

Common
Ground

LEARN • PLAY • PROTECT

OUR NATURE,
RESPONSIBILITY!

A fun do-it-yourself booklet for village children and youth to learn more about the village's commons and natural resources.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is for village children and youth who want to explore, understand, and care for the nature around them. Whether you're a curious child, a playful group of friends, or a youth club with big dreams – this book is your journey guide.

Grown-ups – like teachers, elders, or SHG members – can also use this guide to support and cheer children on!

WHAT DOES THIS GUIDE HELP WITH?

This playbook helps you explore the nature around your village – forest, water bodies, grazing lands, wild-life , and more.

You'll learn how people used to care for these shared treasures, and how you can help protect them today.

You'll play games, listen to stories, draw maps, sing songs, and take small actions to become a nature guardian!







YOU DON'T NEED
A CLASSROOM.
ONLY CURIOSITY
AND COMPANY.



YOUR JOURNEY AS A PROTECTOR OF NATURE

You are about to go on a journey— from discovering your village’s nature to becoming a protector of it!

Here’s the path you will follow:

Stage	What You Will Do
 Seed	Discover what commons are
 Root	Listen to stories and build a connection
 Explore	Go outside and observe
 Reflect	Think about what’s happening to the commons
 Act	Take action in your own way
 Share	Celebrate and inspire others

Use this path to track your progress. You can draw or add leaf stickers to each section as you complete it!



IMPORTANT:

- As you go through this guide, you’ll notice ideas, stories, and discoveries all around you.
- Keep a small notebook or folder—this is your Nature Journal.

Use your Nature Journal to:

- Write down what elders say about ponds, trees, or festivals
- Sketch maps or commons you visit
- Note your ideas and questions
- Paste leaves, draw herbs, or add photos
- Reflect on your actions to protect nature

IT DOESN'T
HAVE TO BE
PERFECT—
IT JUST HAS
TO BE YOURS.

Optional Activity: Decorate the first page of your journal with a drawing or the name of your village.



SECTION 1

LET'S TALK ABOUT NATURE!

SEED

Discover what commons are and why they matter

Look around your village — what do you see?

Tall trees, ponds full of fish, fields where animals graze, forest paths, birds, and bugs — all part of nature!

Some of these places belong to families. But many of them are shared — used and cared for by everyone.

Have you noticed...

- A pond where all the animals drink?
- A forest where everyone collects firewood?
- A path people walk on to get to the temple?
- A tree where children play and elders meet?

These shared parts of nature are called **commons**.

They don't belong to just one person — they belong to all of us.

Commons are natural or human-made resources like:

Forests

Even knowledge passed down in your village!

Ponds and rivers

Sacred groves near temples

Grazing lands

These are things used and cared for by the whole community, not owned by one person.



In many villages, commons are celebrated in local traditions. Think about:

- ❑ **Festivals** linked to forests, water, or harvests (like *Aadi Perukku* or *Pongal*)
- ❑ **Stories or proverbs** elders say about trees, ponds, or animals
- ❑ **Sacred days** when people avoid cutting trees or fishing



Ask your grandmother or local priest:

What did we do in the past to thank nature?"

Activity: Write or draw a story or festival that connects your village to nature.



"Commons are our Shared Treasure!"

- Used by everyone
- Managed together
- Passed to the next generation



Why are Commons Important?

Commons are more than just land, water, or trees. They are life, play, and memory all around us.

Ponds give us water to drink – and a place to splash on hot days.

Forests give fruits, firewood, shade, and homes for animals.

Sacred groves give us peace, stories, and festivals.

Paths and grazing fields connect people, animals, and villages.

Birds, bees, and animals in the commons help keep nature alive.

Commons also connect us to each other. They are places where people meet, children play, elders share stories, and families celebrate festivals. They are treasures passed down from our grandparents – and it is our turn to protect them for the future.

But Wait—These Commons Are in Danger!

Commons are getting smaller or disappearing! Why?

- Some people use too much and don't follow rules
- Young people move away and forget old knowledge
- Our schemes and Programs forget how villages used to manage things together and thus roles of the elders, youth, women and village communities in our own affairs are shrinking.

Activity: Map Our Village Commons!

Take a pencil and draw a simple map of your village.

