

Common  
Ground

Module on

# NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

for Frontline Officials and Sarpanches/  
Panchayat Pradhan



## **Intended Audience**

This module serves as a comprehensive guide for Frontline Officers and Panchayat office bearers, enabling them to effectively understand and support communities on natural resource management in their jurisdiction.

## **Background**

This module was developed based on the training needs assessment (TNA) exercise conducted at the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Odisha, with the participation of frontline officials from various departments, Sarpanches, and women leaders from different parts of the state. This module is designed for a basic one-day orientation to grassroots government and local self-governance institutions' functionaries in rural areas.

## **Objective**

To build clarity among participants on how Panchayats are central to the governance of natural resources and how the interrelationship between people, programs, roles, and power defines outcomes. The session also links Panchayat mandates with relevant SDGs and the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI).



# Key Messaging

**Natural resources are not isolated but are interconnected systems,** including forests, common lands, water, agriculture, and biodiversity that have intricate relationships with local identity, livelihoods, culture, and governance.

**Panchayats are not implementation agencies.** They are local government institutions that are desired to make decisions on natural resource use, restoration, and management with an inclusive and inter-generational perspective.

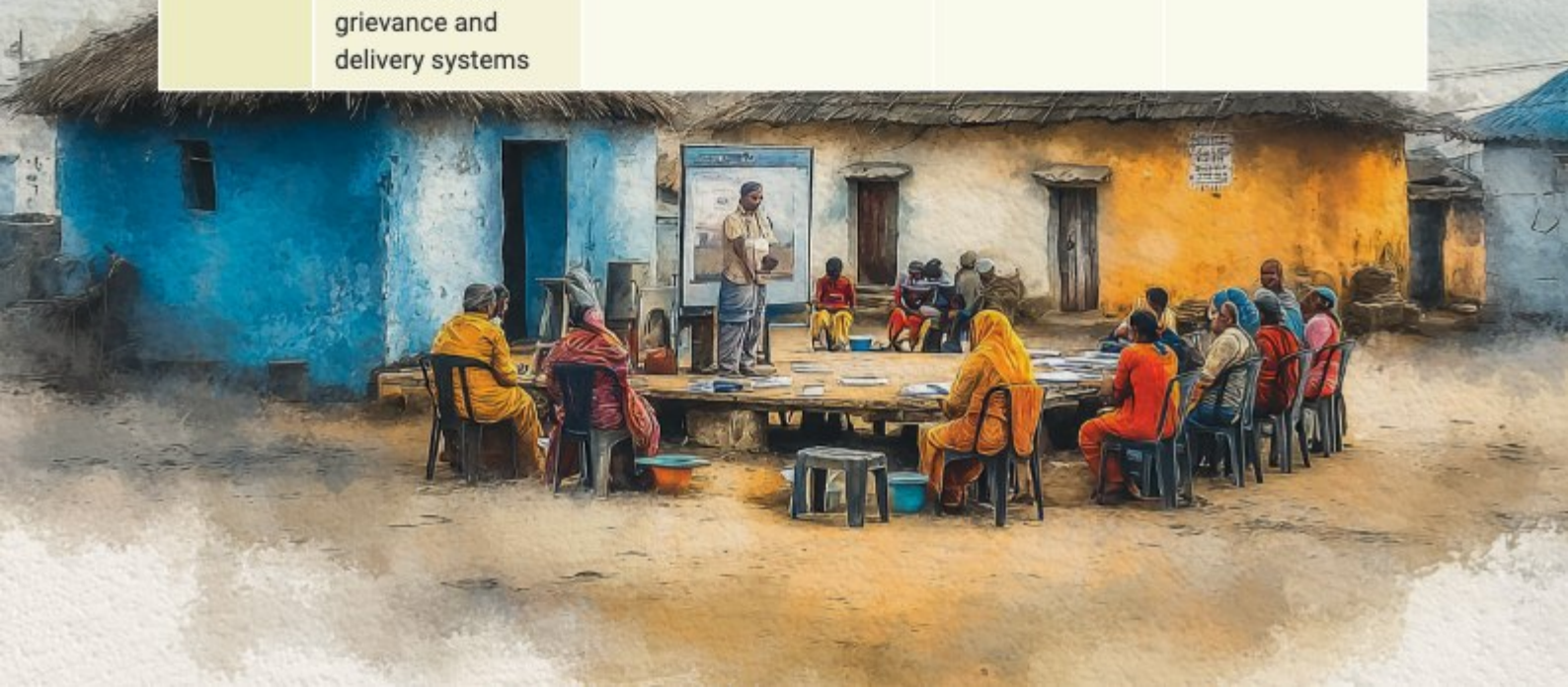
**Recognising overlapping roles:** citizens, community-based organisations (SHGs, Biodiversity Monitoring Committees, Forest Protection Committees, Water-users Associations, Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee) who help design more responsive mechanisms and effective protection and management of common natural resources.

