments that in turn represent the main political-partisan forces in the country (PN, PC and FA).

Figure 1: SNRCC Composition



Source: Compiled by the author.

Based on these structures, the SNRCC sought to generate connections and agreements with the Departmental Municipalities (SNRCC, 2014). It also aimed at developing a strategy for consulting and engaging local stakeholders, conducting a closed, semi-structured 2009 survey of departmental government officials, which found that the issues of greatest concern were extreme events caused by climate variability (drought, floods, as well as storms, tornadoes, or changes in wind flow patterns (LÓPEZ SALGADO, 2009).

In 2010 Uruguay announced its National Climate Change Response System, developed by the SNRCC. This tool, generated by the national government and the CI, explicitly integrated climate change in the country's long-term sustainable development strategy. It aspired to define a coherent set of guidelines with an inter-institutional collaborative and participatory approach, as the response to climate change was considered as a long-term process, which would require planning through an iterative process (SNRCC, 2010). In 2017, the National Climate Change Policy (PNCC, by its Spanish Acronym), draft was unveiled, containing a participatory and multisector approach. In terms of governance, the PNCC considers it necessary to guarantee the participation of public, private, academic and civil society institutions and organizations, within the territorial level. It also provides for the generation of efficient interinstitutional and intersectoral spheres that promote, formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate the climate policy and its specific lines of action, and emphasizes the role of the State as the promoter and driver of such processes, supported by its competent institutions and including the different levels of government (SNRCC, 2017a). Based on this document, in 2017 the First Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) was prepared in accordance with the Paris

Agreement, which was submitted to the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (SNRCC, 2017b).¹

Since March 2020, the new center-right 'multicolor' coalition led by President Luis Lacalle Pou (PN), together with a heterogeneous alliance, aimed at a substantial turnaround in some policy areas, although the COVID-19 pandemic forced the strong prioritization of the health challenge. In the area of environmental policy, the change of government sent a significant signal with the creation of the Ministry of Environment (MA). In a context where the need for a structural adjustment and a review of public funds allocation was emphasized by the government with the enactment of the Law of Urgent Consideration (LUC) or Law No. 19,889 - through Art. 293 - this new Ministry was created to absorb the SNRCC, which had belonged to MVOTMA for more than ten years.

After a long period of reorganization of the ministerial organization charts, in early February 2021 two presidential resolutions culminated the process of appointing the authorities of the MA, which has five executive units. Along with the Secretary General's Office, three new offices were established: the National Office of Environmental Quality and Assessment (DINACEA, by its Spanish acronym), the National Office of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (DINABISE, by its Spanish acronym) and the National Office of Climate Change (which replaces the former Climate Change Unit of MVOTMA). On the other hand, the existing National Water Board (DINAGUA, by its Spanish acronym) remained in place.

Figure 2: Organizational chart for the new Ministry of Environment and insertion of the SNRCC



Source: Compiled by the author.

On the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Paris Agreement in December 2020, President Lacalle Pou participated virtually in the Climate Ambition Summit. He specifically ratified the 2017 NCCP, sending a message of continuity by stating that climate action must be ambitious and have a human rights-based, gender equitable, social and intergenerational approach. It must allow for a sustainable productive transformation that generates new value chains, new development opportunities and quality employment, with focus on a just transition. He also confirmed the commitment to move towards carbon neutrality by 2050.

¹ This First NDC details Uruguay's contribution goals for mitigation differentiated by type of gas and projected to 2025 (SNRCC, 2017b).

Among the new objectives, the President stressed the development of a Long-Term Climate Strategy for low GHG emissions, increasing the capacity for adaptation and resilience to climate change to not compromise food production. Such emphasis in the presidential speech reflects the concerns of a government that targets the agrifood sector as a source of income. In addition, Mr. Lacalle Pou announced that between 2020 and 2021 two new initiatives would be launched: the Coastal Adaptation Plan, and the Cities and Infrastructure Adaptation Plan, in addition to the National Adaptation Plan for the Agricultural Sector presented in 2019 by the outgoing FA administration and supported by the International Cooperation of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. In 2021, the new Minister Adrián Peña (MA) showed a sign of continuity to the joint work with International Cooperation at the December 2020 meeting held with representatives of EUROCLIMA+ (the European Union's flagship program on climate). Together with the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI), it aims to approve a Cooperation Action Plan in 2021 regarding climate issues. Finally, during COP 26 Uruguay pledged to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, which has implications to produce livestock.

