

## **How Funding WDA Helps Whitman College's Student Body**

### **Whitman Direct Action Mission and Methodology:**

Whitman Direct Action (WDA) is a Whitman College based student initiative dedicated to helping marginalized people by promoting economically and environmentally sustainable opportunity through community-based development. We want to do our part to build a world where sustainable practices have replaced destructive ones, where equitable, mutual, and synergistic opportunity replaces oppression, and where critical thought and action replaces apathy and fear. We believe we can best serve our community, world, and ourselves by researching problems prevalent in our society, and undertaking a one to two year project (time depends on project size) designed to address a chosen issue as effectively and meaningfully as we can. In regards to determining what each new project will be once the previous project has been completed, WDA's structure is such that we openly discuss and debate various project proposals and global issues until a single project direction is decided. Therefore, we do not stand for one specific project, instead, the "action" that the group takes on from year to year changes depending on the proposal passed by that year's WDA members. In essence, WDA seeks to create a space where a good idea can become action.

### **Whitman Direct Action and What It Provides the Whitman Community:**

Whitman Direct Action is Whitman College's only international experiential and service learning program. Furthermore, we are entirely student initiated and operated. Because of WDA's dynamic methodology and self-determined agenda, students are given the opportunity to challenge and employ their critical thinking skills and academic prowess by coordinating any international project of their collective choosing. During the course of WDA's projects students learn how to complete projects that require tremendous thought and diligence. This experience increases students' confidence in their abilities to successfully complete whatever they put their hearts and minds into, and greatly enhances their logistical and organizational capabilities. As such, we believe that WDA is an important transition from the school to working arenas, and further facilitates an awareness of many of the issues facing our world today.

### **Introduction to our 2007-08 Project: Sadhana Clean Water Project (SWCP)**

The SCWP aims to address obstacles to clean water access in rural India. India has the second largest population globally with 1.25 billion people of 226 million people do not have access to safe water. In the state of Maharastra in western India and the site for our conference, approximately 700,000 people contract water related diseases annually. The problem of water access is further exacerbated by competition for the limited supplies available. The demand for water in India is expected to double by 2025 with few viable alternatives. Our project aims to explore possible strategies with local NGOs and communities to improve the conditions of water access in India through a two-pronged approach: 1) An Appropriate Technology (AT) study group with India's Sadhana Village NGO and United World College (UWC) and 2) the Safe and Sustainable Water Conference we are hosting in Mumbai, India.

### **Sadhana Appropriate Technology Study Group**

The appropriate technology (AT) study group aims to better comprehend the complex socio-political obstacles surrounding implementing an AT project in rural communities in India. The inspiration for this study group comes from our research and first hand experience leading AT development projects with NGOs, both of which indicate the essential importance of taking a whole systems approach rather than focusing narrowly on technological obstacles and solutions. Our collaborating partners, Sadhana Village and UWC share our experiences and intend to use this study to help them coordinate future AT programs. Together we are conducting a case study of AT impediments in Kolwan Valley where Sadhana village has 13 years of experience. We will carry out surveys, focus groups, personal interviews and participant observation to gather information about the multi-faceted socio-political systems encompassing and hindering the success of AT projects. Following the end of the study in March, UWC, Sadhana Village and WDA will collaboratively evaluate and synthesize the information garnered into a case study report, which will describe and assess our findings and provide recommendations for strategies to adequately address the obstacles. Hopefully, the outcome will be a clarification of, and a solution to, the impediments facing the success of AT projects. A detailed and convincing case study will be compiled that Sadhana Village can use to solicit grants from organizations in order to fund an AT project that is grounded in the socio-political sensitivities of the region and community rather than continuing ineffective directives from government and large multinational NGOs that focus exclusively on technological solutions. The case study will also be available to other NGOs to use as a reference to better understand similar dynamics. Furthermore, the study group provides Whitman College students the opportunity to deepen their understanding of being a change agent and help them think more comprehensively and carefully about such complicated issues. The report will be presented at the Safe and Sustainable Water conference.

