



CSR CORNER

Minimizing Development's Impact

An NGO supports community-based sustainable development

▲ *By Merrisa Eise*

Volunteers divided into teams of three and four hustling door-to-door and seeking feedback from locals regarding the use of new biogas digesters in Wuchuanhu Village, Henan Province. Despite the severity of the sun's heat, the students' energy waned throughout the village. After weeks of desk work and preliminary field research, students returned to the site to complete their case study where they conducted follow-up surveys regarding the efficiency and practicality of the new biogas systems.

This team of students represents just a small fraction of the thousands of youths who have been engaging in environmental protection activities on the Green Long March since its initial launch by Future Generations China in partnership with Beijing Forestry University in 2007. The Green Long March has become Future Generations China's largest annual program, mobilizing more than 3,000 students from 50 universities across China. Most recently in 2009, 40 in-depth case studies on government-sponsored energy saving projects were conducted in the countryside and in city centers to create an evidence and experience base for expanding successful programs and promoting student dialogue across the country.

Case studies that focused on the promotion of biogas systems revealed a diversity of approaches to project implementation. They also brought to light varying degrees of project efficiency, which fluctuated depending on the extent of government involvement and prior training of coordinators involved in the venture. Along the Gold Coast Route of the 2009 Green Long March, which passed through the coastal cities of Zhanjiang and Xiamen, students discovered that the most successful case involved a three-fold partnership that included support from local village heads, residents and a local business. Results highlight the value of partnership and dialogue across sectors, and have been compiled in a database that can be referenced for the future expansion of projects.

Don't be deceived by the name, "Green Long March." It is easy to assume that activities consist of students trekking across harsh terrain in extreme temperatures. Although some activities include bike riding

and travel on foot, the Green Long March should not be characterized as a physical march. Rather, it is a youth movement that provides a platform for students, local governments, business partners and communities across the nation to participate in dialogue. Furthermore, it provides participants with the tools needed to implement change. In previous years, students have organized environmental protection initiatives in villages and coordinated awareness campaigns on their college campuses that address regionally specific issues.

The Green Long March is distinct from other Future Generations China initiatives in that students are at the center of activities. While organizing, designing and implementing projects, students gain indispensable skills that prepare them for life after college and provide them with the leadership skills needed to succeed in today's competitive job market. As the future policy makers and social entrepreneurs of China, it is important that young people have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in creating and implementing meaningful projects with measurable results.

Future Generations China is an environmental non-governmental organization, but our work goes beyond identifying solutions to wildlife or habitat destruction, water pollution or energy

inefficiency. Our chief mission is to support the sustainable development of communities—environmental protection initiatives are the channel through which we work to achieve this goal. This holistic approach allows us to make lasting impacts on communities and build enduring bridges between key players in society. Our Pendebsa program in Tibet, for example, has empowered locals to take on leadership roles in environmental conservation and sustainable development work for more than 20 years.

Future Generations China works to strengthen community capacity in every aspect of our work. In order to achieve this goal, it is essential that communities are a part of the solution. Last year, our Model Eco-Community program identified 35 villages with demonstrated work in conservation and equipped local leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to develop promising local projects. Upon establishment of these model villages, they will serve as demonstration sites for the training of leaders in surrounding areas. Capacity building workshops in these villages have resulted in the improvement of natural environments, an increase in local revenues, and an improved quality of life for locals.

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Distributing booklets about energy efficiency in Henan Province