4 Methodology

This work assumes a case study format with a qualitative methodological strategy, which seeks to gather empirical evidence through different techniques. First, we conducted a bibliographic and documentary review (primary and secondary sources). In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out between August 2020 and June 2021 with fourteen referents at national level and in the three Uruguayan Departments analyzed here, both from the government and from academia linked to agricultural associations and civil society in the broad sense of the term. At the same time, evidence was collected through participant observation during different activities conducted during the first semester of 2021 within the framework of the research project "Strengthening participation processes in the Upper Rio Negro Basin".²

Through this methodology, we surveyed different perceptions of a broad spectrum of actors from the territory under consideration or whose decisions on environmental and climate issues have an impact on this territory. Empirical evidence was collected considering the two central aspects of the aforementioned conceptualization of governance: on the one hand, emphasis was placed on the evaluations of the operation of mechanisms of coordination between the diverse levels of government. Perceptions were also gathered regarding the articulations that arise within the territory itself on environmental matters and particularly in relation to climate issues. Secondly, we surveyed the existing perceptions regarding the participation schemes in the country's climate governance, expressly inquiring about the assessment of their inclusiveness and about the effective chances of

² This Project was implemented since November 2019 under a cooperation agreement between the former Ministry of Housing, Land Management and Environment (MVOTMA)/National Water Board (DINAGUA), together with the Sector Innovation Fund Trust (UPM) and the Foundation for the Support of the Faculty of Economics and Administration of the University of the Republic. In 2020, the new Ministry of Environment (MA) absorbed DINAGUA, becoming part of the Project.

participation by the territorial actors in such schemes. We also sought to assess evaluations regarding the forms of participation in schemes outlined at the level of the territories concerned. In every case, we considered the procedural nature of socio-technical transformations, as well as potential resistance to the policies developed.

The following sections systemize the empirical evidence generated through the deployed techniques. From a multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance perspective, these inputs are analyzed to evaluate the assessments regarding the country's climate articulation and participation schemes, viewing the interactions with the territorial level, while examining the dynamics in the selected Departments. Through documentary analysis and the statements of the interviewees, an attempt is made to categorize, clarify and compare the information gathered, aiming at intersubjective meaning and dialogical contrasts. From this, probable future projections are outlined, which may be relevant for the design and implementation of assertive public policies on climate issues, with focus on the analyzed territory.

5 General views on climate change

Prior to addressing the aspects of multilevel articulation and participation, it is worth mentioning that there is general agreement among the various referents regarding the anthropogenic origin of the phenomenon of climate change and variability. There is also some agreement that the manifestation and magnitude of the phenomenon are evident in emerging problems already identified in the 2009 SNRCC survey of regional governmental actors: "These issues remain so far: drought, floods and changes in wind patterns, with tornadoes whose violence can cause damage to the population and production (...) These are the concerns for the Departmental government as well as the National government for the purpose of trying to minimize their impacts and when such events occur, attempt to address them." In terms of self-criticism at departmental level, we can add that the response is mostly reactive: "We are not able to prevent these phenomena or climatic variability".³ As for possible explanations regarding the nature of the actions, the vision expressed by the civil society of Tacuarembó through representatives of the Agüita NGO from a broad environmental problems perspective is significant: "We believe that the main challenge is the lack of knowledge about the problems: therein lies the issue, if there were no such lack of knowledge there would be much more social pressure to solve them".⁴

In contrast to this general perception, in specific climate issues, the perspective expressed by an expert, the Vice-President of the Agricultural Research Institute (INIA), stands out as he feels that there is particular concern regarding climate change from the different agricultural associations:⁵ "When we took office

³ Interview with Pablo Da Rosa and Oscar Díaz, Land Management Board (DOT, by its Spanish acronym), Departamental Intendencia of Tacuarembó (IDT, by Spanish acronym, 7/2/2021.

⁴ Interview with Andrés Berrutti y Martín Jaurena, Agüita ONG, 6/21/2021.

