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Deposited in DRO:

03 February 2010

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Baldwin, W. A. (2007) 'Agenda 21.', in Encyclopedia of environment and society. Thousand Oaks, California ; London : Sage, pp. 10-11.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?level1=W00currTree=SubjectsprodId=Book228938>

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communist regime took power in 1978. Widespread dissatisfaction with the government caused the Soviet Union to invade and begin a 10-year occupation. This saw the rise of the *mujahidin*, traditionalists and Islamists who drove out the Soviets with the aid of the United States and other Muslim countries. A civil war erupted after this victory that augmented a major humanitarian crisis of millions of refugees scattered worldwide. This period of civil chaos allowed a group known as the Taliban to take control of much of the country. Many of the warring factions from the civil war coalesced into the Northern Alliance, which battled the Taliban until September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda, a Taliban client, attacked the United States. With aerial and ground aid from the United States, the Northern Alliance overcame the Taliban.

Twenty-three years of near-continuous conflict has shattered both Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure. The majority of people are employed in agriculture, though it remains dangerous because of the large number of landmines that are leftover from the conflicts. Security also remains precarious as the Taliban have been allowed to reform and warlords dominate much of the countryside. These well-armed men rely on revenue from poppy crops that provide an estimated 85 percent of the world's heroin. For many farmers, this is the only crop that will grow in the rocky soils of the mountains. However, this provides a difficult challenge for the new government, who cannot hope to rule effectively while this narco-economy prevails.

Afghanistan's environment is so degraded by two decades of warfare that it now presents a major barrier to the nation's efforts at reconstruction. Combined with years of drought, the conflicts have drained the nation's wetlands and caused much of Afghanistan's wildlife to vanish. A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Post-Conflict Environment Assessment report shows how conflict has put previous environmental management and conservation strategies on hold, brought about a collapse of local and national governance, destroyed infrastructure, hindered agricultural activity and driven people into cities already lacking the most basic public amenities.

SEE ALSO: Iran; Pakistan; Turkmenistan; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan.

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Agenda 21

AGENDA 21 IS an internationally agreed action plan for the worldwide implementation of sustainable development. Alongside the Forest Principles and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, it was among the most important outcomes of the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Agenda 21 is a nonlegally binding international agreement, meaning that its signatories are not legally obliged to implement it. However, as an example of soft law, it establishes a set of international norms and expectations that can influence government policy.

Agenda 21 contains provisions relating to human development policy and numerous aspects of resource management, including deforestation, biodiversity, agriculture, and water; and it arguably represents the most comprehensive attempt by the UN to ensure that the global economy (society) does not adversely affect the global environment (nature). Agenda 21 offers a good example of what Steven Bernstein has dubbed *liberal environmentalism*—the compatibility of economic growth and environmental protection—and codifies this relationship into a series of normative policy directions for the 21st century. For instance, it stipulates that an equitable and nondiscriminatory multilateral trading system is crucial for achieving sustainable development. The assumption here is that such a system will not only extend the benefits of trade to the world's poor, but will result in environmentally benign growth as well. Agenda 21 also specifies that trade liberaliza-

tion—the removal of import and export restrictions and subsidies—will hasten the implementation of sustainable development, and calls on governments to implement sustainable development in developing countries by providing debt relief, bilateral and multilateral assistance, development financing through regional development banks, and new and additional resources. More specific provisions recognize the need to reduce unsustainable consumption, especially in industrialized economies; and that women play a vital role in implementing sustainable development. It also calls on governments to reduce perverse subsidies, decentralize natural resource management to the community level, and extend land rights to indigenous peoples.

Needless to say, the governments that drafted Agenda 21 had lofty ambitions. Many hoped that the adoption of Agenda 21 would usher in a new era of environmental sustainability around the world, while at the same time greatly reducing poverty. Sadly, although some gains have been made in both areas of development, notably chemicals management, many of the world's most pressing development and environmental problems continue unabated almost 15 years after the signing of Agenda 21. Moreover, the multilateral trading system is showing very few signs of improving market access conditions for agricultural products from developing countries. These developments have led to claims that Agenda 21 has been largely unsuccessful, and that some alternative development trajectory must be found.

Agenda 21 established the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, which was given the task of overseeing the implementation of Agenda 21. In 2002, the UN held the World Summit on Sustainable Development (dubbed "Rio+10") in Johannesburg, South Africa, to review the implementation of Agenda 21 and forge a new implementation strategy.

SEE ALSO: Sustainable Development; Trade, Free; United Nations.

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Agent Orange

AGENT ORANGE IS a colorless, liquid herbicide used by the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War to reduce foliage of inland forests and coastal mangroves that concealed North Vietnamese fighters. The name comes from the colored stripes emblazoned on the 55-gallon drums in which it was stored and transported.

Agent Orange is a 1:1 mixture of two Phenoxy herbicides: 2, 4-D (2, 4-dichlorophenoxy acetic acid) and 2, 4, 5-T (2, 4, 5-trichlorophenoxy acetic acid). First manufactured in the United States in the 1940s, it became widely used in agriculture by the mid-1950s and continues to be used in various parts of the world. When applied to broadleaf plants, the agent dries out leaves and causes them to drop off, though they usually regenerate within 4–6 months.

U.S. herbicidal warfare against the North Vietnamese began in 1961 with the deployment of a unique army aircraft unit, implemented under Operation Ranch Hand, which executed 6,000 spraying missions between 1965–71. Nineteen million gallons were sprayed over 10 percent of Vietnam's landmass by 1970. Specially equipped C-130 aircraft dispersed 90 percent, while backpacks, small trailers, and helicopters did the rest. Agent Orange was sprayed in 11.2 million gallons over 450,000 acres, which included—most famously—parts of the rainforest canopy covering the Ho Chi Minh Trail running through Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. By military standards, the operation was a success because it enhanced U.S. military offensives. The agent itself was most effective as a defoliant, because unlike many of its color-coded kin, Agent Orange is oil-based, rather than water-soluble. The