**Effective restoration and management of common natural resources** helps advance key SDGs (like No Poverty, Gender Equality, Life on Land, Climate Action) and improves PAI performance on governance capacity, participation, and planning.



# Session Plan and Methods

Duration	Objectives	Key Messaging	Methodology	Exercises/Games
<b>Session 1: Framing the Commons</b>				
60 mins	Understand the concept of “Clarity on Interrelationship” and how natural resource governance contributes to SDGs and PAI	Panchayats are key actors in governing shared natural resources. Recognising multifunctional roles and connecting people, power, and programs is central to SDG-localisation and PAI improvement.	Storytelling, participatory Q&A, visual mapping	<b>Icebreaker -</b> Participatory Introduction and mapping  <b>Group Drawing:</b> Visual Mapping of Natural Resources
<b>Session 2: Understanding Needs and Redressal Mechanisms</b>				
45 mins	Identify dependencies on Commons	Commons meet a wide basket of needs across seasons and communities. Planning must distinguish between governance and delivery, and actively include people’s voices.	Group discussions, real-life case walkthroughs	<b>Exercise:</b> Basket of Needs (BoN) analysis
<b>Session 3: Ownership, Equity, and Coordinated Action</b>				
75 mins	Shift mindset from beneficiary to custodian and explore how coordinated action enables long-term sustainability and discuss how to institutionalise grievance and delivery systems	Community members must be seen as custodians, not passive recipients. Power gaps need to be addressed through coordination, equity, and inclusion.	Games, community simulation	<b>Game:</b> Badlao ke liye Samanway/ Parivartana Nimante Samanway ( <i>Coordination for Change</i> )



Duration	Objectives	Key Messaging	Methodology	Exercises/Games
<b>Session 4: Scheme Integration and Cultural Anchoring</b>				
90 mins	Build awareness around multi-scheme convergence and the importance of local knowledge systems	Commons governance thrives when schemes are aligned with community priorities and when cultural traditions are respected as governance mechanisms	Interactive walkthrough of schemes, storytelling, and memory recall	<b>Flipchart/ PowerPoint Presentation</b> followed by a <b>Story circle:</b> Local practices for commons protection
<b>Wrap-up and Reflection</b>				
30 mins	Reflect on learnings, clarify doubts, and identify local next steps	Every participant has a role to play in sustaining the commons. Small steps taken today can reinforce long-term sustainability and institutional performance.	Open circle, feedback collection  10-minute video show - Good NRM	<b>Activity:</b> "One action I will take" wall



#### Materials Required

- Chart paper, markers, sketch pens for map activity
- Posters/handouts on Panchayat functions (Schedule XI)
- Flipchart to record emerging themes
- Equipments for video show (projector screen/tv)



# Description of Exercises/Games

## 1. Icebreaker:

### **“Participatory Introduction?” (Session 1)**

#### **Objective:**

Help participants ease into, know each other, and relate to the context of the work training with trigger questions, administering three rounds.