⁵ INIA's Board of Directors is the institution's governing body, and its members are appointed by the Executive Branch of government from among individuals of recognized competence in agricultural technology. The Board is comprised of two officials from the Executive Branch appointed by the MGAP, from among whom the President will be chosen. The Board is also composed of two

with the current President of INIA, we met with all the agricultural institutions and in the meetings with the unions, that mentioned the environmental issue on every occasion: And the issue is not so much water pollution or biodiversity, but climate change with focus on the topic of carbon and methane. This gives us legitimacy to strengthen the topic in the agenda: it is not a curiosity of the scientific community, but rather all the guilds are asking us for it". Consequently, the interviewee emphasizes "the need to generate information and knowledge for decision-making by the private sector, individual producers, basin managers, governments, where the decision-making horizon rarely goes beyond ten or twenty years".⁶

4.1 Perceptions on climate governance: the multilevel articulation.

Regarding the general perceptions on the climate governance scheme, the National Board of Climate Change at the new Ministry of Environment points out that despite the changes in institutional organization, the transition process initiated with the 2020 change of national government flowed very naturally in terms of climate change issues. In this regard, close coordination with technical teams from another Ministry with a strong involvement in climate issues, such as MGAP and MIDES, is also indicated. More specifically, a strong continuity of work guidelines and procedures is emphasized: "We continue working on exactly the same issues as during the previous government, based on particularly important instruments (NDC and PNCC) that had been developed. We did not see any reason for a drastic change in policy or direction".⁷ In line with this assessment, from the perspective of an MGAP official based in Tacuarembó there are also elements of thematic chaining with no abrupt variations: "Within what could be institutional history there will be a thread of continuity in the policies to be developed by this Ministry". At the same time, the novelty of having this new agency is emphasized: "When you go from having an Undersecretary's Office to having a consolidated Ministry, it means a hierarchization of environmental issues".⁸

Regarding the possibilities of multilevel articulation offered by the SNRCC from a technical point of view in the MA, the new authorities see it as extremely important at the national level: "It must be maintained, strengthened and enhanced in its functioning (...) We are thinking about how to reformulate its integration so as to incorporate ministries that did not enter before, we are trying to further strengthen this inter-institutional coordination area". It is also noted that the coordination group and all the working groups that already existed in the previous administration continue to meet, and a new working group on climate adaptation has been created within the SNRCC, as well as a working group specifically set up to

representatives from the producers who will be appointed by the Executive Branch, one of them nominated by the Rural Association of Uruguay (ARU) and the Rural Federation, and the other nominated by the Federated Agricultural Coops, the National Commission for Rural Development, and the Uruguayan Federation of Regional Agricultural Experimentation Centers.

⁶ Interview with INIA Vice President, Walter Baethgen, 5/17/2021.

⁷ Interview with Cecilia Penengo, National Board of Climate Change, Ministry of Environment, (MA, by its Spanish acronym), 3/29/2021.

⁸ Interview with Mario Pereira, National Board of Natural Resources, Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries (MGAP, by its Spanish acronym) /Tacuarembó, 12/30/2020.

prepare the long-term climate strategy. At the same time, the articulation with the territorial referents designated by the Congress of Mayors is a matter of concern: "In the last coordination group meetings, the key representatives of the Congress were not present. Their presence is essential when it comes to do anything at territorial level. I know of the effort made to attend, but I understand that everything is still centralized in Montevideo".⁹

Regarding the perceptions on climate change policies defined for the country, and the implications of institutional changes at national level, some territorial referents such as those responsible for the Land Management Board (DOT) of the Municipality of Tacuarembó (IDT) point out the difficulty in evaluating changes: "It is still early, the creation of the Ministry of Environment has been relatively recent and it is just being structured. I believe that there is greater interest on both sides: because the Ministry is new, and in Tacuarembó because we are starting a new Departmental administration. Whenever the Municipality approves the budget, both institutions will have a better-defined picture with the organizational charts". In any case, we emphasize on the continuity of all the projects that have been carried out since the previous Departmental administration, particularly the support to the small agricultural producers, for example, through the cleaning of water ponds to collect water and prevent droughts: "There are many initiatives without the surname of 'climate change' but with 'sustainability', creating resilience".¹⁰

