

Common Ground Monthly Factsheet

February 2026 | Alignments & Shifts

A monthly update from across the Common Ground Initiative. This factsheet offers a monthly snapshot of emerging shifts across Common Ground. These aren't isolated actions but part of a broader effort to realign how people, policy, and place intersect—led by communities, supported by institutions, and grounded in context.



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ADVANCING COMMUNITY-LED GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Strengthening civic engagement and grassroots collaboration

Common Ground's Landscape Partners continued to deepen civic engagement across landscapes. The Collaborative currently works with 16 Landscape Partners across Odisha and Jharkhand, with ongoing engagement helping extend its reach from 53 to around 120 blocks.

A cross-learning visit by Abhivyakti Foundation (Jharkhand) to the programme area of NIRMAN, facilitated by Living Landscapes, enabled peer exchange on Forest Rights Act (FRA) processes and community-led governance systems. The visit focused on strengthening capacities around Gram Sabha facilitation, documentation, and preparation of community-led action plans, while also demonstrating how community networks such as Gram Sabha Samuh anchor the Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) and enable collective decision-making at the grassroots. This exchange highlighted the value of peer-to-peer learning within the network, and has opened up opportunities to build a pool of local resource persons on FRA and community governance, who can support future training and cross-regional learning.

Strengthening community networks and grassroots leadership

Common Ground continues to engage with community networks such as Antaranga, which are emerging as important platforms for strengthening grassroots leadership and enabling scale.

Progress this month included the establishment of regular engagement structures with the Antaranga youth network and the selection of a first cohort of 15 community youth members across two blocks in Kandhamal for deeper engagement. These cohorts are being supported to build landscape-level understanding using tools such as Know Your Landscape (KYL), while strengthening their ability to anchor local governance processes. These networks are enabling peer learning, leadership development and collective problem-solving, while building a cadre of community actors who can engage more effectively with Gram Sabhas, Panchayats and public systems. Over time, this approach is helping shift community institutions from passive beneficiaries to active actors in governance and Commons management.

Insights from engagements such as Grameen Charcha, organised by Atmashakti Trust, which brought together over 40 community networks as a rural haat for exchange across landscapes, further highlighted the potential of such networks in strengthening grassroots capacity building, storytelling and leadership. These community networks are focused on collectively addressing regional challenges such as market access for pineapple and the promotion of Dongria weaves etc in Rayagada, for example. The Charcha also resulted in the Grameen Charcha Collective and has catalysed a longer-term collaboration to build many cohorts of community leaders from tribal landscapes.



Expanding knowledge exchange and collaborative learning

Landscape partners also participated in knowledge-sharing discussions drawing insights from Mumbai Climate Week, attended by leaders from WOSCA and Kalamandir, including conversations around accessible climate knowledge tools such as a “People’s Climate Dictionary”, strengthening youth engagement in climate policy processes, and emerging shifts in climate finance toward smaller, innovation-driven solutions.

At the state level, particularly in Jharkhand and Odisha, partners also convened around FRA implementation challenges, where key gaps such as low processing rates of claims, weak tracking systems, and high rejection rates were identified. Civil society organisations are now aligning around a joint strategy for improving claim quality, strengthening monitoring systems, and enabling periodic review processes, helping bridge silos within the ecosystem.



ENABLING POLICIES AND FINANCIAL FLOWS TOWARDS EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Strengthening Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act - PESA implementation through institutional coordination

After 25 years of statehood, Jharkhand has at last operationalised the rules under the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), a law intended to grant tribal communities greater authority over governance in Fifth Schedule Areas.

