

# THE BENEFITS OF AGENDA 21

**WRITTEN BY**

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In 1993, at the Rio Earth Summit, the UN released a plan called Agenda 21. This plan had a goal of obtaining sustainable development for the future. According to the UN, sustainability/sustainable development means “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN Brundtland Commission). This plan originally had 40 goals, which include conservation of biodiversity, international cooperation, and management of toxic chemicals. A smaller plan called Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was developed, and included five steps: partnership, community-based issue analysis, action planning, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation and feedback. Implementation of LA21 follows a five-step process, which can be adapted for different country contexts. The participation of local communities is a key element that can result in actions that improve quality of life and promote public policies that have been adjusted to fit local situations” (Xavier et al, 2018, p.13). Through these steps, the UN plans to be on the road towards a sustainable future with little to no poverty, protection of wildlife and affordable and clean energy. The

ideas formalized in this plan help the ecological and resource-based concerns mentioned in the document, since the document brings awareness towards non-governmental organizations (NGOs), created programs and partnerships in developing countries to help teach the civilians about sustainability, and helped regulate and clean the environment by managing and decreasing toxic waste and pollution.

NGOs such as Clean up the World (Australia), Earth Council Alliance (USA), and Greenpeace International (Netherlands) have been bringing awareness to certain environmental and social issues for decades. The introduction of Agenda 21 helped the public learn more about these organizations and issues through participation and a shared common interest. The agenda recommends that Governments and institutions, together with non-governmental organizations and appropriate organizations of the United Nations system should launch programmes in different parts of the developing world to extend waste services to the unserved populations. Additionally, these programmes should “build upon and reorient existing or planned activities” (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, (1992). Agenda 21, Rio Declaration, Forest Principles. New York: United

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Nations). NGOs are helping one of Agenda 21's main goals of decreasing and eradicating poverty. NGOs will go to countries with a low GDP or a corrupt government and help the civilians in the country by providing them with education, healthcare, food, and other basic needs they need to make progress. Critics argue that poverty alleviation may be the key rhetoric of NGOs, but in practice, little that is lasting has been achieved on this type of activism (Godrej, 2017). Along with helping to eradicate poverty, NGOs are closing the gaps that local governments are currently not filling on their own, such as: cleaning up pollution in the ocean and on land, protecting endangered animal species, and helping empower civilians in developing countries across the world (ex. Indigenous activism in Brazil and Chile).

Since the introduction of Agenda 21, the UN has pushed for more programs and partnerships in developing countries to help achieve some of the Agenda's goals.

"The overall human settlement objective is to improve the social, economic and environmental quality of human settlements and the living and working environments of all people, in particular, the urban and rural poor. Such improvement should be based on technical cooperation activities, partnerships among the public, private

and community sectors and participation in the decision-making process by community groups and special interest groups such as women, indigenous people, the elderly and the disabled (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development." (1992). Agenda 21, Rio Declaration, Forest Principles. New York: United Nations).

These programs were put in place to help empower marginalized groups of people to implement the future global development, since access to these resources can help these people psychologically, mentally, and physically. "Access to safe and healthy shelter is essential to a person's physical, psychological, social and economic well-being and should be a fundamental part of national and international action" (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. (1992). Agenda 21, Rio Declaration, Forest Principles. New York: United Nations). Through this, countries that are currently in their developmental stages can build up economically and prosper in the future.

In recent years the rise of dangerous energy sources such as gas and coal, and toxic waste have polluted many areas. The disposal of these chemicals can be dangerous or impossible. With Agenda 21 the UN is

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trying their best to regulate these harmful chemicals for the protection of the environment and civilians for a safer and cleaner world. The agenda directly states that “waste minimization technologies and procedures will need to be identified and widely disseminated” (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. (1992). Agenda 21, Rio Declaration, Forest Principles. New York: United Nations.). The UN also recommends that this work should be done in collaboration with national Governments, non-governmental organizations, research institutions along with other UN administrative bodies (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. (1992). Agenda 21, Rio Declaration, Forest Principles. New York: United Nations.). The UN is attempting to clean all this waste through the promotion of cleaner energy sources such as solar energy and wind energy. In developing countries, the UN will bring new technology to help clean up the polluted areas. With the goal of “establishing concrete national standards for effluents and solid waste, taking into account, inter alia, raw material use, and energy consumption.” (Agenda 21). An example of environmental success in a developing country is Araçá bay in Brazil. This settlement is a port

own on Brazil’s coast that suffered from sewage and pollution due to a faulty sewage system and the number of boats in the area. Through participation and problem prioritization, the UN could locate and solve the problems this town was facing . The bay was previously filled with “residential sewage discharge in the environment, linked to the inefficient/nonexistent sewage treatment system and outfall discharge.”(Xavier et al., 2018, p.8). This problem was exacerbated by “urban growth and local industrial development without adequate planning” (Xavier et al., 2018. p.9). Through this type of action, the UN could help eradicate current problems for future progress.

Since the release of Agenda 21, the world has seen some environmental, social, and economic success. One of the Agenda’s main goals to help eradicate poverty is finding improvement with each day, “In the 25 years from 1990 to 2015, the extreme poverty rate dropped an average of a percentage point per year – from nearly 36% to 10%.” (World Bank, 2019). This is mostly due to the empowerment of marginalized groups in developing countries and the work of NGOs in these places too. Currently, the world is using more renewable energy sources than they did in the past. In 2015, the primary production

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of renewable energy increased by 3.8% compared with 2014. This is among the five lowest annual increases in the last 15 years (including 2002 and 2011, where the primary production decreased). It is now 21 % higher than production five years ago (Eurostat - Archive: Energy from renewable sources). These renewable energy sources are much cleaner and more beneficial for the environment and global progress. Agenda 21 has developed many rules and regulations to create a more sustainable and cleaner world. It may take a lot of time before Agenda 21 will achieve all its goals, but in time it will be worth it.



*Hi, my name is Charlene Smith (she/they. I am currently in my third year at Ryerson University planning to major in Geographic Analysis and minoring in French. So far, I enjoy researching a variety of different topics, such as environmentalism, geo-demographics and remote sensing through satellites. In my spare time, I enjoy doing a wide variety of hobbies such as painting, swimming, and listening to music.*

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