For their part, officials of the General Bureau of Development of the Departmental Municipality of Rivera (IDR) stress the continuity of a close relationship with the SNRCC, although they perceive changes in the focus themes at the national level: "Apparently when the SNRCC began, the waste issue was not so important. Today it has gained much relevance: the logic to address climate change today goes through the issue of circular economy, where the IDR has a long-standing strategy and philosophy of waste recycling. To this we add a very intensive work of communication and environmental education". On the other hand, specifically in climate change, the officials highlight some basic work of the IDR, such as the adaptation of rainwater systems to avoid floods, the approach to urban mobility, the management of water resources and public forestation projects with native species".¹¹ In terms of coordination between different State agencies and strata, it is worth mentioning the statement of the General Director of Development and Environment of the IDR: "My perception is that the National Waste Law ran fairly independently from the SNRCC: in fact, parallel progress was made in the drafting of the Law (where I participated in the Congress of Mayors)".¹² This allows us to perceive a certain fragmentation in the activities of government agencies, which

⁹ Interview with Cecilia Penengo, National Board of Climate Change, Ministry of Environment (MA, by its Spanish acronym) 3/29/2021.

¹⁰ Interview with Pablo de Rosa and Oscar Diaz, Land Management Board (DOT), Departmental Intendencia of Tacuarembó (IDT, by Spanish acronym), 7/2/2021.

¹¹ Interview with Alejandro Bertón, Fabio Ocaña and Sebastián Pintos, General Bureau of Development and Environment, IDR, with Iliana Blanco and Pedro Santamarta, Hygiene Board, Departmental Intendencia of Rivera (IDR, by its Spanish acronym), 6/4/2021.

¹² Interview with Alejandro Bertón, General Bureau of Development and Environment, Departmental Intendencia of Rivera (IDR, by its Spanish acronym), 6/4/2021.

implies there is room to improve the articulation and coordination of actions between various levels of government.

From the INDRA Foundation NGO - active in the Departments of Rivera and Tacuarembó - there are clear articulation challenges with national policies from the territory: "It is very difficult in the territory. Things are decided at the national level and at the territorial level we locals are the ones to have or not the opportunity to adapt to these national policies. Decrees and opportunities are generated but the current person in charge of an organization is the one who ends up making decisions". At the same time, we have seen differences between the Departments of the territory with respect to the degree of progress in the work related to the fight against climate change: "Rivera is doing very well, especially with the waste issue. It is a quite different Municipality from the one at Tacuarembó (...) Rivera is a model with respect to waste".¹³

Also, in a critical perspective of their own management, some officials of the outgoing IDT administration pointed out some weaknesses in the run-up to the departmental elections of September 2020: "There are areas that have not been prioritized at all, such as those related to environmental issues". They also pointed to the impulses from the new Waste Law: "Since then the waste issue is beginning to receive special attention from the departmental government (...) It is the issue most linked to climate change, one of the problems is the final disposal site. With it we must solve the whole issue with focus on integrated management". In terms of internal articulation, the incongruities imposed by the task division within the previous IDT organization chart were pointed out: "Our Municipality has the difficulty that it has waste management separated from the Bureau of Environment. In addition to this, waste collection is divorced from its final disposal. In this regard, the progress made in the neighboring Department was acknowledged: "What should happen is that everything should be under one Bureau as it is in Rivera".¹⁴ On the other hand, there is the recognition of room to strengthen articulations at the regional level, where there have already been some collaborative actions promoted by the IDR as progress towards a joint Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Rivera and Tacuarembó presented in 2019 (LÓPEZ and LARGHERO, 2019), conducted with support from the INDRA Foundation and the NATIVA Foundation, the SNRCC and the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID, by its Spanish acronym), plus the involvement of the AUCI.

Regarding the perceptions of a research organization such as INIA, the vision for the design of the country's climate governance mechanisms is nuanced: "The SNRCC idea is spectacular. This institutional arrangement is a "kid's dream" because you have the government talking with the scientific community, it's great". However, the expert points out some gaps with the agricultural research institution's work: "I think that to some extent there was a separation in this approach - which was what the United Nations asked of you in their reports - with the tasks and interests of INIA's agenda (...) The SNRCC was very much connected with the country's efforts for the

¹³ Interview with Aler Donadio, INDRA Foundation, 5/28/2021.

