

Abstract

According to 2008 development statistics maintained by the Indian government approximately 40% of rural and urban communities in India have access to sustainable sanitation facilities. This low percentage sanitation coverage demonstrates the challenges involved in overcoming sanitation problems, especially in rural communities, and highlights the need for building sanitation and health awareness throughout the country.

Building awareness on health, water, and sanitation issues within Indian rural communities is a challenge on a number of different levels; extending from the difficult environmental/weather conditions to working within the boundaries of religious and social traditions, and customs. It is critical to change the insanitary habits that are practiced by families using a systematic and multidimensional approach. In addition to the problem of insanitary practices is the ignorance of the corresponding health issues. As a result, the key to introducing change within a community involves formal and informal exchange of knowledge between village leaders, teachers, mothers, and children. Our goal is to unite these different groups of people and create communication that will yield in an increase in awareness of healthy sanitation practices.

The field of sanitation is not limited to the disposal of human excreta by implementing various sanitation technologies. The Central Rural Sanitation Programme has updated this definition to include “liquid and solid waste disposal, food hygiene, personal hygiene, domestic as well as environmental hygiene in the context of health improvement, school and home sanitation, and safe water and garbage disposal.” This paper discusses an innovative approach to rural health, water, and sanitation education: a mobile education and awareness bus.

Initiated at the Environmental Sanitation Institute, the *Nandini Service on Wheels* project was established in January 2006 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, through the generous donation of Late Ms. Kamla Chowdhry. The goal was to increase awareness on health and sanitation issues throughout rural Gujarat. *Nandini Service on Wheels* is professionally designed to house audio-visual and interactive exhibitions that can aid in teaching rural communities the necessary basics of good sanitation, clean water, and health prevention. With the capability to house and provide sleeping and bath facilities for ~7 staff members and volunteers, the bus provides flexibility to make visits to multiple locations (or districts).

This paper discusses the challenges and successes faced during the design, construction, and deployment of *Nandini*. The lessons learnt in this project will be discussed in depth to provide suggestions to other volunteers, social workers, and organizations that seek to implement rural education programs, rural service initiatives, and sanitation and health curriculums in the most effective manner.