Can you mark:

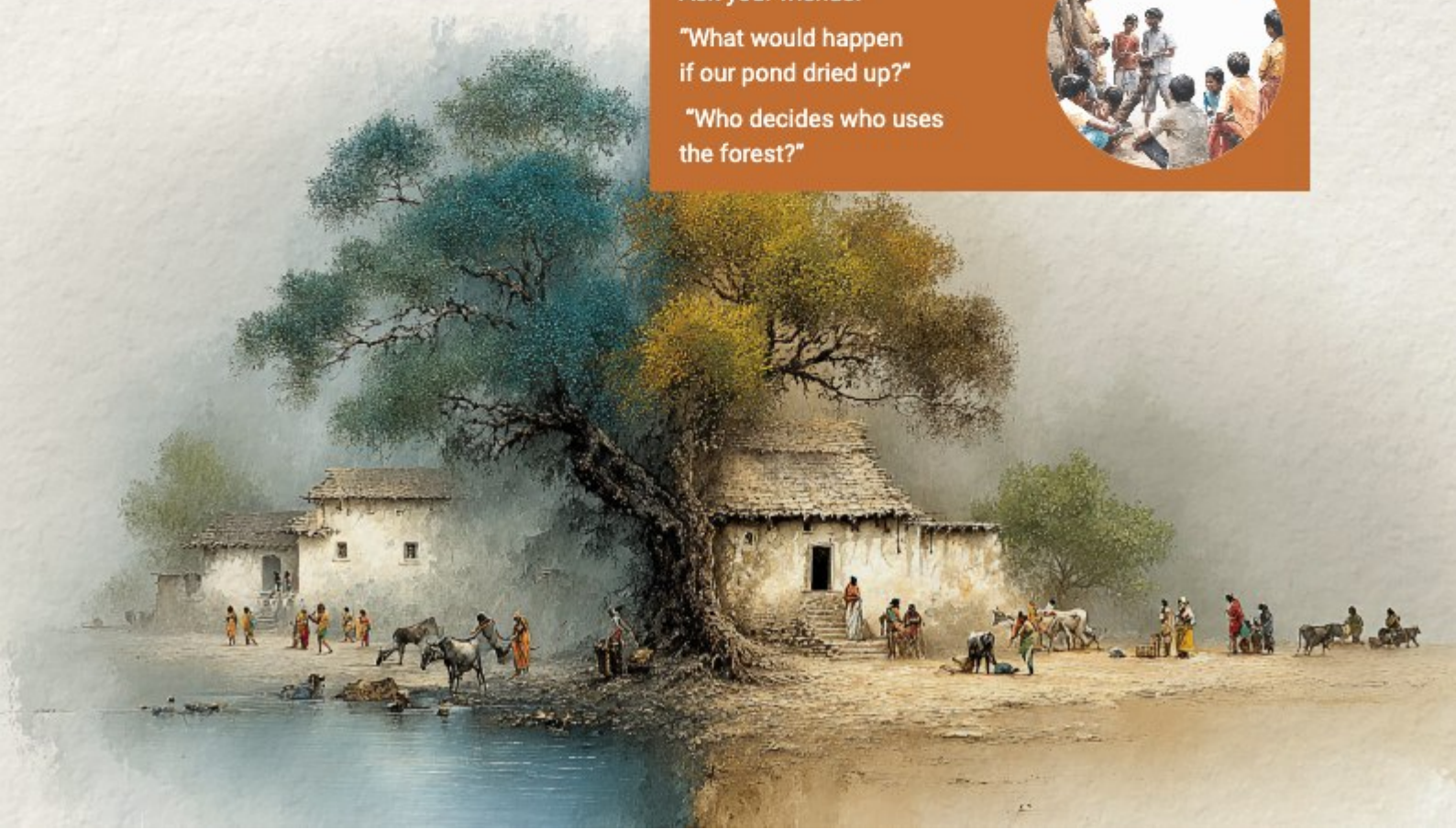
- Where is the pond?
- Where are the forests or groves?
- Where do animals graze?
- Where do people gather for festivals?
- Ask elders to help you add names and stories to your map!

Conversation Starter:

Ask your friends:

"What would happen if our pond dried up?"

"Who decides who uses the forest?"





SECTION 2

NATURE BELONGS TO ALL!

ROOT
Connect
through stories
and shared
memories

Story: The Forest That Gave and Gave...

Near a small village, there was a community forest that belonged to everyone—but not to any one person.