¹⁴ Interview with Laura Lacuague, representative of the former Environment Directorate of the General Directorate of Development and Environment Projects (PRODEMA), Departamental Intendencia of Tacuarembó (IDT, by its Spanish acronym), 8/14/2020.

Framework Convention on Climate Change".¹⁵ Despite the advances, and following Meinke et al. (2006), the interviewee indicates the need to overcome traditional scientific approaches marked by reductionism and the tendency to generate 'islands of knowledge in a sea of ignorance'. Consequently, there is a need for synthesis that also includes socially relevant results, transcending the mere focus on the analysis of scientific inputs.

There are also nuances at the territorial level regarding the assessments on the operability of climate governance mechanisms. In this regard, the Development Bureau of the Municipality of Cerro Largo (IDCL, by its Spanish acronym) is concerned about the opportunities it opens for coordination between various levels of government in terms of environmental policies, while at the same time expressing special sensitivity to the integrated management of water resources. A particular problem that mobilizes this Department's officials is the water quality of the Río Negro as it enters Uruguay after flowing across the border with Brazil and passing through the district of Bagé. Thus, the need for articulations that transcend specific national approaches on certain environmental issues and that include cross-border cooperation is emphasized.¹⁶ With regard to climate change, it is worth noting the distinctive role played by the RDI in recent years within the SNRCC approach. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that for the last twenty years this agency has been promoting a wide range of environmental policies and specific actions in the climate change arena, where it has been able to mobilize international cooperation resources. It should be noted that the Municipality of Rivera has occupied one of the three places defined by the IC for the Departmental levels from the beginning of the SNRCC: the criterion of party affiliation comes into play here, with the IDR assuming the place corresponding to the Municipalities governed by the Colorado Party. As a result, very fluid links with the SNRCC have arisen over time, which are positively valued by Rivera's government officials.¹⁷

However, some officials of the outgoing IDT administration were critical of the representation of these visions and the effective articulation capability of the existing mechanisms: "The Congress of Mayors designates which municipalities will represent it on the different topics. These municipalities are designated for the SNRCC. But there is no place where you obtain feedback on this representation. The CI is made up of Mayors, not of Municipalities. There is no place where you can interact. It is very limited to mayors". In this respect, the officer reports differences in the positions on climate issues during the last few years, which were evident in the framework of the Network of Development and Environment Divisions,¹⁸ given the Departments' varying degrees of progress: "It was not the reflection of a region or of anything. Rivera differs substantially on the waste issue. There were many short circuits." At the same time, the same officer points out: "Distortions happen because the

¹⁵ Interview with INIA Vice President Walter Baethgen, 5/17/2021.

¹⁶ Presentation by Emilio Domínguez, Environment Board, Departamental Intendencia of Cerro Largo (IDCL, by its Spanish acronym), during an activity of the Project for Strengthening Participatory Processes in the Río Negro Basin, 5/19/2021.

¹⁷ Interview with Alejandro Bertón, General Bureau of Development and Environment, Departamental Intendencia of Rivera (IDR, by its Spanish acronym), 6/4/2021.

¹⁸ The current name of this informal cooperation network is the Network of Development and Environment Divisions of the Subnational Governments.

representation is an illusion, it is a non-existent institution". To optimize the articulation, it is mentioned that other informal institutional spaces could be used, which offer an opportunity for the national government to have an exchange with the territories, such as the aforementioned Network, which is supported by UNDP.

