I do not want to provide a better life for just my parents, but for society. I am committed to protecting the environment because I want to improve the lives of those around me. Everyone has the right to live in a safe and healthy environment, and I want to provide that right to all communities. I advocate for environmental participation because it is important to recognize that we are a part of a human chain that can either create great damage or create a safe future for all. My work with Conserve India will allow me to empower Delhi’s poorest and educate and train them to be entrepreneurs, providing them with a sustainable way of living while protecting the environment. Conserve India employs workers from slums; in addition to being poor, they are discriminated against due to the caste system and have difficulty finding legal jobs that pay fairly.

Conserve India is a social entrepreneurship that uses plastic bags and other materials to create fashion products, such as purses and wallets. These products are sold and the profit goes back to the employees and into community projects, such as building and running schools and health clinics in the slums. This local business employs workers from the slums and provides them with the proper training to be productive employees. Positions range from environmental workers, clearing the streets of slums of trash to working in the head office. Workers are given the opportunity to be promoted and move on up the ladder in addition to being legally employed and paid a fair wage. With these wages, the workers are able to support their family.

From collecting the material for the products to reaching out to businesses to sell the products, the workers in the slums are given a voice in how these products will affect their lives. The business provides the workers with social capital and ensures that their children are able to receive an education. I wholeheartedly support communities organizing themselves to defend their rights and improve their lives. Last summer I interned for Green Anhui, where I was given
the opportunity to train pollution victims to work with the government to shut down illegal factories. What sets Green Anhui apart from other environmental NGOs is the emphasis on getting the public involved in environmental policy. Not only did the residents work together to protect their community, but they also banded together to protect the future of their children. Conserve India follows a similar approach, where workers are able to earn their own wages and provide social capital for their community. These workers are transformed throughout the process, becoming leaders in the community and providing a voice for Delhi’s most ignored.

Through training and legal employment, workers can not only improve their own lives, but the lives in their community. Since profit also goes towards building schools and health clinics, the workers are cooperating together to provide a safer environment for everyone in the community, building social cohesion and identity. Conserve India promotes environmental sustainability and stewardship, combining these values with entrepreneurship and community. The actual environment of the slums is cleaned up and the community within the slums becomes stronger. I will be working on training these individuals in entrepreneurship skills, such as meeting buyers and collaborating with designers, an essential aspect of Conserve India. I gained these skills when working with designers and NGO workers while I was interning with EcoVillage Uganda.

Conserve India offers the poorest and most marginalized residents of Delhi an opportunity to improve their lives through fair and legal paid employment. Through the workers’ own products, they are able to provide social capital for their community. The program also allows workers to be promoted and gain leadership skills, providing the community with leaders and organizers.
May 20-July 20: San Francisco to Delhi, India