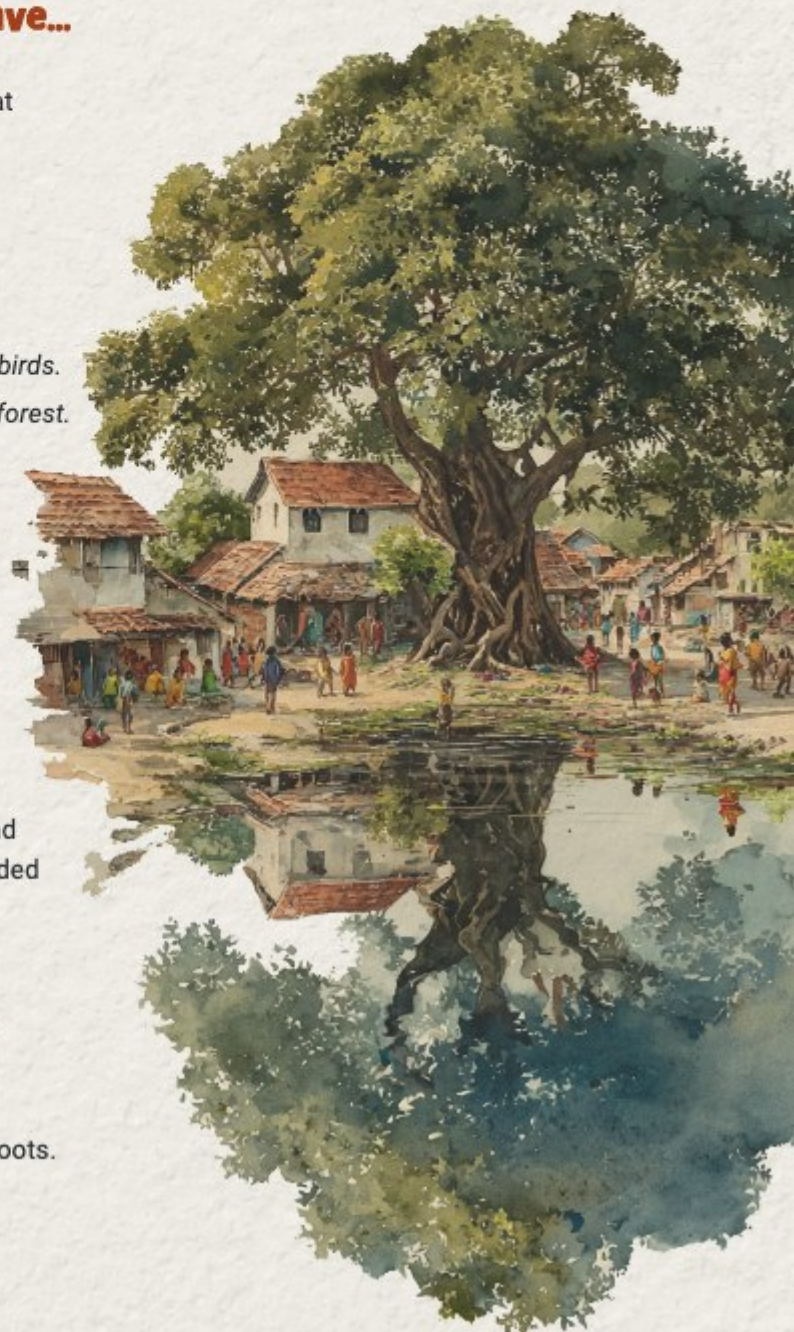
*Youth gathered firewood for festivals and cooking.
Goats and cows grazed during the dry season.
Women collected herbs, fruits, and dry leaves.
Kids played hide and seek and learned to recognize birds.
Elders told stories about the gods said to live in the forest.
No one claimed ownership, but everyone benefited.
Over time, things changed.*

Humans started cutting down more than needed. Litter crept in—plastic bags, bottles, biscuit wrappers. Outsiders took firewood, and no one stopped them. Youth moved to cities; traditions were forgotten.

The forest grew thin and silent. Birds left. The herbs disappeared. That's when a group of local students and young farmers took a stand. They visited elders, recorded stories of the forest.

Marked a trail and created a "Do's and Don'ts" board. Organized a clean-up drive, planted new saplings, and asked the panchayat to support reforestation.

In just one year, the change was visible. New green shoots. Birds returning. A forest remembered—and cared for.



Story Box: A Local Elder's Voice

Every village has sayings about nature. Ask elders or teachers:

- "What do people say about cutting trees too early?"
- "Is there a proverb about ponds or animals?"
- "How did your parents use the forest?"
- "Were there rules that people followed without being told?"

Write their story in your nature journal.

Group Discussion: What Happens When We Forget?

Sit with your friends, class, or youth group and discuss:

- What happens if a community forest is cleared without planning?
- Who suffers when local herbs disappear?
- What do we lose when a sacred grove turns into dry land?

Write down 2 examples from your village or nearby. Share with the group.