4.2 Perceptions of participation in climate governance and possible resistance.

In relation to participation opportunities in the mechanisms of climate governance as defined for the country and current efforts, mention is made of the process of developing the long-term Climate Strategy, which began in August 2020 with the ratification of the new government authorities' political will to continue with a process initiated by the previous administration: "We wanted for this to be a process, perhaps not as broad in its participation as the climate change policy had been, but that in some specific instances there would be an involvement and participation of other civil society actors, key-players from the private sector and Academia, from institutions that obviously have a lot to contribute on these issues." On the other hand, the role of the SNRCC as an information "overflow" channel is pointed out, mentioning advances such as the 2019 Adaptation Plan for the Agricultural Sector, which was developed in a participatory manner with the involvement of many actors linked to the sector. Currently, the focus would be to enhance this instrument, as well as plans that relate to the adaptation of coasts, cities and infrastructure: "Not just linger with documents and fantastic planning, that complicate things when it is time to implement them. It is there where we identify the territorial actors as key-players" In this sense, the processual nature of climate policies is highlighted: "Everything is part of an evolution, there are still things to be done. We must try to envision within this longer view if there is something else that we are not attending to and that is important." At the same time, the need to review the participation criteria is mentioned: "Where do I go? Many times, someone participates who is not even a representative of its constituents (...). It is necessary to find a way to improve the network at all levels".¹⁹ Meanwhile, from the point of view of an MGAP representative based in the region, he also reports participation weaknesses for environmental issues in general, including climate issues: "Often there is no opportunity for active participation. Climate change is generating a worsening of extreme weather events, but people do not consider it as relevant, they do not participate as much as expected in these processes. There are some active NGOs, but their efforts have been very limited, and many look down on them."²⁰

Linked to the question of civil society participation in climate issues, some differences can be identified between various NGOs present in the territory, which are related to their diverse subject areas and historical trajectories. Thus, it is possible to distinguish some organizations such as the INDRA Foundation, present since 2007 in the region's Departments and which has developed a close relationship with IDR, contributing to its climate and water resources policy: "Tacuarembó's policy is always more enclosed than Rivera's, as they are more traditional. For years we have also

19 Interview with Cecilia Penengo, National Bureau of Climate Change, Ministry of Environment (MA, by its Spanish acronym), 3/29/2021.

20 Interview with Mario Pereira, General Bureau of Natural Resources, Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries (MGAP, by its Spanish acronym) /Tacuarembó, 12/30/2020.

made efforts to link up with the people who are now in charge of the Municipality of Cerro Largo". In addition, this NGO points out the need to think about the challenges in an integral way to achieve a more assertive participation: "Also when we talk about territorial development we must handle external variables, such as the international markets requiring agricultural products that we produce, like soybean or rice. The establishment of an enterprise such as UPM in the region is a big issue". Here the need for a critical position is emphasized, for example in the monitoring committee for the company's settlement: "We are one of the few NGOs that participate in that committee. We must prevent it from becoming a mere "salute to the flag". There we simply report what is happening, they listen, but there are not many opportunities for proposals".²¹

The recently created Agüita NGO, operating in the Department of Tacuarembó, has focused on proper waste management and has managed to obtain funding from the Swiss embassy for the "Transition to a garbage-free Tacuarembó, I recycle" project. On the climate issue, the difficulties of viewing the problem in a concrete way are mentioned: "We have some other projects, in relation to climate change we don't have a very concrete plan. For us, climate change is something more abstract, more difficult to put on the ground. In terms of participation, efforts are concentrated on trying to achieve a closer link at the departmental level, although they have also received the new Minister of the Environment: "We did not have a very good response from the Intendencia, but we are not in a spirit of conflict. We are not a complaint NGO. We are going to continue urging them to join in recycling, which has its climatic implications. We are proposing ways to collaborate, even to be partners."²²

Regarding participation in climate governance processes defined for the country, the Vice-Presidency of INIA identified some weaknesses in the involvement and participation in governance due to the nature of the approach when projecting uncertain scenarios in the long-term future: "That takes away interest and connectivity to action. When governance is not useful, it is not very attractive. We need better risk management, better information and financial instruments". The need to strengthen the participation of Academia in SNRCC was also mentioned, highlighting the contributions of the information provided over the last twenty years by the research of the Agroclimate and Information Systems Unit (GRAS, by its Spanish acronym) of INIA.²³

Finally, in relation to possible resistance to climate change policies promoted at the national or departmental level, there is a significant consensus among the different interviewees regarding the fact that they do not consider opposing positions to the guidelines outlined in this area. However, it is mentioned that there is still a lack of knowledge of the implications of the climate phenomenon in the population, as well as certain difficulties in envisioning the ways in which climate governance functions on the part of some institutional actors at territorial levels.²⁴ On the other hand, the growing concern of various agro-productive sectors about

