He holds a Master’s in Development Studies and Public Policies, Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague, The Netherlands, and an undergraduate degree in Political Sciences, Universidad de la República del Uruguay, where he teaches International Cooperation and Development. He has worked and been a consultant for several international agencies and institutions such as UNDP, IDB, UNICEF, IDRC and ILO. He is currently the Executive Director of the Uruguayan International Cooperation Agency (Agencia Uruguaya de Cooperación Internacional - AUCI); and since January 2012 has also held the post of Executive Secretary of the Ibero-American Program to Strengthen South-South Cooperation at SEGIB.

What is the role of Uruguay in Triangular and South-South Cooperation (SSC)?

Uruguay combines its role as a traditional recipient of cooperation with its incipient role as provider of South-South Cooperation (SSC). Although Uruguay is a small country, it believes in the need to work together with the rest of the international community to address common development challenges that each country must face, no matter its economic importance or size.

In this regard, although Uruguay faces significant pending challenges to consolidate the benefits of the economic growth it has achieved in the last few years, it has also learnt lessons that encourage the country to take on responsibilities in regional and global development. In its recent history, the Uruguayan state has had to innovate in its policies to face development issues, within a context of an international economic and financial crisis, the high cost of energy resources and its high vulnerability vis-à-vis the fluctuations of the world economy. This has led to a significant wealth of experiences and to building capacities at the public institutions in charge of social policies, management of the economy, provision of services and public infrastructure (health, education, water and sanitation), and technological innovation, among others.

Uruguay is making available to its bilateral and triangular cooperation partners, the lessons it has learnt and the capacities it has built into its public institutions.

Furthermore, as a southern country, Uruguay supports the guiding principles of SSC that consider it a type of cooperation based on horizontal and reciprocal partnerships, which are demand-driven and aim at capacity-building and the generation of independent, sustainable, local knowledge, seeking the best solutions, adjusted to the local and national contexts.
Since you are the coordinator of the Ibero-American Program to Strengthen SSC, could you tell us what the Program is all about?

The Ibero-American Program to Strengthen South-South Cooperation stems from the mandate of the Plan of Action of the 17th Ibero-American Summit held in Santiago, Chile, in 2007.

The field of action of the Program is SSC that has been strongly encouraged in the region in the last few years, but faces challenges as regards the capacity of the institutions promoting these activities.

The Program was approved by those in charge of Cooperation, within the framework of the 18th Summit in San Salvador, in November 2008. Its initial objective and the goal for these first four years of work was to “Strengthen Horizontal South-South Cooperation and make it more dynamic, thus contributing to the quality and impact of its actions, as well as to the dissemination of the related best practices”. This will be achieved through:

- Capacity building and strengthening of institutions in charge of managing cooperation in Ibero-American countries, by training in cooperation management and competencies, creating consistent information systems, and discussing and defining the region’s common positions on this matter.

- Identification and dissemination of SSC success stories and best practices in the region, so that they are replicated within the region as well as elsewhere, in places with similar levels of development.

In these last few years, Program activities have been carried out within a framework of respect for basic SSC principles, such as their horizontal and supplementary nature. Furthermore, the Program’s resources have mainly been allocated to the institutional strengthening of its member countries Technical Cooperation Units, to the improvement of SSC information systems and the establishment of the region’s political -strategic positions with regard to the most important topics of the global cooperation agenda. In this regard, the Program has played a very significant role in the region.

Based on the Strategic Plan recently defined by the Program’s Steering Committee in the last couple of years, the idea is to provide greater visibility and momentum to the Program so it can meet its objectives, which have been reinforced and outlined again according to the needs of the current international cooperation context, particularly that of SSC.

In what way does the Ibero-American Program to Strengthen SSC benefit the region?

At a time when SSC is on the increase, and traditional North-South cooperation has been suffering the consequences of the economic and financial crisis, the Program has allowed technicians and politicians to meet and discuss SSC-related topics.

Given its conceptual and methodological wealth, the Program is a suitable platform for decision-making and setting of positions to make the voice of the region heard.
What is the added value of the Ibero-American Program to Strengthen SSC?