In Jharkhand, to spur the momentum of PESA implementation, Common Ground partners in collaboration with the Department of Panchayati Raj, Government of Jharkhand, have planned three regional convenings involving operational actors viz. Panchayat leaders, traditional leaders, Gram Panchayat Help Desk representatives, Adi Karmasathis, frontline officials of NGOs and government departments. Such convenings will help in creating a larger actor network, breaking the departmental barriers, for smooth implementation of PESA rules and provisions on the ground. To start with, a convening was organised with the help of Kalamandir, Tagore Society For Rural Development (TSRD), and the PRI department, in the East Singhbhum region that witnessed more than 60 participants. Discussions focused on operationalising statutory provisions related to financial governance, minor forest produce, customary dispute resolution, and institutional roles, while aligning actors across departments. A follow-up mechanism through regional coordination groups has been established to support continued engagement and address field-level challenges.

Further to institutionalise the capacity building process, efforts are being made for developing playbooks, training materials, and modules for panchayat level functionaries and cadres cutting across different departments and institutional spaces. Discussions with the departments also matured for deployment of a project management unit (PMU) under the anchorship of CRISP, with provision of other relevant actors joining, to strengthen institutional coordination and support implementation at scale.

Improving Panchayat Level Inclusive Planning and Governance Process

PRI-CBO pilot learnings in Jharkhand and Odisha have been synthesised and shared with communities and local government officials. The recommendations will be translated into enabling government orders to improve PRI-CBO convergence, Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP), and Gram Panchayat Development Planning (GPDP) process in Odisha and Jharkhand. At the same time, the Tamil Nadu government has approved the scaling up plan and made budgetary provisions for PRI-CBO convergence and VPRP process in 300 panchayats in the state. They have also decided to upscale Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDG) work to 35 panchayats as a representative sample for state-level process integration.

Strengthening MegREAP functions in Meghalaya

A detailed project report is being developed from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to Meghalaya Basin Development Authority. This initiative could unlock the potential for 20 Bamboo Villages in Meghalaya, driving both ecological restoration and rural income growth. It is expected to impact 100 villages and cover 40,000 hectares of land.

Building resilience through forest–community collaboration

Specialised training programmes for forest guards and Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) were conducted across Regional Forest Training Institutes in Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Chaibasa, with technical support from the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES). These sessions focused on strengthening collaboration between forest departments and community institutions for participatory ecological restoration, including springshed management and catchment area treatment planning. Plans are underway to scale this approach through a master trainer model across divisions, enabling wider adoption of community-led ecological planning.

Insights from these efforts are also feeding into the Learning, Measurement and Evaluation (LME) framework, strengthening evidence on how governance and ecological restoration contribute to long-term outcomes.



CREATING SPACES FOR EQUITABLE NEGOTIATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND MARKETS

Understanding corporate finance flows for restoration

As part of preparations for the CSR and ESG workshop planned for March, the Markets Working Group continued analysing corporate funding flows, including trends in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending and emerging Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) priorities.

In parallel, consultations were held with Landscape Partners to better understand their experiences engaging with corporate funders, including challenges in accessing funding, aligning project designs with corporate expectations, and navigating reporting requirements.

At the same time, the team has analysed CSR spending data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) to understand how corporate funds are currently distributed across geographies and themes. Insights from these consultations and analysis will inform discussions on how landscape restoration and livelihood initiatives can be more effectively positioned within corporate sustainability frameworks, while also helping identify pathways to better align corporate investments with community priorities and landscape-level outcomes.

Operationalisation of blended financing instrument for multi-layered integrated farming in Boipariguda

The work on blended financing instruments has progressed with detailed planning exercises that aid in implementation readiness of the Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) actors with the help of Outcome Accelerator funding support in Boipariguda.

Partners have developed implementation calendars aligned with public finance cycles and have begun onboarding community catalysts to support field-level coordination and programme execution. Work is also underway to strengthen operational tracking and convergence across actors, enabling more structured implementation on the ground.

Advancing NTFP and bamboo value chains

Exploratory work with Sal seed value chain opportunities and constraints have been done through consultation with local actors including NGOs, FPOs, market facilitators and other value chain actors. The local level issues are understood and analysed to inform engagement with the Government of Odisha, and possible funding opportunities through KfW (add full form).