21 Interview with Aler Donadio, INDRA Foundation, 5/28/2021.

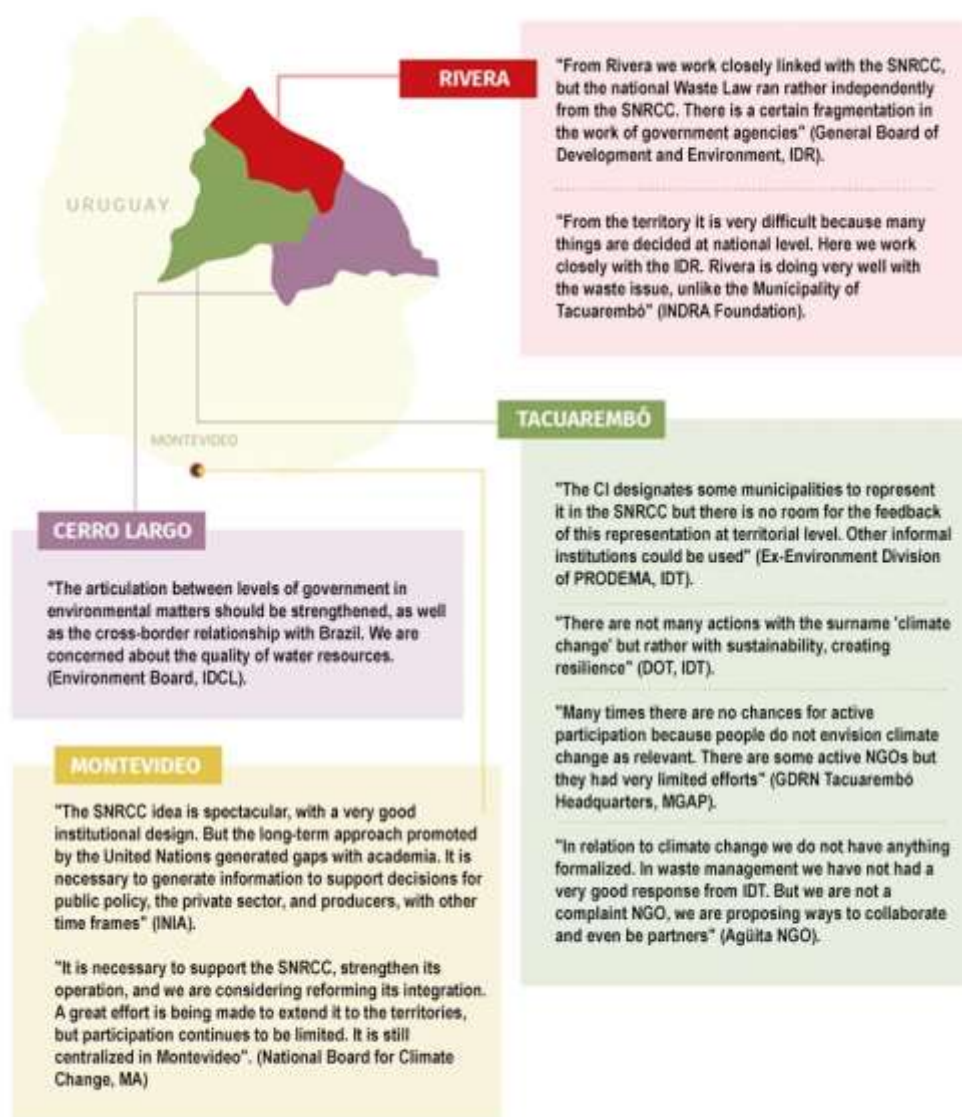
22 Interview with Andrés Berrutti and Martín Jaurena, Agüita NGO, 6/21/2021

23 Interview with INIA's Vice President, Walter Baethgen, 5/17/2021.

24 Interview with Cecilia Penengo, National Bureau of Climate Change, Ministry of Environment (MA, by its Spanish acronym), 3/29/2021.

the impact of droughts, floods and changes in wind patterns is highlighted: "There is no opposition or obstruction, on the contrary. We see interest from the forestry sector, from small producers. Sometimes the subject sounds like something distant, but we do not see any resistance.²⁵ Similarly, there is an evolution in the awareness of the issue in Academia: "I hardly see resistance anymore, as there was years ago. The first time I worked on a climate change project I was considered delusional". The expert identifies specifically in the agricultural unions serious concerns about the future projections of exports such as livestock, associated with methane emissions. In this regard, both the international talks at the climate summits and the negotiations of trade agreements generate expectations regarding the country's position.