The main added value of the Program is to have created a platform capable of coordinating the political and strategic dimensions, which entails involving all cooperation authorities of the member countries and the technical officials of the different organizations. The coordinated actions of political authorities have led to setting up and promoting basic global agreements and common stances on SSC principles and priorities, from a Latin American regional standpoint.

The political level has an effective impact on the other successful dimension of the program: the technical level. Bonds set up between the technicians of the countries’ Technical Units, through an exchange of experiences, have significantly reinforced the links between countries for bilateral SSC initiatives. Thanks to this mutual knowledge and the good relationships between the State players of Ibero-American SSC, there has been a reduction in “transaction costs” when implementing joint cooperation projects.

On the other hand, the Annual Report on South-South Cooperation in Ibero-America, published with the support of SSCP, and the documents systematizing successful experiences in one of its lines of action, have become the written evidence of SSC activities. The Report is the only one of its kind. There is no other report on cooperation between countries of a region.

The Program has also served as a discussion and regional position shaping forum on topics regarding the international cooperation agenda and SSC. These stances have been presented at relevant fora, such as the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Korea, or the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in New York. All this helps to strengthen those responsible for Cooperation and the region as such; and also strongly reinforces the capacity to coordinate positions in the international cooperation debate.

SSCP can serve as a reference model for other areas of Ibero-American cooperation which is currently being renewed, as well as for other similar platforms in other regions. Furthermore, it is considered an example for the integration of Ibero-American countries.

Which are the priority countries and topics for Uruguayan cooperation? How are these priorities set?

Uruguay has cooperation agreements in place with all Latin American countries. Due to geographical distances, available resources and the competitive edge of cultural affinity, the Uruguayan South-South Cooperation Program focuses mainly on the region: South American, Central American and Caribbean countries.

Since the creation of the Uruguayan International Cooperation Agency (AUCI) at the end of 2010, bilateral Programs have been started up with Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Paraguay and El Salvador. Moreover, an important joint Uruguayan-Mexican fund was launched in 2012 and will be implemented as from this year. Specific projects have also been carried out with several countries such as Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

In 2013, the idea is to update bilateral cooperation Programs with some of Uruguay’s partners, for instance, Peru, Panama, Costa Rica and Guatemala.
So far, a few specific activities have taken place outside the region due to technical assistance requests received by the country: two in Africa and one in Asia. Anyhow, these have been small scale activities and, as explained above, our country’s capabilities and those of AUCI, particularly, would not allow its participation in big projects outside the region, at least for the time being.

Uruguayan cooperation is demand-driven, so Uruguay is open to collaborating in the fields that our partners deem useful for their development priorities. Anyhow, AUCI has been carrying out field work since the end of 2010, which has been the beginning of an important survey and systematization of national capacities in four strategic areas, in which Uruguay has been able to develop experience and knowledge to be transferred in SSC initiatives.

Many of the strengths are linked to cumulative institutional experience or long-term policies in Uruguay. Other initiatives relate to processes that were initially promoted from the field of international cooperation and that the country has adopted and developed, reinforcing them with national capacities and resources. In this regard, Uruguay fulfills its commitment of supporting the development of other countries based on its own experience.

According to the above systematization, the four strategic areas for Uruguay are: I. Social Affairs; II. Farming; III. Infrastructure for Development; and IV. Governance and Quality of Democracy.

In brief, I could say that within the social arena, we include topics on the design and management of inclusive social Programs, the coordination of social policies and institutions, public health Programs such as transplants, the fight against tobacco, and support to breastfeeding, as well as digital inclusion policies -Plan Ceibal, Uruguay-, among others.

Uruguay has long-standing experience in farming given its productive profile, which includes topics such as animal traceability, food safety, improvement of productive chains and animal and plant health.

Infrastructure for development encompasses matters related to energy efficiency, access to drinking water, logistics, equitable access to the society of information and knowledge.

Finally, the so-called governance and quality of institutions (democracy) is based on the wealth of experience of this country, with stable and strong democratic institutions, as well as with recent innovations, such as access to public information or democratic participation. Some of the topics in this field are, inter alia, collective bargaining, institutional quality, electoral regime, and e-government.