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TATA AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL TRAINING CENTRE FOR THE BLIND, GUJARAT

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In the heat of the sweltering sun, the men are picking chawli from the fields. One of them holds the sack and clicks his fingers, others come up to him with measured steps to deposit the legumes. Nothing extraordinary — except on closer inspection, one realizes that it is a group of visually-impaired men working in perfect synchronicity.

Spread over 250 acres in Phansa, Gujarat, the Tata Agricultural and Rural Training Centre for the Blind (TACEB) demonstrates how instilling self-assurance and ingenious training methods can turn visually-impaired youths between the ages of 15 to 35 into adept agriculturists, horticulturists or dairy farmers.

Akshaybhai Ramanuj, Coordinator, explains that here the trainees do not even use the cane. Seniors guide students, walk hand-in-hand with them or help button their shirts.

Ganpat Padhiar, in charge of the training for 30 years says, “We are just the facilitators. It is the seniors who pass on their practical experience to the newcomers.” He and dedicated staff supervise the training, urging newcomers to set up a string with pegs at regular intervals to insure sowing in a straight line or how to measure a circular pit around the coconut palm.

Practical classes are interspersed with lessons under the trees where topical subjects like the use of herbicides rather than chemical pesticides are read out. TACEB is almost fully self-sufficient thanks to the cultivation of rice, sugarcane, peanuts, vegetables, fruits and dairy farming. At the Kalgam Cooperative Collective Farm, they practice their training and learn how to earn their livelihood. Later in their villages, they will be given resources to resettle like providing a water pipeline along with technical advice. Thus, TACEB's far-sighted vision has enabled the rural visually-impaired to integrate with sighted society.

A grant of Rs 26.00 million was sanctioned in 2006-2007, from the Tata Education Trust.

Open-air classroom at TACEB





Student working in the agriculture fields at TACEB — sustaining a self-sufficient campus



Students helping each other button a shirt