Figure 3 - Perceptions on climate change with focus on Northeastern Uruguay



Source: Compiled by the author.

25 Interview with Alejandro Bertón, Fabio Ocaña and Sebastián Pintos, General Bureau of Development and Environment, with Iliana Blanco and Pedro Santamarta, Hygiene Board, Departamental Intendencia of Rivera (IDR, by its Spanish acronym), 6/4/2021.

5 Conclusions

In view of the March 2020 change of government in Uruguay and after Departmental elections in September 2020, this article assumes a theoretical multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance perspective with a qualitative approach to analyze the current assessments of both national and territorial actors regarding climate governance policies and procedures deployed in the country and in the Northeast region. Faced with a challenging international context, this analysis seeks to contribute to the design of policies and strategies to face climate change issues. Here it is assumed that the participation and commitment of territorial actors are of special importance for the achievement of these goals.

In relation to the organizational changes at the national level and the creation of the new Ministry of Environment, there is an assessment by technicians from different government levels regarding the reinforcement of the importance of environmental issues implied by this decision. In spite of political and ideological changes, it is perceived that the new administration has given continuity to policies and instruments designed by the previous administration in terms of climate change. Regarding perceptions of the country's climate governance mechanisms, there is a positive evaluation of the current plans, although some gaps are noted in relation to government approaches and the knowledge contributed by agricultural research. The need to generate awareness to guide public policy decisions, private sector and producers' proposals was highlighted. Although the National Government underlines the efforts of coordination and information flow to the territorial levels, some questions were raised from the region (particularly in Tacuarembó) regarding the effective representation of the participants in the SNRCC framework, as well as the effective dialogue provided by the venues contemplated by the Congress of Mayors. In contrast, the Intendencia of Rivera emphasizes the fluid relationship built with SNRCC for decades. Cerro Largo points out the need to improve both the articulation of national policies and the crossborder articulation with Brazil on environmental issues, expressing particular concern for the quality of shared water resources. On the other hand, civil society in the region points to a certain lack of awareness among the population regarding the institutional governance system and the climate policies defined for the country. There are also different focal points within the actions of various NGOs present in the territory, which perceive the issue of climate change with varying degrees of proximity. Furthermore, there are varying degrees of permeability on the part of the different Intendencias with respect to proposals from organized civil society, for example, in integrated waste management, which has climate implications.

Regarding participation in existing schemes, several interviewees from Academia and territorial government levels point out the need to strengthen their representation in the climate governance processes defined for the country, particularly within SNRCC. To this end, a certain lack of awareness of existing mechanisms should be overcome to generate greater interest in such participation. On the other hand, civil society organizations expressed a strong interest in achieving greater participation in the mechanisms defined by the municipal governments. In particular, the interest in improving the dialogue with the Intendencia of Tacuarembó is emphasized. Regarding potential resistance to the implementation of climate policies, it should be noted that the interviewees unanimously pointed out that they

did not identify clearly opposing stances, but that on the contrary, there is a growing awareness of the issue, particularly on the part of the trade unions of several agricultural and livestock sectors.

In conclusion, it can be stated that despite a positive evaluation of the achievements of the framework defined in 2009 around the SNRCC, there is still room to optimize the articulation and participation mechanisms for adaptation and mitigation strategies in the face of climate change. There is a clear need to increase awareness of the problem. The forms of dialogue and representation of the territories, which show great differences even within the same region, should also be reviewed. In order to generate a more effective governance framework, the involvement of agricultural associations could also be enhanced, given their greater sensitivity to the issue, as well as reviewing the linkage and contributions from Academia, aiming at achieving socially relevant results. Finally, at the level of the territories themselves, there is room for greater empowerment of civil society organizations, which requires greater receptivity from some governmental entities. Positive experiences such as those of the Department of Rivera indicate the effectiveness of good practices in this field.

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