Youth Challenge Game: Commons Detective

Explore your village and surrounding areas. Find commons that are neglected or overused. Look for:

- Sacred groves with plastic waste
- Forest patches being cleared
- Grazing lands with no grass left

Takeaway for Village Youth

- A forest gives more than just wood—it gives water, shade, soil, and sacred value.
- If young people don't step up, no one else may.
- You are not too young to protect the commons. Start small, act local, think long-term.



SECTION 3

LEARN THROUGH PLAY!

EXPLORE

Observe and
discover
commons around
you

Activity 1: Tree Treasure Hunt

Goal: Discover the commons around you

Get into small groups. Walk around your village and look for different **commons**—not just trees, but also ponds, grazing fields, and sacred spaces.

Make your own Treasure Map by marking:

- Trees used by everyone
- Wells, or tanks
- Grazing spots for animals
- Sacred groves or medicinal plants
- Meeting places under trees or at water points

Label them: "Who uses this?" "How is it cared for?"

Bonus points if you can find a resource that's neglected and think of how to revive it.



Activity 2: Match the Resource with Its Use

Distribute a simple worksheet (you can also draw this on a blackboard or chart paper).

Column A: Resource	Column B: Who uses it / For what?
 Forest	
 Pond	
 Grazing Land	
 Sacred Grove	
 Firewood Patch	
 Herbal Plants	



Ask participants to match items and explain their answers. Then ask:

- "What happens if this resource disappears?"
- "What can we do to keep it healthy?"

Activity 3: Sing for the Earth

Folk Song Finder

Ask an elder or local singer:
"What song did you sing during planting or harvesting or when rain came?"

Try to learn it and write it down here:

Song name: _____

Meaning or story: _____

Bonus: Turn your song into a short street play or skit to perform in the village!



SECTION 4 WE ARE THE GUARDIANS

REFLECT
Understand
changes and your
power to care

Let's Talk!

Close your eyes and think of the river that flows near your village... the tall tamarind tree where you and your friends sit in the shade... the forest path where your grandmother collects herbs... the pond where cattle drink and children splash after school.

These are not just parts of nature.
They are your **home**, your **history**, and your **future**.

But around us, we see changes:

- Trees are being cut.
- Ponds are drying up.
- Litter appears where once there were clean paths and groves.

Sometimes it feels like we are too small or too young to stop it. But here's a truth you may not have been told:

All over the world, youth—yes, people just like you—are standing up to protect their commons.

They don't wait for someone else to act.
They clean, they plant, they speak out.
They inspire entire communities to care again.

You don't have to be a scientist, a government officer, or even finish school to start.
All you need is attention, care, and courage.

Sometimes, a small act—like planting a sapling or asking your school to clean the village tank—can lead to bigger changes.

And when one child acts, others often follow.



Meet the Youth Protectors!

Greta Thunberg – A Climate Voice from Sweden

When Greta was just 15, she began sitting outside her country's parliament every Friday with a sign: "School Strike for Climate."

She sat alone. But soon, thousands of children and youth around the world joined her. Today, her Fridays for Future movement is global.

Greta's Message:
"You're never too small to make a difference."

Ask Yourself:
"If Greta can do this with just a sign and courage, what could I do in my village?"

Licypriya Kangujam – India's Youngest Climate Voice

From **Manipur, India**, Licypriya began speaking about the environment at just 6 years old. She asked leaders: "What will happen to our forests and water if you keep ignoring the earth?"

Now she speaks at world events and still says, "Children in villages deserve clean air and water too!"

Licypriya's Message:
"We want action, not just empty promises."

Discussion Prompt:
"Would you stand in front of the panchayat and ask for trees to be protected or ponds to be cleaned?"

Tamil Nadu's Turtle Protectors

Every year, **Olive Ridley turtles** come to lay eggs on the Tamil Nadu coast. But beaches are not always safe. Youth groups from local schools and fishing families walk the shores at night.

They collect eggs, keep them safe from dogs and garbage, and return the babies to the sea.

Quote from a coastal youth:
"I never knew helping turtles could also teach me to protect nature."

Youth Challenge: Be a Guardian of the Commons

Think of something in your village that needs care—a drying pond, a forgotten forest path, or a littered grazing land.

1. Talk to friends, elders, or teachers.
2. Create a plan: Clean-up? Awareness posters? Tree planting?
3. Act! Even small steps count.
4. Share what you did in your nature journal.



Talk Circle Prompt:

"If you could protect one thing in your village forever, what would it be—and why?"



SECTION 5 TAKE THE LEAD – BE A COMMONS HERO!

