NASA Foundation, Ahmedabad: A non-profit Voluntary organisation

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1. National Sanitation & Environment Improvement Foundation (NASA Foundation) was born out of the felt need of the society, especially urban society, as most of the economically weak urban population used to defecate in open spaces in absence of their own toilets. This, in fact, has been one of the major problems to be tackled by health workers and local bodies. Providing community toilet facility is the only answer to this problem, which was developed 25 years ago out of a simple design of a toilet in a block including disposal system. The engineers who were expert in designing multi-story buildings were not willing to design a simple toilet complex. However, the concept of community toilets has gained in popularity and during the last 20 years hundreds of community toilet complexes have sprung up in most of the cities in India. People can use them by paying to the person who maintains the complex.

2. **Importance of sanitation & NASA Foundation:**

   The proper disposal of human excreta has been one of the most neglected fields in our country. Most of the places where a large number of people assemble — railway stations, bus stations, hospitals, parks, beaches, markets and places of worship for example — rarely have toilets and urinals for public use. Owing to this, people often use fields, farmlands, ponds, streams, streets and railway tracks for defecation. The continuing rise in population, industries, urban centres and use of transportation facilities has aggravated the problem, creating grave threat to health and environment.

3. The lack of proper sanitation facilities has been one of the prime causes for spread of diseases in India. This gives rise to water pollution, which, in turn, spreads fatal diseases. Local governments and municipal corporations have failed to provide adequate solution to this problem all these years.

4. All this has led to the concept of “pay & use”, developed side by side with the idea of community toilet complex. NASA Foundation took to this task with a humble beginning from a city, Bhavnagar, where it worked for one-and-a-half years to demolish the old toilet complexes of the city and build new ones. Gradually, it paid attention to places of pilgrimage in Gujarat where donations were received to create good community toilet complexes. NASA also started toilet/urinal complexes at various bus-stations of Gujarat. The foundation then took up work in Ahmedabad and other cities. During the last 6-7 years, it has also worked at different ports of Gujarat including Alang ship breaking yard near Bhavnagar and other ports like Okha, Porbandar and Veraval. The NASA foundation has its own
engineering team for construction of such complexes and a team for maintaining them round the clock as well. It also employs persons with good understanding to get work done properly by sweepers and others responsible for keeping the complexes clean.

5. During the last two years, NASA has also been working for the uplift of the socio-economic condition of its workers, particularly women, by giving them proper wages and looking after their social needs. The foundation has two full-time women workers whose duty is to help the ground-level staff in creating their savings and looking after all their needs. Although this is a humble beginning, NASA is eager to work for upgrading the quality of life of its workers and to create among them a sense of belonging to a unified “NASA family”.

6. Along with sanitation, water preservation is also equally important and the World Bank has laid great emphasis on this aspect. NASA Foundation has taken the lead in locating voluntary agencies in Gujarat which have been doing good work in the harvesting of rain water. In the initial year NASA found out 70 voluntary agencies and duly rewarded them for their good work. The foundation is now planning to start a project — Seeing is Believing — where members of voluntary agencies would be taken from one place to another in buses so that they can see and appreciate the various systems of rain water harvesting. NASA believes that knowledge comes from observation of conditions at the grassroots level and this is the concept behind the project. If materialised, this would be the first of its kind in Gujarat.

7. **Funding support**: NASA receives fund from government agencies, charitable institutions and individual donors. Being a non-government and non-profit organization, it welcomes support from patrons around the world. All donations received from abroad and within India are tax-deductible under a scheme.

8. At present NASA maintains at least 85 toilet complexes in Gujarat where around 350 persons have been employed. The state of Karnataka and parts of the state of Maharashtra are also attracted to the scheme. The main office of NASA Foundation is at fourth floor, 10-11 Sahyog Comm. Centre, Opp.Dinbai Tower, Lal Darwaja, Ahmedabad – 380 001, Gujarat.

9. NASA Foundation has a consulting engineer, a full-time engineer, and an engineer contractor for repair work. There are five field supervisors, three full-time workers in the accounts department, two full-time women workers, one full-time typist/clerk and one full-time office helper. The foundation also has an adviser who is a retired general manager of a nationalized bank while another adviser helps in the management of the foundation. One chief engineer of the government also advises it on certain matters.