Under the NTFP Price Information System initiative, pilot districts along with product mix and value chain nodes, have been mapped and necessary consultation has been done with local Common Ground partners including WOSCA and SEWAK.

As a pre-requisite of Bamboo village work, seven experts for enumerating enabling conditions, have been onboarded in Meghalaya.

Coordinators across two Bamboo Villages in Ri-Bhoi district—now onboarded and currently coordinating the EC studies as their first assignment. Work on nursery development is also progressing, with the MegREAP team developing a plan for establishing branchling-based bamboo nurseries and preparing training support for state mission staff. These efforts aim to build the foundational capacities required for bamboo cultivation and enterprise development across the Bamboo Villages while aligning with the broader plantation targets under the state bamboo mission.

In Odisha, the Bamboo resource assessment process has been initiated in the Ramgiri cluster of Koraput. Mapping of bamboo in Individual Forest Rights (IFR) areas has also been taken up to provide a concrete understanding of bamboo availability and supply potential across community managed areas.



CATALYSING COLLABORATIVE ACTION AMONG AND ACROSS CIVIL SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT BODIES, AND TECH INITIATIVES

Mainstreaming digital public goods

Common Ground partners continued efforts to strengthen the ecosystem of digital public goods supporting community-led governance and natural resource management.

Living Landscapes facilitated a session with the CRISP team to introduce a curated set of tools including Commons Connect, Know Your Landscape (KYL), Green Rural Economy (GRE), Samaajaa, iECHO Hub, Gramify and the Common Ground Forum. The session focused on identifying practical use cases and exploring how these tools can be integrated into ongoing programmes on participatory governance and landscape planning.

Learn more about the tools [here](#).

The Green Rural Economy (GRE) platform is seeing increasing engagement, with Landscape Partners and community networks, including Antaranga, beginning to raise queries and share solutions. Requests for training materials, expertise and field-level support are being curated into playbooks and knowledge resources, contributing to a growing repository for the ecosystem.

CoRE Stack hosted its sixth Community of Practice session, focusing on the use of KYL datasets for baseline preparation and planning within Multi-Actor Platforms.

CoP videos can be viewed on CoRE Stack YouTube Channel:
<https://youtu.be/p1078JwnEWE?si=W9vy5QeWNPkNdPDB>

The February release of the Gramify app helps find information on entitlements and schemes and also local solutions for livelihoods and enterprise (through access to the Green Rural Economy platform from within the app itself).

Strengthening adoption and last-mile engagement

While multiple tools are now available, field-level experience indicates that sustained adoption requires stronger on-ground facilitation and support. Partners highlighted challenges such as limited connectivity, the need for simplified interfaces, and the importance of in-person engagement to build familiarity and trust. Efforts are underway to address these gaps through facilitators, training support, and product adoption strategies, including a mentorship engagement to strengthen adoption of selected tools such as iECHO and the Common Ground Forum.

There is also a growing recognition of the need to build local cadres such as “landscape data stewards” who can support data collection, interpretation and use at the community level, bridging the gap between digital tools and grassroots processes.

Solvecon 2026, organised by Reap Benefit, at PES University, Bengaluru, was a youth-focused social innovation event that brought together over 1500 changemakers, grassroots organisations, and practitioners from across India working on civic engagement, climate action, mental health, and community development. Common Ground partners including Kalamandir, WOSCA and Seba Jagat attended the event engaging through mela stalls, talks on youth leadership, and "Adda" discussion sessions that created space for open dialogue and idea exchange.

It provided avenues to create deepened understanding of youth-led initiatives and grassroots innovation, exposure to practical tools for civic action, and strengthened networks for future collaboration. The participating team while exploring different tools, also identified “Adda sessions” to offer a replicable model of open, peer-led dialogue worth adopting

Panchayats to Climate Practice

As part of Mumbai Climate Week, Asar, in partnership with the Policy & Development Advisory Group (PDAG) and the Government of Maharashtra, convened a panel discussion that brought Panchayat leaders from diverse geographies onto a shared platform, foregrounding grounded experiences of climate action from across the country. The session highlighted how local governance institutions are already shaping responses to climate challenges through everyday practice. Building on this momentum, Common Ground is exploring a broader collaboration to shape a shared vision for a climate-resilient Jharkhand, rooted in a pluralistic, bio-regional approach.