### **The Safe and Sustainable Water Conference, Mumbai, India**

The Safe and Sustainable Water Conference at the Nehru Conference Center in Mumbai, India is scheduled for March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and with expected attendance of over fifty prominent NGOs, as well as government officials and lawyers. The conference will be a medium for NGO leaders, federal, state and local government officials, and community leaders dealing with clean water access issues to gather together in order to network and to share knowledge, resources and experiences through presentations, workshops, forums and a water fair. The first part of the day will be a panel with four speakers from diverse background and extensive experiences in the various areas that constitute the problem of water access. Keynote speakers include a member of parliament, prominent human rights lawyers, the chairman of the Maharashtra Water Resources Authority, and at least one academic speaker yet to be determined. The second part of the day will be a continuation of networking and consist of multiple smaller forums and workshops. There will a number of presentations by NGOs concerning their experiences and the challenges they have faced and overcome. WDA will be collaborating with UWC and Sadhana village to

present the appropriate technology study group's findings, analysis and recommendations. Furthermore, there will be workshops targeted at the legal issues and challenges faced by NGOs addressing the problem of water access. Finally, WDA will publish a collaborative book with the NGOs detailing the multifaceted political, cultural, technological, and economic obstacles faced by each representative organization and then detail the multifaceted approach taken to overcome those obstacles. Because water solutions are never one-size-fits-all, we believe that providing a series of case studies is the best resource we can generate to provide organizations and communities with the tools and resources needed to begin their own creative initiatives designed to address the specific circumstances of their representative region.

### **WDA at Whitman College: Fund us Now to Help Secure our Future**

WDA is unique in that by doing projects such as the SCWP, we prove to the Whitman community that college students can do more than they ever expected. Demonstrating this by hosting a clean water conference in Mumbai, India and coordinating a study group on appropriate technology is proving to be an endeavor that is both inspiring and surprising to our campus. With our previous Central American Biodiesel Project and the Build-A-House Project and now the SCWP, we are finally garnering a degree of legitimacy on campus, which is sparking the admiration and imagination of professors, staff and students alike. For the first time professors, staff and students are approaching WDA and asking how they can help, and inquiring as to the possibility for their future involvement during the coming years.

This shift in campus support comes at a precarious and pivotal time period considering that the core group of students that have led WDA's past projects are currently seniors and will be leaving Whitman College at the end of the year. As such, we are in the process of establishing a board of advisors (professors and staff), and making sure that we have enough first-years, sophomores and juniors actively involved in order to ensure that there is a solid foundation of volunteers to carry through for 2008-'09. Never before has our volunteer base been so large, eager and diverse in age. The vision of WDA as a longstanding campus activist organization is on the brink of becoming a reality.

In addition to expanding and motivating our volunteer base, we are further taking advantage of this opportunity by outlining tried-and-true fundraising strategies that are easy to implement successfully, codifying fundraising and support partnerships with other campus organizations (interest houses, campus clubs, Greek organizations, and sports teams) that will help provide additional structure and aid to future WDA members so as to make the transition as streamlined as possible. Lastly, the major tool we are establishing is that of a sophisticated means of communication. We have a website for communicating ourselves to the world and with multiple functions for storing meeting minutes, blogs, staff information, files and documents, among other essentials. And we have employed Google Apps which allows us to create e-mail accounts, share calendars, documents, customize domain names, and so on.

With all of this work being put into the future, we strongly believe that the success of this year's project is equally as important to the longevity of WDA as an activist organization. Given the campus atmosphere, current campus interest, and the basis we have established, we are confident that the successful completion of the SCWP will culminate into the actualization of WDA as a long-term component of the Whitman community.

**How Funding This Conference Helps the Whitman Community Directly:**

The conference WDA is hosting in Mumbai will not only benefit people leading clean water endeavors throughout India, but also provides invaluable educational and experiential opportunities for Whitman students. WDA members who attend the conference will bring back their unique experiences and insights to share with the rest of the community.

On returning from the conference WDA plans to present the following programs for the benefit of the entire Whitman Community:

- 1) A presentation at the 2008 Undergraduate Conference about Water Development in India, and WDA's experiences creating the Sadhana Clean Water Project.
- 2) A presentation to the community about our philosophy of activism, effective fundraising strategies, and collaborating with NGOs.
- 3) A *Winterim* workshop incorporating the above topics.

Furthermore, from these presentations and workshops coupled with our own first-hand experience we will have helped increase constructive dialogue and action on campus concerning sustainable development and grassroots activism.

For more information please see [www.whitmandirectaction.org](http://www.whitmandirectaction.org) or email [conference@whitmandirectaction.org](mailto:conference@whitmandirectaction.org).

Thank you for considering our request.