#### **How to play:**

- First round** Participants meet colleagues they may not know well, building trust and relational warmth early in the gathering by exploring their basic introduction that includes name, place, and position.
- Second round** To bring fun and ease at the onset of the gathering by administering fun questions, such as ‘Think about an animal that you feel happy to see’ and ‘Remember a song that resonates with your life’.
- Third round** ‘What is the most memorable event in their life they want to celebrate with others?’ This will help in creating a positive atmosphere in the room with a certain degree of optimism and ease.



## 2. Group Drawing: Natural Resources Mapping (Session 1)

### Objective:

Visual mapping of the natural resources, and interact with the map with questions such as 'How is it relevant to their life and nature?'

### How to play:

- Participants imagine a panchayat and draw their map on a chart paper.
- Mark commons (ponds, forests, grazing land, and biodiversity), institutions, and stakeholder groups.
- Discuss the relevance and significance of such resources for their panchayat and people's livelihoods.

## 3. Exercise: Basket of Need Mapping (Session 2)

### Objective:

Highlight diverse dependencies on natural resources.

### How to play:

- Step 1** Divide the people into 3-4 groups, possibly based on their roles and area of work
- Step 2** Ask them to imagine a village, and a typical household
- Step 3** Ask the group to map what comes into the village (product flow such as food, NTFP, furniture, building material, medicines, etc.), and the source of such products.
- Step 4** Ask the group to map what goes out of the village (for example, food, furniture, building material, medicines, NTFP, etc.)
- Step 5** Build a group consensus - 'What needs can be met from their natural resources? What new livelihood opportunities can be generated using their own natural resources?'



## 4. Game:

# **Badlao ke liye Samanway/Parivartana Nimante Samanway (Coordination for Change) (Session 3)**

### **Objective:**

To demonstrate how coordination is needed between different roles to protect and manage a common resource (e.g., forest, water body), and what happens when one actor fails.

(Time: 15 minutes)

### **Group:**

8–10 people

### **How to Play:**

#### **Step 1: Set the Scene (2 mins)**

Facilitator says:

“Imagine a forest near your village is facing problems – illegal cutting, grazing, or fire. The Panchayat wants to protect it. Everyone has a role to play.”

#### **Step 2: Assign Roles (3 mins)**

Give 6–8 volunteers simple roles:

- Panchayat Member
- Forest Watch Volunteer
- SHG Member
- Youth Group Leader
- Farmer
- Grazing Animal Owner
- Forest Department
- Local School Teacher

They stand in a circle. Everyone holds a piece of string/yarn (or just touches each other's shoulder if string is not available), forming a web. The forest is in the centre (symbolised by a leaf, stick, or stone).

### Step 3: Introduce a Problem (5 mins)

Facilitator says:

- "Fire starts in the forest."
- "Someone is cutting trees illegally."
- "There's no water left for forest regeneration."

Ask each person to say how they will respond. One or two roles are asked to not act (e.g., farmer says "Not my job").

The chain weakens – show that inaction by one affects all.

### Step 4: Debrief (5 mins)

Ask:

- "What happened when even one person did not act?"
- "Could anyone solve it alone?"
- "What does this tell us about natural resource management at the Panchayat level?"

End with this message:

**"Good planning alone is not enough. People at every level—village, block, district—must talk to each other and work together. The community must stay involved and ask questions to make sure work is done properly."**



## 5. Story Circle and Hall of Fame: **Context Reflections** (Session 4)

### Objective:

Acknowledge local ecological and self-governance knowledge.

### How to play:

- Sit in a circle.
- Each participant shares a story, ritual, or seasonal practice linked to natural resources.
- Document ideas that could inform planning.

## 6. Reflection Wall: **“One Action I Will Take”** (Wrap-up)

### Objective:

Help participants commit to post-training action.

### How to play:

- Each person writes one action they'll take on a card or sticky note.
- Post on the “Commons Wall.”
- Read aloud or group by theme.

Closing with a video (embedded) - Happy Panchayat with good natural resource endowments, a healthy community, and demonstrated collective action



# 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.