ACT
Create change in
your own village

Mission Map: 5 Steps to Become a Commons Hero

1

Scout It!

Look around your village and choose one commons to protect.

- Forest / Pond / Grazing land /
- Sacred grove / Pathways

Draw or take a photo of it.

- Write: Why is it important?

2

Know It!

Ask 2 elders or commons allies:

- What do people use this for?
- Were there rules earlier?
- What problems are happening now?

3

Fill the "Commons Diary" Box:

"In the past, people used this for _____. Now the problem is _____."

(Such as: In the past, people used this for **watering animals and washing clothes**. Now the problem is **the pond is filled with plastic and has no clean water**.)

"In the past, people used this **sacred grove to collect herbs and pray during festivals**. Now the problem is **trees are being cut, and no one visits it anymore**.)"

4

Fix It! (With Help!)

Pick ONE small thing your team can do:

- Clean-up
- Make a "Do's & Don'ts" board
- Plant trees
- Spread awareness with songs, stickers, or a wall poster
- Tell the Panchayat/SHG for help

5

Tell Others

Present your work in school or youth club.
Use drama, song, photo, or even a street play!



Commons Allies Box : You are not alone!

Here's how each village system can help you in this journey:

Group	How They Can Help
SHGs	Mobilize women to support clean-ups, water saving, local crafts
Panchayat	Give permissions, tools, budgets, support gram sabha visibility
Youth Clubs	Lead activities, bring energy, coordinate with elders
NGOs/CSOs	Provide training, materials, link to larger campaigns
Faith Leaders	Share environmental messages in festivals and sermons
Teachers/Schools	Link nature work with classroom learning or projects
Forest/Line Depts.	Give saplings, help demarcate commons, offer guidance
Local Media/WhatsApp groups	Share your effort with wider audiences

Village Youth Pledge:
"We may be young, but we have the right and the responsibility to care for our commons. We will work with our elders, our panchayat, our teachers and our neighbors to protect the land, water, and trees that protect us."



SECTION 6

SHARE — MY COMMONS JOURNEY



Your Journey So Far...

You have:

- Discovered what commons are
- Listened to elders' stories
- Explored your village nature spots
- Thought about what is changing
- Taken action to protect your commons

Now it's time to look back, celebrate, and share your story!

Activity: My Commons Journal Page

Use this space to draw, write, or paste pictures of what you did.

Prompts:

- What commons did you care for? (e.g., pond, grove, path)
- What did you notice?
- How did it feel to protect nature?

You can draw before-and-after pictures, paste a photo, or write a short story or poem!

Visual Idea: "My Journey Tree"

Draw a tree with five big leaves and one fruit.

Leaf 1: "Something I discovered"

Leaf 2: "A story I heard"

Leaf 3: "An action I took"

Leaf 4: "Who I worked with"

Leaf 5: "A change I noticed"

Fruit: "What I want to protect forever"

Hang these trees on a "Commons Wall" in your school or youth center!



Talk Circle Prompt: Share Your Story

Sit with your group and share answers to these questions:

- What surprised you most during your journey?
- What do you want to keep doing?
- How can you help others become commons protectors too?

Encourage everyone to speak—no answer is too small.

Commons Hero Certificate

Create or fill out your very own certificate!



Commons Protector Certificate

Awarded to: _____

For: Taking action to care for our village commons and inspiring others.

"You stood up for nature with heart, hands, and hope."

Date: _____

Signed by: _____ (teacher/youth mentor/SHG leader)

With care from your community
[Leave space for a drawing or photo]

Closing Message For You!

**You did something powerful.
You looked around. You cared.
You acted.
Now you are part of a growing
circle of commons protectors.**

Remember:

**You are never too
young to lead.**

**And your village
needs you.**



DIY GUIDE

OUR NATURE, RESPONSIBILITY!

A fun and friendly guide to help children and youth care
for our Commons and Natural Resources.

Common Ground

Common Ground is a collaborative systems change initiative in the domain of environmental governance and rural livelihoods in India, jointly led by several organisations and anchored by a secretariat organisation, called Living Landscapes. Common Ground leverages the unique opportunity presented by the Commons to address three interconnected crises of our time – livelihoods, climate, and social equality – by integrating a socio-ecological narrative into mainstream development models. Through a collaborative action framework, Common Ground focuses on ‘field setting’, so that entrepreneurial action by multiple actors is accelerated and multiplied, seeding the ecosystem with institutional apparatus and a distributed network of change leaders, to set the stage for sustainable impact beyond the scope of any single initiative or organisation.

Scan here to know more.