Launch of the Commons Sensing Podcast

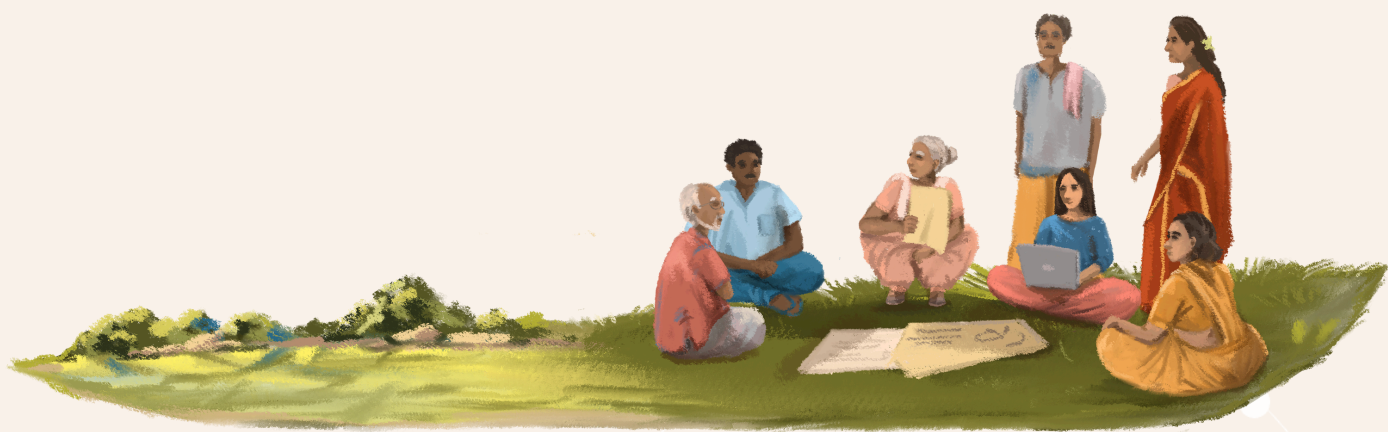
The first episode of the Common Ground Podcast was launched on the Common Ground YouTube channel. Titled “Commons Sensing: Grounding Commons Through Practice”, the episode features Kanchi Kohli in conversation with Jagdeesh Puppala and Huda Jaffer (SELCO Foundation), reflecting on decades of work across forests, land, energy access, and community institutions. The discussion explores how commons are shaped through collective action and local governance, and how commons-centred approaches interact with markets and the state. Shared across social media platforms and partner networks.

*To watch the podcast visit the Common Ground Initiative YouTube Channel:
<https://youtu.be/QmGt5oCTguE?si=Ca5CLc35AFv6Szer>*

Coalition Building

The Collaborative's ecosystem has grown to 91 partners, including community champions, networks, and institutional organizations across Odisha, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Kerala. Over the last year, Common Ground's facilitation through convenings, events, workshops, and melas has created spaces for exchange and collaboration, with potential to expand to Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Nagaland. More than 60 organizations are currently being engaged to explore potential collaboration and become part of the Alliance.

With regards to newer partnerships, Common Ground is partnering with World Resources Institute-India to strengthen data architecture and monitoring systems through a joint climate-focused proposal. This collaboration aims to enhance springshed health tracking, enable local data stewardship through Village Data Volunteers, and support adaptive management. It will also contribute to evidence-based policy engagement and help unlock public finance, advancing data-driven governance systems.



For partnerships or to join the Collaborative, write to:
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Our Website: <https://commongroundinitiative.in/>